

Tomi Lahren's "Winning Team"



Fox News contributor Tomi Lahren made headlines earlier this week over an unfortunate incident that went down (and was captured on video) in Minneapolis last Sunday. The self-professed conservative thinker was the recipient of a tossed drink and shouted obscenities from local restaurant patrons who were clearly motivated by political differences with the pundit. It was an ugly display of which Lahren was undeniably the victim.

Support for Lahren soon funneled in from both sides of the political aisle, including President Trump (of whom Lahren is an outspoken supporter) and even liberal comedian Kathy Griffin. Being that Lahren often preaches about *liberal intolerance*, she'll assuredly milk the restaurant incident – as an example of such – for all it's worth (and she has every right to do so).

Controversy is nothing new for Lahren. As some might recall, her media career began with a series of heated Internet-video

sermons in which she trashed prominent liberals and liberal sensibilities. It was a novelty of sorts – the notion of an attractive college-aged woman (who you'd expect to be a liberal) aggressively calling out the Left. The videos went viral, and the popular shtick earned her a show on Glenn Beck's *TheBlaze* network.

Lahren's tenure at *TheBlaze*, however, was reportedly quite complicated. Backstage friction and a number of uninformed and inconsistent commentaries from Lahren made people at the network uncomfortable. Her fluctuating positions (seemingly influenced by whichever audience she happened to be speaking to at any given time) led many to conclude that she didn't particularly believe in the principles she claimed to espouse, and was instead using conservatism as little more than a marketing mantra to advance her personal brand.

That sentiment gained steam when Lahren, who had previously presented herself as fiercely pro-life (even calling those who are pro-choice "straight-up baby killers"), told the liberal hosts of *The View* that she was pro-choice, and suggested that pro-lifers were hypocrites. It was apparently the last straw for Beck, who suspended (and later terminated) Lahren from *TheBlaze*.

Lahren spent her off-time advancing her way up the cars of the *Trump Train* (even working for a pro-Trump super PAC), which primed her to be hired on by Fox News last year. There, she's been given a larger than ever platform from which to toss red meat at the network's key demographic.

It was undoubtedly a good career move for Lahren, and last Monday (in a tweet that kind of got lost in light of the restaurant incident), she couldn't help but take a shot at her former employer:

Are you former media "NeverTrumpers" now on the Trump Train because you realize you were wrong or do you just not want to

be broke and irrelevant? Either way, welcome to the winning team! ☐☐

– Tomi Lahren (@TomiLahren) May 21, 2018

Though Lahren didn't mention him by name, she was clearly referring to Glenn Beck, who had just made news himself by donning a MAGA hat, and pledging on his radio show to enthusiastically support President Trump in the 2020 election.



Glenn Beck puts on the MAGA hat

The endorsement caught many by surprise because Beck had been a NeverTrumper throughout the 2016 election cycle, and had remained one of the president's staunchest conservative critics (citing principled differences on character and policy).

Beck attributed his sudden change of heart to the mainstream media's continual unfair treatment of the president – an explanation that the conservative group, *Reagan Battalion*, wasn't quite buying:

You can criticize & even be disgusted with the way the media covers Trump.

We are.

You can praise Trump when he does good, and criticize when he

says, tweets, does something stupid or bad.

We do.

And you still don't have to put on a MAGA hat & bow to the king. <https://t.co/hGotYawev2>

– The Reagan Battalion (@ReaganBattalion) May 19, 2018

But *bowing to the king* is exactly what Beck did, and what was assuredly his real reason for doing so wasn't the overnight realization that he was "wrong," but rather Lahren's second suggestion (as confirmed to the *Daily Beast* by a Beck associate): "...do you just not want to be broke and irrelevant?"

The fact of the matter is that the era of Trump has not been good for TheBlaze, in large part because of Beck's unapologetic criticisms of the president. Viewership and advertising revenue have sharply declined. Last year, the network even had to lay off 60 employees (an estimated 30% of its personnel). And Beck is far from the only conservative in the media who has been hurt by not pledging allegiance to Trump.

The sad reality is that if you're a conservative commentator, who believes in (and espouses) the same principles, policies, and sense of character that you did three years ago, many of the same people who were your fans back then *now* view you as a turncoat. They expect compliance with Trump, and if they don't see it, they don't want to see you.

In our increasingly tribal political environment, a refusal to capitulate to the "winning team" (as Lahren puts it) is a career liability. If you don't fall in line with your *side*, you're gonna pay. It's the reason why *RedState* recently released some of its most talented writers. It's the reason why several Fox News personalities, who were top ratings draws

three years ago, have virtually disappeared from the network. It's the reason why some of the top dogs in conservative radio sound nothing like they did back in 2015.

Honesty and genuineness are admirable traits, but they often aren't profitable. Partisan warfare, however, is a reliable commodity. People like Lahren (and many others) have tailored their rhetoric to serve the latter. And what's remarkable is that they've been increasingly brazen about how they've done so purely in the interest of a business model. After all, once you assign your political relevance to the gratification of a tribe, you're acknowledging that as an individual, you're little more than a consumer product.

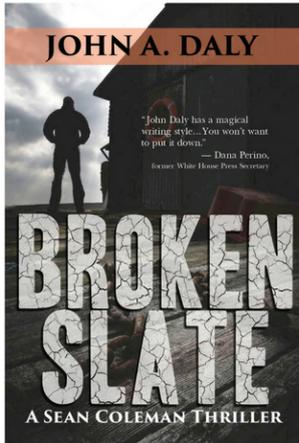
Beck may have finally concluded that selling out is the best choice he can make for the longevity of his brand and his network. Then again, maybe I'm reading too much into the stunt. I suppose it's best to wait and see where he takes things from here.

What isn't in doubt is the transformation of the conservative media (with a few notable exceptions) into an offering that doesn't value honest discourse, competing ideas, or even conservatism the way it used to. Cheering on the "winning team" and *owning the liberals* is what sells these days, and as a big proponent of capitalism, I get that.

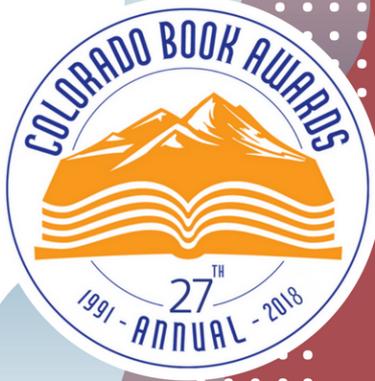
Still, it's disheartening whenever honor and integrity are replaced with price-tags.

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