

## **Letter: Banning menthol cigarettes would save Black lives**

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By Rev. Horace Sheffield  
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Regarding a recent opinion piece ("Black consumers would bear the burden of a menthol ban, Feb. 19"), I was disappointed but not surprised the author casted doubt on policies proven to reduce health disparities. Researchers estimate prohibiting menthol cigarettes would save up to 654,000 lives within 40 years, including the lives of 255,000 Black Americans. The tobacco industry makes billions off the addiction of mostly Black smokers to menthol.

It has a long history of enriching spokespersons to project false claims to protect their bottom line. I know this firsthand. They offered me a quarter million dollars to promote lies and false fears in my community. But I will not sell my soul to the devil. I will speak the truth. And, after spending decades targeting us with their menthol cigarette ads, they are now exploiting our real fears regarding policing in this country.

The FDA rule to ban menthol will apply only to manufacturers and retailers, not individual consumers. It will not make it illegal for anyone to either possess or consume menthol cigarettes. This law enforcement argument is just another tobacco industry lie and it must stop.

For decades, the industry relentlessly targeted us, and it worked, 85% of African American smokers use menthols. Now, working with our nation's most respected, unbought Black health, social justice, and community leaders, we are fighting for our lives to end the sale of menthol cigarettes.