



Menthol Ban and Key Tobacco Industry Rebuttals

Tobacco use is the number one preventable cause of death and disease among African Americans. A prohibition on the manufacture and sale of mentholated tobacco products will help decrease the rate of preventable deaths in the Black community.

I know many White people who smoke menthols. Why is this a racial issue?

For decades the tobacco industry specifically marketed menthols to African American communities. The industry appropriated elements of Black culture and heavily invested advertising dollars into African American publications. They are known for sponsoring Black events like the KOOL Jazz festival, saturating urban Black neighborhood stores with ads, and pricing menthols more cheaply in Black neighborhoods. As a result of their efforts, 85% of African American smokers choose menthols while less than 30% of White smokers prefer menthols.

Isn't tobacco use an issue of personal responsibility?

The tobacco industry used to distribute free samples of their deadly products to underage youth, handing them out from mobile units in Black neighborhoods like an ice cream truck. To this day, tobacco companies donate millions of dollars to institutions that provide credible unbiased information for making good decisions. These include historically Black colleges and universities, African American newspapers, civic leaders, researchers and elected officials. Research shows that quitting menthols is more difficult than quitting tobacco without this characterizing flavor. African Americans consistently report more, but less successful, attempts at quitting menthols. It is possible that tobacco use is not as *personal* of a choice as many assume.

Won't a ban on menthol increase the potential for unjustly criminalizing African Americans

This is a tobacco industry argument that exploits the real issues of police brutality and mass incarceration. Excessive force and systemic racism are problems that must be addressed independently of public health measures. The FDA ban on mentholated tobacco polices manufacturers and retailers of the product—not an individual's use or possession of them.

Isn't it true that a ban on menthol will only create a black market?

Data from countries (including Canada) that have already banned menthol cigarettes and data from the United States after banning other flavored cigarettes show no likelihood of international, illicit trade of menthol cigarettes after they are prohibited. Surveys show, in fact, that a ban would encourage African Americans to quit menthols rather than seek them from a black market.

Is the FDA just trying to take away our personal freedom?

Like food, drugs, cleaning products and cosmetics, the FDA regulates products that pose a threat to the public's health or safety. They do not regulate personal choices.

Aren't there bigger issues facing the Black community?

Tobacco related illness kills more African Americans than murders, suicides, HIV and car accidents combined. It would be an injustice to be silent on the issue.