

The Day

Let the people smoke what they choose

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The war against smokers continues, as the FDA will move to ban menthol cigarettes. From the initial bans on smoking indoors in the late 1990s, to the current war on vaping, nicotine users have been increasingly marginalized. And they're particularly discriminated against by the wealthy and ruling class, especially because smoking has become more concentrated in lower-income people. Now, the Biden administration seeks to push smokers even further to the margins, this time adding an unfortunate racial component since menthols are overwhelmingly used by African-Americans.

Here's a better idea: let the people smoke.

Public health is important, but so is the freedom to make decisions that give you pleasure despite harming your own body. Pretty much every day, we all do something that is not optimal for our health, whether that's eating a hamburger or going bungee jumping. Whether and how the government allows us to harm our bodies is a question rooted as much in class as it is in science. If you prefer harmful activities the ruling class enjoys, you're probably safe. But if your vices are looked down upon by them, watch out.

An interesting question: how many people in the Biden administration are smokers? We don't know, but given their socio-economic status, it's likely to be very few. Among "elites" in east coast cities like D.C., smoking has become extremely unpopular (trust me), and those who smoke are treated like lepers.

But how many in the Biden administration routinely stop to get some sort of frappuccino at Starbucks, which has as many calories as a Big Mac? Yet those same people might look with disdain on those who routinely eat Big Macs.

True, smoking is quite bad for you, and deaths and adverse health effects from smoking are a significant problem. Yet despite that unquestionable fact, is it still possible to legitimately choose to smoke? Yes, it is.

Some may argue that those who are addicted to smoking are no longer "choosing" to smoke, so their preferences don't actually matter. Yet if addiction were the only reason people smoked, it wouldn't explain why anyone starts smoking in the first place. Moreover, millions of Americans

who aren't addicted to nicotine enjoy occasional cigarettes after a long day, after a big meal, or when they're out at the bar. Often, that's a menthol cigarette.

Paternalism is a slippery slope. If your vices become unpopular with the ruling class, prepare to defend your right to harm your own body. But first you need to defend the rights of others, even — especially — those who enjoy vices you abhor.

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