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## **New Documentary Takes Hard Look at Tobacco Industry’s Predatory Tactics for New Generations**

*Black Lives/Black Lungs: The Journey of a Stolen Leaf explores how long-standing exploitative strategies are now applied to e-cigarettes*

**WASHINGTON, D.C. (February 28, 2023)** – Six years after his seminal short film “Black Lives/Black Lungs” documented the decades-long campaign transforming menthol into a Black cigarette, filmmaker and former Truth Initiative fellow Lincoln Mondy released today his follow-up documentary exposing the tobacco industry’s manipulative efforts to skirt federal regulations. “Black Lives/Black Lungs: The Journey of a Stolen Leaf” unravels the industry’s forward-looking strategy of protecting profits, subverting regulations, and maintaining influence through the promotion of e-cigarettes to hook a new generation to nicotine. The short film is available today for wide release on [YouTube](#).

“After exploring the connection between Black people and the tobacco industry with ‘Black Lives/Black Lungs,’ I knew there was more to the story that needed to be shared,” stated Mondy. “As I’ve watched the explosion of the e-cigarette market in recent years leading to the youth e-cigarette epidemic, the parallels between the marketing of this new product and the way that the industry targeted the Black community with menthol cigarettes couldn’t be ignored. Past is prologue, and I hope this film does its part to shine a spotlight on the practices that tobacco companies are bringing out once again to ensnare a new generation.”

With nearly 9 in 10 Black smokers currently using menthol cigarettes – including 94.8% of Black teenage smokers aged 12-17 – and with tobacco use as the number one cause of preventable death among Black Americans with 45,000 dead each year, “Black Lives/Black Lungs: The Journey of a Stolen Leaf” explores the history of the tobacco industry and how it was built on the backs of Black slaves. As colonizers pillaged and stole land from indigenous communities, they also stole their sacred plant, tobacco, turning it into a cash crop. By 1630, over a million and a half pounds of tobacco were being exported from Jamestown every year, setting into motion tobacco as an early justification for slavery and the billion-dollar industry we know today.

After connecting Big Tobacco to colonization, slavery, and capitalism, Mondy takes viewers to the present by focusing on flavors and industry tactics as connective tissues tying traditional cigarettes and e-cigarettes together. Experts and advocates provide commentary and examples of the industry’s playbook:



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Buy Black influence, sow doubt in science, and subvert regulation. By stepping into the origins of the industry and the origins of traditional cigarettes, Mondy presents a visual and detailed case showing how Big Tobacco has never been far from its origins, and the dangers of allowing an industry unfettered access to dust off their old predatory tactics for new generations.

The film features numerous experts and longtime champions of calling out predatory tactics used by the tobacco industry, including:

- Alexandria Duruji, public health advocate
- Denise A. Smith, Senior Fellow, The Century Foundation
- Diamond Miller, Manager of College Activism and Organizing, Truth Initiative
- Dr. Mignonne C. Guy, Chair in the Department of African American Studies, Virginia Commonwealth University
- Dr. Phillip Gardiner, Founding Member and Co-Chair, African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council
- Dr. Valerie Yerger, Founding Member and Council Member, African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council
- Carol McGruder, Founding Member and Co-Chair, African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council

The film is directed and narrated by Mondy, who created the original “Black Lives/Black Lungs” as part of the [2015-16 Truth Initiative Youth Activism Fellowship](#). Through Truth Initiative’s highly effective **truth** public education campaign, the organization has long been on the front lines of calling out and engaging with young people around the tobacco industry’s long history of systemic discrimination and predatory tactics contributing to a public health emergency in the Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and LGBTQ+ communities. Young people can join in taking action around tobacco and vaping as a social justice issue, visit [thetruth.com/take-action](http://thetruth.com/take-action).

“Black Lives/Black Lungs: The Journey of a Stolen Leaf” is now available to stream on [YouTube](#). Young people nationwide will also be hosting screenings on their own campuses and communities with support from **truth**; to learn more about how to host a screening, please visit [thetruth.com](http://thetruth.com).

#### **About Truth Initiative®**

Truth Initiative is a national public health organization dedicated to achieving a culture where all young people reject smoking, vaping and nicotine and a future



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where tobacco and nicotine addiction are a thing of the past. In 2020, we celebrated 20 years of saving lives and preventing millions of youth from smoking. Our impact has helped drive the teen smoking rate down from 23% in 2000 to under 3% in 2021. The truth about tobacco and the tobacco industry are at the heart of our proven-effective and nationally recognized **truth**<sup>®</sup> public education campaign. As youth e-cigarette use threatens to addict a new generation to nicotine, we are leading the fight against tobacco and nicotine addiction in all forms. Our rigorous scientific research and policy studies, community and youth engagement programs supporting populations at high risk of using tobacco, and innovation in tobacco dependence treatment are also helping to end one of the most critical public health battles of our time. Based in Washington D.C., our organization, formerly known as the American Legacy Foundation, was established and funded through the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement between attorneys general from 46 states, five U.S. territories and the tobacco industry. To learn more, visit [truthinitiative.org](https://truthinitiative.org).

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