

Letter to Beyonce` Knowles – Multi-Grammy Winning R&B Artist

Ms. Knowles, without question you are one of the world's leading R & B stars. As a ten-time Grammy-Award-Winning, singer, songwriter, and record producer, you have a fan base that is international, and includes young and old of all races. You exemplify what it is to be a young, beautiful, and successful African American woman of today! At only 25 years of age, you are admired worldwide for your grace, determination, style and achievements as an artist. Beyonce`, you are a creative force with potentially unrealized influence on the behaviors of the young (and old), worldwide. It is not insignificant that because of your music, the word "Bootylicious" is now included in Webster's dictionary.

Given your status as a living cultural icon, it was disappointing to learn that you chose to pose for your latest album cover, *B-Day*, and your upcoming tour promotions clutching a vintage cigarette holder and cigarette.

With the power of this single image, it appears that you are glamorizing tobacco use and sending a message to your fans that tobacco use is safe and acceptable. This is a devastating blow to all of the African American tobacco-control advocates and Elders, like us, that fight tirelessly against the tobacco industry's assault to entice our youth into smoking. The image you used plays right into the hands of the industry that continues to coerce, co-opt and lie about the harmful effects of their products. Ms. Knowles, you may not have known, but the tobacco industry was found guilty of racketeering by a Federal judge in 2006 for decades of deceiving the public.

The National African American Tobacco Education Network (NAATEN) and the South Carolina-based National African American Tobacco Prevention Network (NAATPN) stand in solidarity opposing the promotion of tobacco products using artists, athletes or persons from our community who are uneducated about the hazards of tobacco use. The organizations listed below support us in this effort and would like you to a) publicly declare that you will no longer use tobacco products or paraphernalia in your advertising, b) make a statement regarding your personal use/non-use of tobacco, and c) work with both organizations to discourage tobacco use, especially amongst youth.

Over 45,000 African Americans die **every year** from tobacco-related diseases; more than the number of deaths from HIV/AIDS, accidents, homicide, and diabetes combined. More than 25 percent of African American youth are exposed to second-hand smoke at home, and, unfortunately, 17 percent of African American high school students smoke cigarettes. If this trend continues, an estimated 1.6 million African Americans under age 18 will become regular smokers, and about 500,000 of those smokers will die of a smoking-related disease that could be prevented.

"We don't smoke that s- - -. We just sell it. We reserve the right to smoke for the young, the poor, the black and stupid." R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company Executive (1992).

Many African American icons have died from smoking related diseases. We have lost Sarah Vaughan, Duke Ellington, Jesse Owens, Sammy Davis Jr., Ella Fitzgerald, Nat King Cole, Lou Rawls and Gregory Hines – all from tobacco use.

You can be such a positive influence for our community. You can join Harry Belafonte, James Brown of CBS NFL Sports, and S. Epatha Merkeson of television's Law & Order who have all contributed their voices to a national media campaign to reduce tobacco use in Black communities. You can also lend your endorsement to a national campaign to empower tobacco control leadership and advocacy in black Greek organizations and eliminate the use of tobacco among young black college students. We urge you to cease any use of tobacco products in your advertising, and send your fans a clear message that you understand how harmful the products are. We want to help you deliberately grow, not destroy, your ever-expanding fan base.

Please help us. We will certainly help you.

Sincerely,

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