

How Woke Coke (and Others) Cash in on ‘Social Justice’

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What do corporations gain from virtue-signaling their support for Social Justice™ pet projects?

The Coca-Cola™ corporation makes sugar water with a splash of [carcinogenic industrial food coloring](#) to get the iconic caramel shading.

What on Earth does it have to do with Social Justice™, and why does it send millions of dollars to activist groups?

Indeed, [the neoliberal intersection of identity politics and multinational business](#) is, on its face, perplexing. And it’s admittedly a complex phenomenon.

But arguably the most obvious reason: pure profit and market-cornering.

In the 2010s, the Coca-Cola corporation and competing soft drink manufacturers had a big problem. [In New York](#) and elsewhere, local governments were considering banning or limiting the sale of soda on public health grounds.

Some were even threatening to remove soda from the accepted foods available for purchase through SNAP programs (publicly funded food assistance, aka “food stamps”).

Via [NPR](#):

“SNAP households **spend about 10 percent of food dollars on sugary drinks**, which is about three times more than the amount they spend on milk. In New York City alone, [as we’ve reported](#), this translates into more than \$75 million in sugary drink purchases each year that are subsidized by U.S. taxpayers...

As Congress debates a new farm bill containing billions in SNAP funding, there's an increasing appetite to overhaul the program while at the same time preserving the benefits it provides in keeping low-income Americans fed."

Ten percent of the [annual \\$182 billion SNAP budget](#) is obviously a huge sum of money that Coca-Cola stood to lose.

Removing sodas from the list of acceptable purchases for food stamp holders might have been good for the peasants' personal health. The proposed changes may have alleviated the public health burdens of obesity and heart disease and diabetes.

But it would have devastated Coke's bottom line.

So, how best to protect their interests and keep SNAP people hooked on the bottle?

Why not dump some cash into race hustlers' bank accounts and enlist them to smear their ideological opponents as racist? It works for aspirational politicians (like Kamala Harris) and [Person of Color© collegiate athletes](#) and virtually any protected identity in any other context, so why not for a giant corporation? And Coca-Cola™ certainly has the cash on hand to grease the wheels.

Coke gave millions to the NAACP and the Hispanic Federation – both directly and through front groups like the American Beverage Association.

This picked up in 2011-2013 – when the Farm Bill and soda taxes were under consideration. <https://t.co/6MnVdXQ3Uy> pic.twitter.com/oMtgUBAZIE

— Calley Means (@calleymmeans) [January 2, 2023](#)

Via [Nutrition Insight](#):

"According to a new report issued by the nonprofit Center for Science in the Public Interest, that case, in which **the state chapter of the NAACP and the Hispanic Federation unexpectedly joined Big Soda's legal fight**, is just the latest illustration of the persuasive power of "philanthropic" grants from the sugar-drinks industry.

Both groups received grants from Coca-Cola, with the national **NAACP receiving at least \$2.1 million from the soda giant since 1986**, including \$100,000 as recently as December. The Hispanic Federation also lists Coke as a donor, and in February 2012 its president, Lillian Rodriguez Lopez, left the nonprofit group to become director of Latin affairs at the company."

(The report notes that, beyond civil rights groups, the processed sugar industry "has given money to—and cultivated relationships with—groups representing doctors, dentists, dietitians, anti-hunger advocates, and others." [We've previously reported on the collusion](#)

[between the medical and big food industry](#) to move more product.)

As they were contracted to do on behalf of Coca-Cola™, the NAACP and dozens of other groups funded by the corporation attacked proponents of the proposed SNAP regulations to ban soda as “discriminatory, paternalistic, and ineffective.”

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The issue here isn't whether the New York soda ban was ethically justified. Most rational people agree that the role of the state isn't to protect people from their own destructive decisions that don't directly affect anyone else.

The key issue is the cynical weaponization of identity politics to enhance market and political power among disingenuous actors.

The result is that liberal/"progressive" actors otherwise ostensibly opposed to big business become the willing tools of profiteering at a cost to the health of the very communities they purport to serve.

The irony can't be emphasized enough that the ones who disproportionately get hurt by this brand of performative wokeness are the racial minorities who [consume high-fructose corn syrup products like Coca-Cola™ at higher rates](#) than their white counterparts.

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