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In-class essay on “Fast Food, Personal Choice, and Politics”

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Sample of a good one!

Fat Finger Pointing

Obesity is a global epidemic that is plaguing everybody in the civilized world. It causes heart problems, diabetes, and an early death for most people who suffer the condition. You would think that a problem that is so urgent, so dangerous to the wellbeing of our nation, would be relatively apolitical. Unfortunately, Washington has disappointed us yet again, making the obesity epidemic nothing more than talking point to argue over on Sunday morning news shows. Despite the fact that Judith Warner brings up some valid concerns in her article “Junking Junk Food,” the essay does nothing except further the political games that stop this issue from getting the attention that it needs.

Warner talks about Sarah Palin’s reaction to junk food legislation in her article. Mrs. Palin used her constant media attention to start a populist frenzy over the Obama administration’s supposed attack on our freedom to eat unhealthy snack foods. Warner was very astute when she pointed out that “suddenly, Pennsylvania’s suggestion that encouraging alternatives to high-sugar sweets became an assault on the American way of life.” This shows that the likes of Sarah Palin are just trying to create a controversy in order to gain some political points. Judith Warner also points out later in her article that “[Michelle Obama] has succeeded in gaining some bipartisan support,” when it comes to her fight against obesity. This shows wanting to curb obesity is not a liberal or conservative issue; politicians just want to gain political points for opposing things that the president supports.

In fact, there is a really good article from the Cato institute (a libertarian think tank) called “What You Eat is Your own Business,” by Radley Balko. When you first look at the title, you assume it is going to be more populist drivel about how we should be okay with obesity (because freedom, WW II, and all of that nationalist nonsense). In reality, it’s about how big government is fighting obesity incorrectly. Balko says, “More and more, states are preventing private health insurers from charging overweight and obese clients higher premiums, which effectively removes any financial responsibility for maintaining a healthy lifestyle.” Libertarians are the most conservative group in the country (they make Romney and Santorum look like Hu Jintao and Hugo Chavez), so that’s proof in itself that the desire to end obesity is not a single party issue.

This is why Judith Warner’s article did not impress me. Rather than moving past the political games that people like Sarah Palin are playing, she falls for them hook, line, and sinker. She says, “But now, with anti-government sentiment resurgent, the cookies are pushing back, like the return of the repressed [. . .] and their influence is irrational but real.” I do not think she could have done a better job of alienating conservatives who are concerned about the impact of the obesity epidemic. While everybody is entitled to their opinions, calling anti-government sentiment irrational is only going to put people on the defensive. Now instead of talking about how we can fix this epidemic in the most effective and efficient way to solve the problem, Warner has done the same thing as Sarah Palin and stepped in the way of progress with her political bull.

I do not know what is the best way to solve the obesity epidemic. Personally, I think that Radley Balko’s idea of raising premiums on the obese makes the most sense, but I’m neither a doctor nor a political scientist. What I do know, however, is that when we use serious issues as a means to a political end, that issue is never going to be resolved. In that sense, Judith Warner is no better than Sarah Palin, as both are hindering our goal of curbing the epidemic. If liberals and conservatives can’t stop arguing for five minutes and try to stop this epidemic, then it’s just going to keep getting bigger until it’s too late.

**Professor’s commentary**: I thought Daniel was being a little hard on Judith Warner, who is making the same argument that he is, but this is excellent in all other respects: accurate interpretation of the two passages, sophisticated understanding of the context, and clear, forceful, sophisticated expression of his own views. He gets extra kudos for knowing that the Cato Institute leans Libertarian and for bringing in Hu Jianto and Hugo Chavez!