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Ann Coulter believes the left has 'lost its mind'. Should we listen?

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“If I were the Democrats,” Ann Coulter tells me on a recent morning in New York, “I would admit that we have totally effed over our working class, admit that there are legitimate complaints, that heroin coming over the southern border is destroying America. The Democrats could 100% steal the White House from Trump, because he’s not doing it.”

In person, Coulter, the bestselling author and personality who has recently taken to comparing the liberal media to cancer cells, is friendly and seemingly earnest. Her face is free of the smirk it often wears in photos, but she has the same long, lean features and razor-straight hair that have been plastered on the dustjackets of so many books, and the same unblinking intensity.

Coulter’s authority as an unofficial mouthpiece for President Trump’s base is rivaled only by the revulsion she elicits from progressives. She is not the type of pundit who persuades by appealing to the middle ground. In 2004’s *How to Talk to a Liberal (If You Must)*, she offered 10 rules: “Outrage the enemy”, “Never apologize”, “Never compliment a Democrat”, “Never show graciousness toward a Democrat” – some of the rules overlap – “Never flatter a Democrat ...”

During her two-decade career, Coulter has followed these rules carefully. She has accused a group of 9/11 widows of reveling in their husbands’ deaths; lamented that Timothy McVeigh didn’t park his truck in front of the New York Times building; argued that the increasing popularity of soccer in America is a sign of moral decay; and been fired from MSNBC for telling a disabled Vietnam veteran on air that people like him were to blame for losing the war. (She later said she didn’t know he was disabled.)

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In response, Coulter has been described, variously, as a human submachine pistol (Lloyd Grove, *Washington Post*, 2002); a “paid banshee” and “self-drawn cartoon” (David Carr, *New York Times*, 2003); “She-Devil” (John Edwards, 2007); “Trump’s Aryan Witch Enforcer” (conservative critic Charlie Sykes, 2016); and “troll” (multiple citations).

Few consider Coulter a serious intellectual. But she’s a good debater – charismatic, dexterous, always ready with a talking point or quip. She also has an occasional, uncanny ability to sense political undercurrents that others miss.

In June 2015, three days after Donald Trump announced his candidacy for president, Coulter appeared on an episode of the Bill Maher show. She told him that, of the 17 Republican primary candidates, Trump was the one with the best chance of winning the White House. The room erupted in laughter. She then proceeded to tell an incredulous Maher that Bernie Sanders was the only Democrat who could beat Trump.

No one is laughing now. But that includes Coulter, because Trump's first year and a half in the White House have been, well, something less than a resounding success – a fact Coulter attributes to Trump's failure to fulfill campaign promises, like building a wall on the Mexican border, and, perhaps more importantly, failure to follow her advice.

For someone who only two years ago wrote a book titled *In Trump We Trust* (subtitle: *E Pluribus Awesome!*), she has become one of his fiercest critics. Last year a meeting at the White House deteriorated into, the *Daily Beast* reported, “profanity-laced” shouting between Coulter and Trump. (He swore first, Coulter later said.)

Ann Coulter, September 2018, in New York City. Photograph: Pascal Perich/The Guardian US

Trump memorably claimed he could shoot someone in the middle of Fifth Avenue without losing votes; for her part, Coulter, an evangelical Christian, has said she doesn't care if Trump performs abortions in the White House as long as he follows through on restricting immigration.

She still supports Trump, for lack of a satisfying alternative, but living the Trump presidency has been bitterly disappointing. “Every other day I want to strangle him,” she tells me.

In her latest provocation, *Resistance is Futile! How the Trump-Hating Left Lost Its Collective Mind*, Coulter argues that progressives, by responding hysterically to Trump, play into his hand. And “the contempt the Democrats have for ordinary people, for what they call ‘deplorables?’” she tells me. “You've got to flip that around.”

Divider

Coulter arrives at a recent radio taping at Compound Media (“the free speech network”). She douses her hands with sanitizer, rubbing her long fingers together, and explains that she has a cold and can't shake hands or embrace. She offers fist-bumps instead.

Coulter is a late riser who usually sleeps till noon, though she makes an exception for media opportunities.

She takes her responsibilities as a self-publicist seriously, and works at a relentless pace. While promoting her third book, 2003's *Treason: Liberal Treachery from the Cold War to the War on Terrorism*, she gave 160 interviews in less than a month, according to the *New York Times*' late David Carr.

Coulter and the other guests assemble in the studio. Coulter chews on nicotine gum. Host Bill Schulz opens by plugging her book.

Coulter says, “I've been a little upset with the president for keeping – let's see – *none* of his promises,” adding that her book is “excellent advice for the ‘Resistance’”, though “unfortunately they all hate me with the hot, hot hate of a thousand suns, so they won't read it.”

Trump “doesn’t have a history in politics”, she says later in the conversation, and “he hasn’t thought deeply about a lot of these issues –”

“*WHAT*,” Schulz shouts in mock outrage.

The other panelists agree with Coulter’s lackluster assessment of the Trump presidency but there seems to be a consensus that the left’s response is histrionic and will backfire.

“These attacks, this stuff from the left – this is what’s going to get him re-elected,” another guest, the comedian Dave Landau, says.

Coulter’s sometimes-affinity with Trump is unsurprising; in addition to a shared enthusiasm for hand sanitizer, both owe their success to a willingness to say out loud the things other people think in their heads. Those who read Coulter’s books – all have been bestsellers – and devotedly follow her media appearances love her because she articulates suspicions many Americans hold: that the media has a leftwing bias; that progressives shut down disagreement by crying racism or sexism; that neither party cares about the working class.

Her audience is “a narrow band of people”, Carr once observed, “who nonetheless number in the millions”.

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“Immigrants are great if you’re rich,” Coulter tells me. “You live in New York or LA, you get your pool cleaned. Rosa the maid cleans everything, serves, picks up the kids, makes the beds. Life is grand. But I go out to America. And I knew that immigration was an enormous effing issue that our political class – Republicans for the donor money, Democrats for the votes – was ignoring.”

In June 2015 Coulter published *Adios America! The Left’s Plan to Turn Our Country into a Third World Hellhole*. The book argued that unchecked immigration, both legal and illegal, was increasing crime, straining the welfare state, and depressing blue-collar wages, and that the media, because of political correctness, and big business, for cheap labor, were preventing honest debate.

The book’s most serious charge has since become a mainstream allegation by conservatives: if Democrats have their way, Coulter claimed, they will add up to 30 million new voters to the rolls – overwhelmingly dependent on big government and loyal to the Democratic party. In other words, liberal elites support mass immigration because they are thumbing the scale of democracy itself.

Ann Coulter, right, during an appearance on Fox News. Photograph: Fox News

Then an interview she did about the book went viral. “I’m in a cab on the way to the airport and I get a text from Trump’s people: ‘Mr Trump would like a copy of your book overnighted to him.’ So I did. And two weeks later he’s talking about Mexican rapists. He has *uncanny* political instincts.”

In the *Atlantic*, in December 2015, the former Bush speechwriter David Frum described Coulter’s book as the “political book of the year”. “Perhaps no single writer has had such immediate impact on a presidential election since Harriet Beecher Stowe,” he added, in a sentence that might cause consternation to the author of the antislavery novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Frum

argued that rosy liberal claims about immigration are not borne out in statistics. Although some immigrants have assimilated well – he cited Nigerian Americans – other immigrant communities suffer from high unemployment, welfare dependency, and educational failure, he said.

In an incisive recent piece in *Current Affairs*, a left-leaning journal, writer Brianna Rennix acknowledged that Coulter was probably correct about Democrats (and Republicans) exploiting immigration for cheap labor and votes. But *Adios America!* is a “vicious, dehumanizing” book, the review said, and one with eugenic undertones.

Rennix added that the book, which cites stomach-churning examples of crimes against women in immigrant communities, seemed more bothered by the fact that these crimes occurred in America than the fact that they occurred.

Trump, however, loved Coulter’s book. And Coulter loved Trump. He was, she believed, a kind of idiot savant. When recalling the moment on 16 June 2015 that Trump came down the golden escalator to announce his candidacy, she sounds like a Christian describing when she was born again. She threw all her energy into getting him elected.

Two years later, the gold varnish has worn off.

But she still loves Trump for his ability to antagonize progressives and the media – whose tendency to overreact, she argues, is what always saves him. This is terrain that Coulter, more than almost anyone, understands.

Or as she once put it: “When the spittle starts coming from liberals’ mouths, you know you have struck *gold*.”

Divider

Two days after her taping with Bill Schulz, Coulter has another radio show, with Mark Simone of New York’s WOR 710. After a show Coulter often goes to lunch with the panelists, but she is still sick, and possibly still contagious. A social function would invite handshakes, which would be socially irresponsible – and perhaps risk foreign agents infiltrating her immune system and making her sick all over again. One can’t be too careful.

Hygiene and physical perfection are preoccupations of Coulter’s. She is fond of the word “retarded” as a term of disparagement (though she has said she would never use the term to refer to “someone with an actual mental handicap”), and in *Adios America!* writes contemptuously of disabled immigrants. She told me she believes pretty girls are more likely to be conservatives.

Coulter does agree to join me at a cafe in SoHo. Since a 2004 pie-throwing incident at the University of Arizona (“They missed, because liberals throw like girls”), Coulter has taken greater security precautions, sometimes including a bodyguard. She navigates New York with a highly developed sense of which areas are “safe” for her – none, really, outside the Upper East Side.

At the cafe she glances at the menu but orders only a chai latte to accompany her nicotine gum. “I have a *few* coastal elite habits,” she says when I raise an eyebrow at the latte.

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Last December, after Marco Rubio announced that he would not support the Republican tax bill unless it included more provisions for low-income families, Coulter tweeted, “We singles live empty lives of quiet desperation and will die alone. Now Rubio is demanding that we also fund happy families with children who fill their days with joy.”

But besides noting, in passing, that she has dated men who drive motorcycles, Coulter declines to say much about her romantic life. She has never been married, though she has been engaged, she says vaguely, “two or three times”. Previous boyfriends include Dinesh D’Souza, the rightwing pundit Trump pardoned for making illegal campaign contributions. D’Souza recently unveiled a new film, *Death of a Nation*, exploring parallels between Trump and Abraham Lincoln.

The only other question Coulter refuses to answer is her age. According to the *New York Times* and Wikipedia, she is 56. (Coulter tells me information online is incorrect and she has been trying to get a hold of Jimmy Wales, the founder of Wikipedia, to fix it.)

Coulter has an active social life and many friends, including in liberal bastions like Hollywood. Some of these friends, such as a successful screenwriter and producer who asked to be anonymous, keep their relationship with Coulter discreet to avoid falling victim to what the screenwriter called “reverse McCarthyism”.

Although she claims to despise the coastal elite, Coulter’s upbringing, in New Canaan, Connecticut, epitomized establishment values. Her father, John Coulter, was an FBI agent who hunted Soviet spies; after retiring from the Bureau he became a union-busting lawyer. He met Coulter’s mother, Nell, while working an FBI assignment at a uranium plant in Kentucky.

The Coulters were conservative, religiously observant (mother Presbyterian, father Catholic) Americans of Scottish descent, frugal and not given to displays of emotion. John Coulter was “of the old school, a man of few words, the un-Oprah, no crying or wearing your heart on your sleeve, and reacting to moments of great sentiment with a joke”, she wrote in a 2008 eulogy for her father.

Discussion during family dinners focused on politics, which Coulter has credited with refining her debating skills.

“Father didn’t care what popular opinion was,” she writes. “There was right and wrong.” He was contemptuous of moral relativism on issues like abortion, and she recalls “the look of disgust” on his face when he saw a picture in the newspaper of Senator Ted Kennedy, a Catholic Democrat, praying a rosary.

Coulter brought her father’s uncompromising politics to Cornell, where she co-founded the conservative *Cornell Review*. After law school at the University of Michigan she spent several years doing dreary legal work in New York. In 1995 she moved to Washington DC to work for the Senate judiciary committee.

Coulter’s first book, *High Crimes and Misdemeanors: The Case Against Bill Clinton*, was a methodical argument for impeachment. In contrast to her later books, the tone and style were lawyerly and self-consciously serious.

The book was notable in another respect. At the time, many liberals, including prominent feminists, excused Clinton’s affair with Lewinsky as consensual, or painted Lewinsky, a 22-

year-old White House intern, as a power-hungry harlot. Coulter argued that the power difference between Clinton and Lewinsky made the relationship inherently inappropriate and exploitative.

(Perhaps to avoid being mistaken for a hero of intersectional feminism, Coulter has since expressed interest in revoking women's suffrage.)

Divider

Detractors on both left and right have accused Coulter of using coded language to appeal to the alt-right.

In September 2015, during a televised Republican debate in which the candidates kept reverting to platitudes about supporting Israel, Coulter tweeted, with characteristic tact: "How many f---ing Jews do these people think there are in the United States?"

The conservative writer David French argued in *National Review* that Coulter was dog-whistling to a "very small, very angry crowd that's far more white nationalist than it is recognizably conservative". ("Dog-whistling," Coulter says when I describe French's accusation. "How original!" She calls French's writing "stupid" and "boring".)

"In 20 years," Coulter declared on Twitter last year, "Russia will be the only country that is recognizably European."

"She means white," a commenter explained, for anyone wondering.

VDARE, an anti-immigration website that publishes explicit white supremacists, carries Coulter's column. The website is named for Virginia Dare, believed to be the first English child born in North America; Dare died at the mysterious, doomed Roanoke colony, a fate the group's founders believe could be prophetic for white North Americans.

Coulter is a longtime friend of the site's founder, Peter Brimelow, and credits him in the acknowledgements of *Adios America!* (She also credits Peter Thiel.) Brimelow denies his site is racist. It publishes people such as Jared Taylor, founder of the white nationalist magazine *American Renaissance*, and John Derbyshire, who was fired from *National Review* for his writing on race.

Ann Coulter on drinking lattes: 'I have a *few* coastal elite habits'. Photograph: Pascal Perich/Guardian US

"Maybe [Brimelow] has published Jared – I don't think I've ever seen anything by Jared there," she tells me. "But who *cares*? That is the most guilt-by-association *insanity*."

Charlie Sykes, a writer for the *Weekly Standard*, a conservative magazine, told me Coulter was once an asset to the conservative movement, but morphed from "intellectually substantive to demagogically sensationalistic, much like the movement itself". He added: "Her willingness to traffic in racial and ethnic bigotry has done incalculable damage, because she's normalized it for a huge swath of conservatives."

There is nothing inherently racist about restricting immigration, Coulter says. She calls the left's attitudes about immigration hypocritical.

“It wasn’t long ago that Harry Reid was on the Senate floor denouncing anchor babies,” she says, and Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer “were defending border patrol agents. So this is, number one, a very recent policy of the left, and, number two, it’s clearly utterly political and self-interested. Immigrants since 1970 vote about 80% for the Democrats. Democrats have no right to bring in millions of people who are going to vote for them any more than Republicans do. And the reason they cry racism is they don’t want to talk about it.”

She argues that the mainstream media ignores serious problems associated with immigration, especially violence and drug crime.

Most research does not support the notion immigrants commit more crime; the Cato Institute, a libertarian thinktank, says both documented and undocumented immigrants commit crimes at lower rates than native-born Americans. According to research published in the *Journal of Ethnicity in Criminal Justice* and cited by the Marshall Project and others, violent crime in the US decreased 36% since 1980, even though the immigrant population increased 118% in the same period.

Low-skilled immigration “drives down wages for low-wage workers”, Coulter tells me. “Of course it does. What is your counterargument? You’ve repealed the laws of supply and demand?”

The journalist Sam Quinones, author of *Dreamland: The True Tale of America’s Opiate Epidemic*, acknowledged this in an op-ed last year. “I recognize the anger of citizens at the bottom of the economy who must compete with those in the US without permission,” he writes. “I don’t like to hear them characterized as racist simply for pointing it out.”

But, he adds, Americans enjoy cheap goods and services because of immigrant labor. Trump voters want “to eat their cake and keep it, too”.

Sykes argues that Coulter’s anti-immigration, anti-trade, anti-globalization stance “isn’t conservative in any meaningful sense of the word” and “has more in common with European-style popular-front nationalism than conservatism”.

“I think what Coulter represents has always been a recessive gene on the right,” he tells me. “But, until recently, it’s been a minority point of view that was held in check.”

Divider

The auditorium of the Metropolitan Republican Club on the Upper East Side is packed to capacity. Late arrivals stand in the back. Everyone chatters excitedly as they wait. The crowd varies in age but skews overwhelmingly white. An earnest man with an eastern European accent strains to see the podium. “I was much closer to Trump and Melania,” he says wistfully, and shows me photographs he took when he saw them in Washington. He glows as if they are photos of his children.

Undocumented immigrants are the single greatest threat facing America, he feels. At least “every second one” are violent criminals, and even the ones who aren’t are still here illegally. If it were up to him, he says, they would be eligible for only three “benefits” – immediate deportation, jail with hard labor, or the electric chair.

His ideal policy would also pare down legal immigration, almost to zero, “like Japan”, and admit only the most highly skilled applicants, strictly on merit. (This aspiration is somewhat puzzling; Japan is in economic and cultural crisis because of its rapidly shrinking population, and without an influx of new blood it may lose a third of its population this century.)

Aren't you an immigrant? I ask.

Yes, he says, from Latvia. He was granted asylum during the cold war. In any event, he hastens to add, he has more than earned his keep.

Coulter comes into the room to a standing ovation. “The main thesis of my book,” she says, “is that the media are liars – every one of them.”

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This turns out to be a popular message. The audience loves her. She has no prepared remarks, instead moving from topic to topic using her best lines, often verbatim from the book.

On Trump's alleged obstruction of justice: all Trump has done is lie to the media, which is legal, and “there is nothing wrong with lying to the media. In fact I recommend it.”

One audience member asks Coulter to speak to the significance of the massive online media sphere that has flourished as an alternative to the liberal mainstream media.

“For democracy to live we must kill the media,” Coulter says. “There may be a rash of reporter suicides – have no sympathy.” We must destroy the media, and rebuild it on “more ethical lines”.

The time has come for her greatest line of all: Trump, she says, is chemotherapy for the country. The process won't be pleasant. “We'll get sick, we'll throw up, it really sucks. But *the entire New York Times editorial board dies.*”

The audience explodes, clapping wildly, shrieking in laughter, heads thrown back like hyenas at the site of a kill.