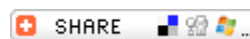




Columns and OpEds

[\[Print\]](#) [\[Email\]](#)

[Share](#)



Gene Healy: President Obama's war on his own 'youthful irresponsibility'

By: [Gene Healy](#)
Examiner Columnist
May 25, 2010

In his high school yearbook photo, President Barack Obama sports a white leisure suit and a Travolta-esque collar whose wingspan could put a bystander's eye out. Hey, it was 1979.

Maybe that explains the rest of young Barry's yearbook page, with its "still life" featuring a pack of rolling papers and a shout-out to the "Choom gang." ("Chooming" is Hawaiian slang for smoking pot.)

Far be it from me to condemn our president for harmless (and amusing) youthful indiscretions. As his predecessor put it, "When I was young and irresponsible, I was young and irresponsible."

But Obama's older now, and he's responsible for administering our nation's drug policy. Surely he can't feel comfortable locking up thousands of Americans for the sort of behavior that gave him a chuckle three decades ago.

Yet, in his new National Drug Control Strategy, Obama "firmly opposes the legalization of marijuana or any other illicit drug" and boasts of his administration's aggressive approach to pot eradication. Watch your back, Choom Gang.

Two days after the "new" strategy's release, the Associated Press published a comprehensive analysis of our 40-year drug war, using data obtained through Freedom of Information Act requests.

Since 1970, we've spent a trillion dollars trying to improve Americans' character by preventing them from ingesting federally disapproved substances. Nearly \$450 billion went toward locking up 37 million nonviolent offenders, 10 million for marijuana possession.

Obama has won praise from liberal pundits by paying lip service to drug-war de-escalation, but as the AP report shows, he has devoted more resources to enforcement than any other president.

"We're not at war with people in this country," the president's drug czar insists, so we should stop calling it a "war on drugs," which leads Americans to see it "as a war on them."

How did they ever get *that* idea? You can find the answer in a horrifying YouTube video that has garnered more than a million views this month. In it, a ninja-garbed SWAT team breaks into a private home in Columbia, Mo., and shoots the family dog in front of the suspect's 7-year-old son.

After seizing "a pipe and a small amount of marijuana," they had the audacity to charge the parents with child endangerment.

Softer rhetoric won't change the fact that the drug war *is* a war. Since the 1980s, the feds have subsidized the transfer of military ordnance to local police and Special Forces training of SWAT teams. That has led to a dangerous warrior ethos among civilian peacekeepers and an appalling body count. Obama has never gone in for Clintonian dodges about his youthful drug use. Inhaling "was the point," he said in 2007, and in his autobiography, he copped to occasionally snorting "a little blow."

Like many middle-class kids, the president briefly flirted with drug culture before putting away childish things and becoming a high achiever. (Indeed, looking at what he has achieved since, you sometimes wish pot killed motivation as effectively as drug-war propagandists claim.)

The president lacks the moral authority to lock people up for behavior he engaged in as a young man. Still, political realities being what they are, we can't expect him to declare a total cease-fire in the drug war. To his credit, Obama has at least reversed the Bush policy of prosecuting medical marijuana cases in states where it's legal.

But Obama may soon be presented with an unwelcome test of character. In November, Californians will likely approve a ballot initiative legalizing recreational pot use. Will Obama ignore the people's will and continue to prosecute marijuana users in our largest state?

He has five months to think about doing the right thing.

Examiner columnist Gene Healy is a vice president at the Cato Institute and the author of "The Cult of the Presidency."

More from Gene Healy

- [President Obama's war on his own 'youthful irresponsibility'](#)
- [Rand Paul, anti-incumbent Republican](#)
- [Security cameras' slippery slope](#)
- [Busting the Myth of Camelot](#)
- [The coming low-sodium dystopia](#)

Topics

[Gene Healy](#) , [Conservatives](#) , [Liberals](#) , [Democrats](#) , [Politics](#) , [ZRepublicans](#) , [Talk Radio](#) , [Blogosphere](#)



[Government benefits at record highs, while private pay hist historic lows](#)