

Let's Not Forget Who Charlie Kirk Really Was

The right-wing influencer did not deserve to die, and we shouldn't forget the many despicable things he said and did.

-Joan Walsh, The Nation



Mourners made a wreath for Charlie Kirk at the US Embassy in Pretoria on September 11, 2025. (Phill Magakoe / AFP via Getty Images)

The murder of right-wing provocateur Charlie Kirk is a tragedy. But the response augurs even bigger tragedies for American politics. Even as Democrats and progressives rushed to lament the killing, the right rushed even faster to blame the left for its opposition to Donald Trump and his authoritarian movement, a movement backed to the hilt by Kirk's Turning Point USA.

Kirk had every right to his views and to the way that he expressed them, even if he did not support that right for other people. He founded the Professor Watchlist, committed to singling out academics he believed discriminated against conservative views, scholarship, and students, leading to threats against some of the instructors named. He regularly attacked the LGBTQ community, [saying](#), "God's perfect law...[says gay people] shall be stoned to death." He claimed the Civil Rights Act was "a huge mistake," and called the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. "an awful person." He mocked the 2023 political assault on Nancy Pelosi's husband, Paul, and even suggested someone should bail his assailant out of jail. Kirk even [attempted to link](#) Minnesota Governor Tim Walz to the assassination of Walz's close friend and ally, State Senator Melissa Hortman.

Ironically—if that word is even possible to use in 2023—he [said](#), "I think it's worth to have a cost of, unfortunately, some gun deaths every single year so that we can have the Second Amendment to protect our other God-given rights."

Kirk said and did many despicable things, but he did not deserve to die. Now his death is being used by the right to call for the persecution of practically anyone to Kirk's left. "The left is the party of murder," X owner Elon Musk intoned on his Nazi-adjacent site. Wisconsin Representative Derrick Van Orden told reporters that the media, "every one of you," is

responsible. “You are responsible for this, because you are echoing the horrifically horrible political violent rhetoric produced by the Democrat Party.” Kate Miller, the wife of Stephen Miller, who recently called the Democratic Party “a domestic extremist organization,” [posted on Musk’s site](#): “It’s a real treat to see all these Liberals condemn political violence now. You called us Hitler. You called us Nazis. You called us Racists. You have blood on your hands.”

President Donald Trump blamed “radical-left political violence,” and promised to “find each and every one of those who contributed to this atrocity and other political violence, including the organizations that fund and support it, as well as those who go after our judges, law enforcement officials, and everyone else who brings order to our country.” All of this while Trump’s FBI chief Kash Patel was embarrassing himself by first claiming a “subject” was in custody and then having to announce that the man was interrogated and released. There is still no suspect in custody and no reliable account of a motive for Kirk’s murder.

Liberals were not the only ones who disdained Kirk. White nationalist Nick Fuentes had long feuded with him, and recently attacked him for supporting the war in Gaza and flip-flopping on the Epstein files. (Like Fuentes, [Kirk once was outraged](#) by the administration’s failure to release them as promised; when Trump leaned on him and others, he backed off, saying Epstein was a dead issue.)

Many on the right are frustrated with Trump’s coddling of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Trump’s inability to end the siege of Gaza. Kirk was a diehard Israel hawk. A few days ago, [Laura Loomer attacked him](#) for criticizing Trump’s bombing of Iran’s nuclear facilities. There are many threads of right-wing thought that could have led a conservative to pick up a gun; by the way, they have most of the guns.

But instead of fighting back, many liberals seem to be trying to mollify the right-wing crackpots. Maybe the worst thing I’ve seen today is Ezra Klein’s smarmy “Charlie Kirk practiced politics exactly the right way” in Thursday’s *New York Times*. “He was showing up to campuses and talking with anyone who would talk to him,” Klein [wrote](#). “He was one of the era’s most effective practitioners of persuasion. A taste for disagreement is a virtue in a democracy. Liberalism could use more of his moxie and fearlessness.”

Author Mark Harris said it better than I could on Bluesky: “You can write this only if, by virtue of your income, identity, or both, you are utterly removed from the consequences of politics. To pretend that the racist, misogynistic, anti-gay vileness that Kirk spent his life spreading is secondary to the fact that he spread it ‘the right way’ is appalling.”

Klein is not the only one to pretend that Kirk was a gentleman and a scholar who was open to all views, took all comers, and, because of his skill, generally wound up beating them in the public square. In fact, Kirk mostly debated people he set up and who knew less than he did, and he often played their views for laughs. Just because he and Gavin Newsom had a nice conversation on the governor’s podcast doesn’t make him a role model for our sons left or right. He may well have been a fine friend and family man, but he was also a vicious troll.

Nevertheless, people are being punished for saying anything like that. The cowards at [MSNBC fired](#) longtime political analyst (and GOP President George W. Bush adviser) Matthew Dowd for expressing regret for Kirk's death but then adding, "I always go back to, hateful thoughts lead to hateful words, which then lead to hateful actions." After his firing, Dowd apologized: "Let me be clear, I in no way intended for my comments to blame Kirk for this horrendous attack." A Florida reporter was [suspended](#) after asking Representative Randy Fine if Kirk's murder changed his stance on campus-carry gun laws.

As I write, *The Wall Street Journal* is reporting that "transgender, anti-fascist ideology" was found inside what is believed to be the murder weapon. I'll want to see a lot more evidence before I believe that. And "transgender ideology" isn't a thing—let alone something that can be communicated on a bullet casing. The latest: The Salt Lake City FBI released photos of a person of interest. He seems to be wearing a shirt with a flag and a bald eagle, and he looks nothing like a transgender antifa activist to my eyes. We so far know nothing about who did this.

If it turns out that Kirk's murderer did voice some nominally progressive views, it's still the fact that [75 percent of political murders](#) have come from the extremist right in the last decade, according to the ADL Center on Extremism.

The media will continue to "both sides" the issue. Democrats absolutely should not.