Spike Jonze Directed a MedMen Commercial About Cannabis. And It’s Pretty Epic.

“The New Normal” campaign, starring Jesse Williams, advocates for weed’s normalization while telling its complicated history.

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Cannabis retail giant, MedMen, just released a new short on their YouTube channel that’s guaranteed to light up some conversation and, hopefully, change some attitudes.

Directed by Spike Jonze of *Being John Malkovich* and *Her* fame, and starring *Grey’s Anatomy* heartthrob, Jesse Willams, “The New Normal” spot tells the story of cannabis in the U.S. — from George Washington’s hemp farm, through prohibition, to its evolving normalization in the economy and the culture

David Dancer, Chief Marketing Officer for MedMen, says the overall message of the ad is to show both “the unjust criminalization and history of the propaganda and stigmatization of cannabis,” while also stressing that it’s “a product that should be as normal as every other product that you purchase and every other wellness and lifestyle brand that you engage with.”

Bringing on the big guns

Perhaps more than any other cannabis brand, MedMen has made the mainstreaming of marijuana a central tenet of its messaging. For this project, they wanted to take it to the

next level so they tapped ad agency, Mekanism, to help them find the right creative partners. Enter Jonze and Williams.

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Jonze said he was drawn to the project because “there was something that moved me about it.” Shooting the commercial was an education for him.

“I got to learn the bigger picture of the whole story,” he said “I feel so hopeful, but the thing that sticks with me and upsets me is that there are still so many people that are still locked up for this plant that is now legal in so many places. That doesn’t make sense.”

For Williams, who co-wrote the commercial, it was a continuation of his very public advocacy for legalization and decriminalization.

“The highly selective criminalization of one plant, with flagrantly harsher punishments for one community, must be acknowledged and left behind for something more reasonable, realistic and fair,” he said.

Night at the Marijuana museum

According to Dancer, the creative idea behind this video was all Jonze. “He took a flat storyboard and made it come to life,” he says.

Literally. The two-minute spot begins *Night at the Museum*-style where a diorama comes to life featuring Williams, as George Washington, holding up a giant marijuana leaf. Williams then narrates the action as the camera pans to different freeze frames of marijuana’s dark history over the years: cops stopping and frisking, courts dolling out harsh sentences, and a crazed man directing the anti-pot propaganda film, *Reefer Madness.*

But the tone of the ad shifts when Williams asks, “Madness? How about wellness?” The images become more positive focusing on the plant’s health benefits, business opportunities, and ultimately suburban normalcy.

Marketing plan

Dancer says the “The New Normal” will live on MedMen’s YouTube channel, where they will drive engagement and sharing. MedMen will be advertising in hundreds of movie theaters across California, Nevada, and Michigan, as well as on Sirius XM and other radio and podcast outlets.

“We also have a really large buy within the connected-TV space that allows us to actually get onto channels that you would think of as traditional broadcast, like Bravo, E!, Oxygen, and others,” says Dancer.

That said, MedMen has no plans to run the ad directly on broadcast TV, thus avoiding the fate of the recently banned Super Bowl ad from Acreage Holdings.

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So how much does a huge production like “The New Normal” cost? Dancer won’t reveal the budget, but he says, “We are not spending any more dollars in marketing the next two quarters that ‘The New Normal’ will be live than we have in the past two quarters.”

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