

In the early days of the George W. Bush campaign, questions about his shady past naturally arose. In particular, the media asked about his alleged cocaine use, to which Bush issued his now famous reply that he was not going to “engage in the politics of destruction,” and so such a question was inappropriate. It was a perfectly legitimate response, until one considers that Bush is from a party that eight years earlier tried to crucify Clinton for trying marijuana once. Journalists were quick to point out the inconsistency of this, but no adequate response was ever issued. The only answer appears to be the obvious cynical one: that conservatives were not so much genuinely outraged in 1992 as much as that they wanted to bring Clinton down anyway they could. And so that’s why I’m dragging this dead horse out for a few more beatings, in hopes that perhaps some young Republican could write in and explain this to me.

The GOP did all it could in 1992 to try and make Clinton’s marijuana use an issue. The phrase, “I didn’t inhale,” became perhaps Clinton’s best known quote. GOP funded commercials showed clips of Clinton talking about his marijuana experiment. Conservative columnists argued that marijuana use would increase if Clinton were to be elected president, and when it did increase briefly during the Clinton-Gore years, many fingers pointed at the bad role model in the oval office.

Of course Bush never admitted to his cocaine habit, and in a court of law a man’s silence is not supposed to be held against him. Unfortunately, public opinion does not work the same way, and so when Bush said, “maybe,” most Americans interpreted it as “yes.” Why wouldn’t he come clean unless he had something to hide? So, fair or not, most Americans believe Bush to be guilty.

Which brings the question: why did the same people who demonized Clinton for marijuana use jump so eagerly on the Bush bandwagon? Especially considering that marijuana is a non-addictive drug that is reportedly less dangerous than alcohol. Cocaine, on the other hand, is one of the most addictive and most dangerous drugs. Clinton, for all his faults, was at least brave enough to admit his activity, whereas Bush has yet to come forward. And Clinton's activity was a one-time experiment, while Bush's is rumored to be more frequent. For conservatives, a group who likes to complain about a biased liberal media, this kind of double standard smacks of hypocrisy.

Another issue that conservatives made a fuss about in 1992 was Clinton's conscientious objection to the war in Vietnam. He was called a draft-dodger, unpatriotic, and un-American. After he won the election, many wondered if the army could respect a commander-in-chief who had avoided service. Cynical remarks were made every time Clinton addressed the army, and bumper stickers appeared saying, "Only in America does a homeless vet sleep in a cardboard box while a draft dodger sleeps in the White House." It was as if Clinton's patriotic duty was to serve in a war he morally objected to. Such sentiment usually only exists in countries like Nazi Germany.

George W. Bush, meanwhile, has never wavered in his public support of the Vietnam War. However, when the time came for him to serve, he used his family connections to get into the National Guard instead, jumping over many more qualified young men who were waiting in line for the opportunity. So, my question to you conservatives is again: why is this a non-issue?

I'll be looking for your replies next week.