

Seattle Times Thinks Soda Taxes Are Racist



By Alex Berezow, PhD — March 3, 2017

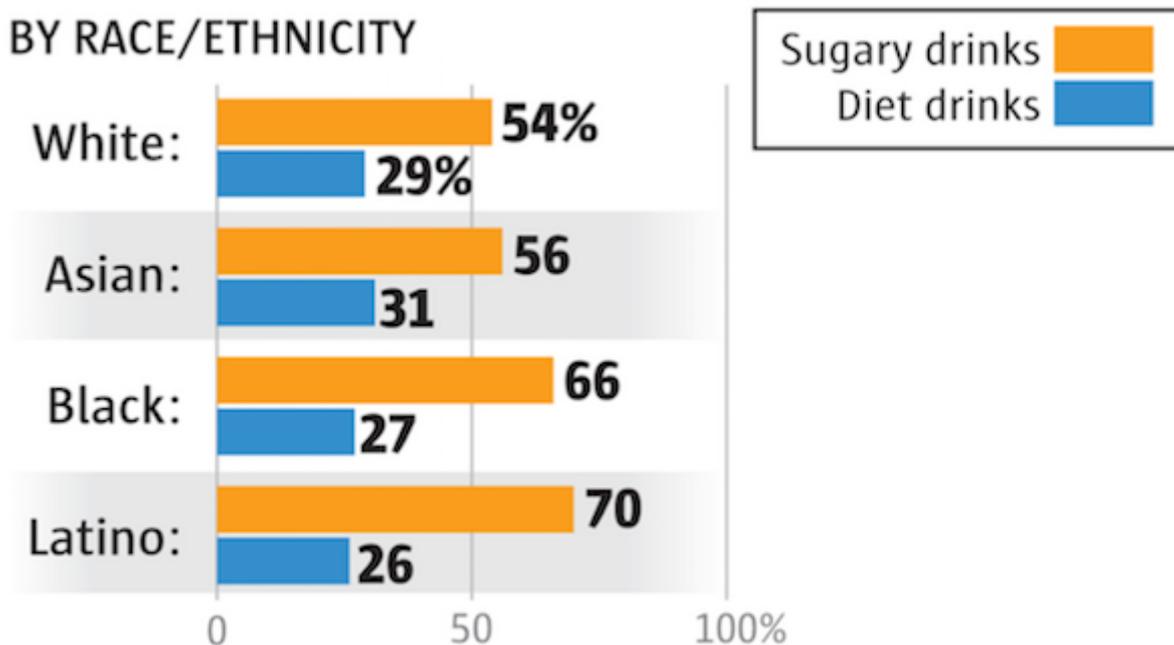


Credit: Shutterstock [1]

Soda taxes are many things. Obnoxious. Unscientific. An example of government overreach. The one thing they aren't is racist, yet precisely that case was made by *Seattle Times* reporter Gene Balk¹.

His [argument](#) [2] goes like this: Blacks and Hispanics consume more sugary beverages than whites and Asians, while whites and Asians drink more diet beverages than blacks and Hispanics. Because the tax does not apply to diet beverages, it is racist.

BY RACE/ETHNICITY



data provided by the *Seattle Times* (see [graph](#) [2]) indicates that it is true that blacks and Hispanics

drink more sugary beverages. When it comes to diet beverages, the four ethnic groups examined were roughly equal. Combined, 83% of whites, 87% of Asians, 93% of blacks, and 96% of Hispanics drank any kind of sugary or diet beverage.

Obviously, drinking a sugary/diet beverage is a person's choice. Nobody is forced to drink them. Like all Pigovian taxes, a tax on sugary drinks will incentivize people to switch to diet beverages. So even if the tax initially creates a disproportionate burden on blacks and Hispanics, they can respond by purchasing diet beverages, which aren't taxed. Problem solved. Besides, isn't encouraging people to drink less sugary soda precisely what Seattle is trying to encourage?

So Much Wrongness, So Little Time

Mr. Balk's article gets worse. He writes, "Many researchers now say that drinking diet soda does not help with weight loss." That defies common sense. Diet soda has fewer calories than regular soda. Consuming fewer calories is necessary to lose weight. So, yes, diet soda can help people lose weight, assuming they don't over-compensate by splurging on other calorie-packed foods.

Mr. Balk is wrong again when he writes, "There are more questions than answers regarding the long-term effects of consuming these artificial sweeteners." No, these questions have been answered numerous times. Mr. Balk has chosen not to accept them because they don't conform to his worldview. For the six approved sweeteners used in the U.S. (saccharin, aspartame, acesulfame potassium (Ace-K), sucralose, neotame, and advantame), the [FDA](#) [3] says it "determined that the estimated daily intake even for a high consumer of the substance would not exceed the [acceptable daily intake]."2

Of course, the elephant in the room is the undeniable fact that [some foods have more sugar than soda](#) [4]. For example, sweetened or fruited yogurt (47 grams) and a single mango (45.9 grams) have more sugar than a 12-oz Coke (39 grams). Twelve ounces of grape juice has a whopping 54 grams. It does not make scientific sense to tax sugary beverages but not fruit juice or any other natural foods that Mother Nature made too sweet for the City of Seattle.

It's the Seattle Times, Not the Science Times

Despite being less than 650 words long, the author manages to cram an impressive amount of fake news and illogical reasoning into the article3. Like the [New York Times](#) [5], the *Seattle Times* has a [history](#) [6] of flubbing major science stories. It should seriously consider not writing them anymore.

Notes

- (1) The article never uses the word "racist," but it's certainly implied from the headline: "No soda tax for diet drinkers? Seattle's plan excludes drinks favored by rich and white."
- (2) For more information on artificial sweeteners, see ACSH's report, [Sugar Substitutes & Your Health](#) [7].
- (3) Gene Balk does not take criticism well. On Twitter, he called me a "troll" and then blocked me.



gene balk  @genebalk · 1m

@AlexBerezow @seattletimes @HankCampbell you're a troll



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Links

[1] <https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/refreshing-bubbly-soda-pop-ice-cubes-288477014>

[2] <http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/data/no-soda-tax-for-diet-drinkers-seattles-plan-excludes-drinks-favored-by-rich-and-white/>

[3] <https://www.fda.gov/food/ingredientpackaginglabeling/foodadditivesingredients/ucm397716.htm>

[4] <http://acsh.org/news/2016/09/29/san-francisco-soda-tax-feel-good-policy-based-junk-science-10226>

[5] http://www.realclearscience.com/blog/2015/03/maybe_nyt_should_stop_writing_about_science.html

[6] <http://cliffmass.blogspot.com/2013/10/ocean-acidification-and-northwest.html>

[7] <http://www.acsh.org/news/2006/04/17/sugar-substitutes-and-your-health>