

Ann Coulter: TRIPPed Up

“I got *nothing* out of him [Jim Moody] and I must say *being* one of his friends that *did* annoy me.” – *Ann Coulter*

“Admittedly, I knew in January [1998] what was on the Tripp tapes.” – *Ann Coulter*

I don’t mind reliving the greatest night of my life over and over and over again. I was dancing a jig. I was bouncing off the walls.” – *Ann Coulter*

“If you imagine what the world would be like if Linda Tripp hadn’t kept those tapes – a very different world.” – *Ann Coulter*

Secrecy shrouded Ann Coulter’s intimate knowledge of, and clandestine connection with, the now-infamous Tripp tapes. Ironically, it was the Starr Report which unveiled a corner of that shroud:

[Tripp] said she subsequently learned that Moody, before turning the tapes over to Starr’s office, had given them to Ann Coulter – a conservative lawyer and frequent talk show guest who has since written a book outlining the case for Clinton’s impeachment – for copying.¹

In the Crossfire

Suspicious were initially aroused when, in a *Crossfire* debate,² Coulter refused to give a direct answer on this topic: “A real quick question on the tapes. Have you ever personally listened to the Linda Tripp tapes? ... How’d you get them?” Coulter’s response: “Well, do you think it’s OK for a president to perjure himself under oath? So what do you think of a political pundit lying on TV?”

Clearly a Clintonesque admission. Why such obfuscation if there’s nothing to *hide*? Is Coulter concerned about the *legal* ramifications of her actions?

Denials and Smokescreens

On *Rivera Live*,³ Coulter first *denied* hearing the tapes, then *admitted* to hearing *one* tape., and lied about her *source* for the tapes.

RIVERA: “Did you ever listen to and/or make copies of those tapes?”

COULTER: “No, I literally would have had them air-dropped across America and I’d probably be a millionaire by now. ... they would have been on *Entertainment Tonight*, they would have been on your show and I’d be a multi-millionaire.”

Interestingly, just hours before I had interviewed Jim Moody about whether Coulter had copied the tapes. His reply was *almost identical* – “If she had them, believe me, she would have been the *first* to release them *wholesale*. I mean, she’s doing a *book* on the Clinton scandals.”⁴ – the *very same argument* used by Ann Coulter on *Rivera Live* later that night.

Directly challenged by Geraldo Rivera, Coulter conceded listening to *one* of the tapes: “I heard the same tape that was described by *Newsweek*.”

But Coulter adamantly denied getting the tape from Moody: “I got *nothing* out of him [Moody] and I must say *being* one of his friends that *did* annoy me.” Is it *coincidental* that Moody also spoke of Ann’s *annoyance* at him over the tapes? Moody said: “She’s kind of annoyed at me for not giving her the tapes so she could put them in her book.”⁵

Still, Coulter continued to blow smokescreens, claiming she got the tapes in her capacity as a journalist/investigative reporter (“people send me things”). In fact, she got the tapes because of her friendship with Moody.

Ethical Questions

Why would Coulter attempt to extract “privileged information” from another lawyer? Did she participate in the duplication of those tapes? Did her connection with the tapes taint the evidence and break the “chain of custody?” Was attorney-client confidentiality circumvented?

In a debate on “journalistic ethics” on *Newshour with Jim Lehrer*,⁶ fellow attorney Barry Scheck asked whether the audience had a right to know if a pundit had listened to the tapes because they might be biased. Coulter replied: “Well, I think if I had been influenced and biased, I would have been wrong in my legal commentary more often.” Doesn’t Coulter’s “amazingly accurate” prognostication inspire suspicion.

Scheck continued: “... you’d actually listened to them, but oddly enough, we didn’t know that you had.” Wearing her ethical blinders, Coulter countered: “I don’t see what difference that makes.”

An under-appreciated aspect of this entire affair has been the *blending* of roles and the *crossing* of ethical lines. Is Ann Coulter a *lawyer*, a *journalist*, or a *pundit*? The answer is all *three*, depending on the role she wants to play at the time.

Consider Coulter’s various hats of convenience: *political pundit* (to avoid talking about the Tripp tapes), *legal analyst* (to discuss the issues), and *journalist* (to justify possession of the Tripp tapes). On *Newshour*, Coulter vigorously stated that she offers “*legal analysis*,” not political *punditry* on talk shows, but on *Crossfire* she referred to herself as a “*political pundit*” and on *Rivera Live* she justified her secret knowledge of the tapes because of her identity as a “*journalist*” and “*investigative reporter*.”

Investigations?

Remember, Ann Coulter lied about *hearing* the Tripp tapes (“I was just thinking last night one thing we still have to hear are the tapes. The two most famous women in America, Monica Lewinsky and Linda Tripp and no one has ever heard their voices.”).⁷ On *Rivera Live*, she first denied listening to *any* of the tapes, then admitted hearing *one*, but denied *having* the Tripp tapes (“Geraldo, if I had copies of those tapes you

would have gotten a FEDEX package the next day.”)⁸ yet denied her *source* for the Tripp tapes (“Both Coulter and Moody say he was not the source of the tape she heard.”)⁹ None of which was true.

However, once the threat of Congressional investigation into her activities was over, Coulter revealed that the greatest night of her life (“I must say, I don’t mind reliving the greatest night of my life over and over again. I was dancing a jig. I was bouncing off the walls”) was when she was listening to the tapes Moody had provided her.¹⁰

Isn’t it time we examined more closely Coulter’s clandestine connection to the Tripp tapes – those tapes which changed history?

“I do think she’s a great American hero. We never would have found out about the corruption and illegality at the very top of the government but for Linda Tripp. If you imagine what the world would be like if Linda Tripp hadn’t kept those tapes – a very different world.”¹¹

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Endnotes:

¹ John Riley, “Starr Aide’s Role As Tripp Advisor,” *Newsday*, October 3, 1998.

² *Crossfire*, CNN, October 2, 1998.

³ *Rivera Live*, CNBC, October 14, 1998.

⁴ Interview with Jim Moody, October 14, 1998.

⁵ Howard Kurtz, “The Blonde Flinging Bombshells at Clinton,” *Washington Post*, October 16, 1998, pg. D4.

⁶ *Newshour with Jim Lehrer*, PBS, October 19, 1998.

⁷ Ann Coulter, *Inside Politics*, CNN, May 6, 1998.

⁸ Ann Coulter, *Rivera Live*, CNBC, October 14, 1998.

⁹ Howard Kurtz, “The Blonde Flinging Bombshells at Clinton,” *Washington Post*, October 16, 1998, pg. D4.

¹⁰ Ann Coulter, *Hartford Courant*, June 25, 1999.

¹¹ Ann Coulter, *Rivera Live*, CNBC, May 24, 2000.