



Calling Out the Tobacco Industry's Targeting of the Black Community and Other Communities of Color

Eric Batch, National Vice President, Advocacy Outreach and Partnerships
Ryon Everidge, Spoken Word Artist, Rapper, Actor, Producer of Music for TV and Film



Agenda



About the presenters

Spoken Word as a tool for change

Key milestones in the fight

"How Long Will You Target Me?"

"I Already Know."

"What Would They Say?"

“Poetry has the freedom of a speech
and the heartbeat of music.”

Ryon Everidge



“Spoken word poetry makes the data undeniable. It turns percentages into people, life-years lost into lives interrupted, and policy debates into moral imperatives. It doesn’t just complement the statistics — it completes them. It gives the crisis a voice, a face, and a heartbeat, reminding us that behind every data point is a story that deserves to be heard.”



Key milestones in our fight:

- August of 2020 – Passage of Senate Bill 793
- Fall 2020 the tobacco industry launched a referendum drive to overturn the law.
- Nov. 2020 – Nov. 2022 The law remained suspended while voters considered the referendum challenging it.
- **March 2021 – Ryon and Eric have shaved ice.**
- June 2022 – The City of Los Angeles restricts the sale of menthol.
- Nov. 2022 – Prop. 31 – 63% ‘Yes.’
- Dec. of 2022 Law went into effect.



What we were seeing

- Tobacco companies misappropriated cultural symbols and movements, including:
 - #BlackLivesMatter.
 - Juneteenth.
 - Quotes from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
- Restricting the sale of menthol framed as:
 - A threat to personal freedom.
 - A policy that would increase racial profiling and criminalize communities of color.
- The industry claimed it would lead to:
 - Loss of tax revenue.
 - Rise in illegal tobacco markets.
 - Neighborhood crime due to smuggling.



“The tobacco industry’s products kill 7 million people annually while generating \$880 billion in revenue—more than Google, Meta, and Apple combined. Despite decades of tobacco control progress, the industry is adapting faster than regulations can evolve, pivoting to new nicotine products while maintaining their addiction-based business model.”

Eline Goethals (New Report: Making Tobacco Industry Elimination Inevitable.)



How Long Will You Target Me?



How Long Will You Target Me?:

<https://youtu.be/gwwH-3Bjaqc?si=XCpiLh2FNZ4AwWT1>



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“You have pumped my community
with advertisements and
flavors...advertisements and
flavors...advertisements and
flavors...”

Ryon Everidge



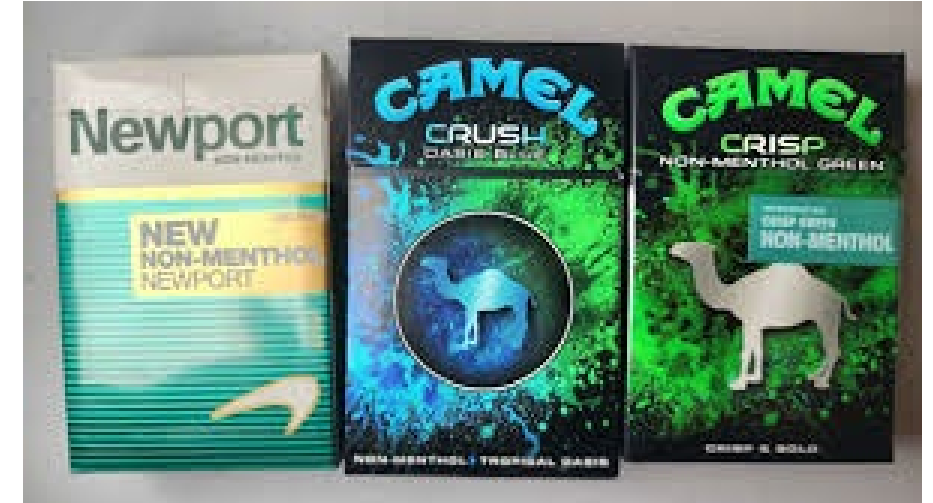
Breakout: Using this video in your campaigns.



- Let's talk about the emotions you felt while listening to the poem?
- Were there lines or images that stood out?
- How can you use this video in the work that you are doing?
- What does the title "How Long Will You Target Me?" imply about historical and ongoing exploitation?

Introduction of “non-menthol” menthols

- After the flavor restriction went into effect, tobacco companies introduced new “non-menthol menthol” products
- Brands like Kool and Newport introduced products labeled “non-menthol” that still deliver a cooling sensation using synthetic chemicals that mimic menthol’s numbing effect without its flavor.
- These products are marketed with phrases like:
 - “Same intensity, same vibe, minus the menthol.”
 - “Fresh” or “crisp” to imply menthol-like experience.





I Already Know: <https://youtu.be/Tfi7ZOWEfdQ?si=IkBXJU4RHOKwrtlo>



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“When you target certain faces...who live in certain places...with products with a specific taste -it’s...race...ist...”

Ryon Everidge



Breakout: Using this video in your campaigns.



- Let's talk about the emotions you felt while listening to the poem?
- Were there lines or images that stood out?
- How does the industry's response to the menthol ban make you feel?
- How does the phrase "I already know" function as both a shield and a statement of power?



Political Pressure and Withdrawal

- Menthol rules delayed indefinitely amid pressure from civil rights groups and political strategists concerned about backlash from Black voters.
- Key arguments against restricting the sale of menthols:
 - It could:
 - Lead to over-policing in Black communities.
 - Increase illegal tobacco markets.
 - Exacerbate mass incarceration.
 - Tobacco companies argued:
 - Prohibition would not work.
 - Youth smoking rates were already low.
 - The ban would cost billions in revenue.





What Would They Say?:

<https://youtu.be/8IRCnyKfh7E?si=bR-z1QfAelATh5Um>



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“They really tried to use our suffering against us..
It doesn’t get any lower than that.
What does Big Tobacco know about anybody that’s had to
struggle..
They don’t struggle to survive...they don’t struggle eat...they
don’t march with us in the streets...So what makes them
think they can exploit our experiences for their profits?”

Ryon Everidge



Breakout: Using this video in your campaigns.



- Let's talk about the emotions you felt while listening to the poem?
- Were there lines or images that stood out?
- What images or emotions did Ryon evoke when imagining the voices of those who've passed?
- What is the significance of the question: "What would they say?"
- After watching the video, do you feel a call to action? If so, what are you going to do?



Thank You!

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