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KIRK (1993–2025)

ALLEN MENDENHALL

Freedom of speech is all.

Charlie Kirk is dead.

That is not a sentence I ever imagined writing, certainly not in 2025. He leaves behind a devoted wife as well as two young children, who will grow up in a world without their father.

Charlie Kirk was the founder of Turning Point USA, a conservative student activist group, and host of *The Charlie Kirk Show*, a nationally-syndicated daily radio show. The focus of Turning Point was empowering young people to speak out for free markets and limited government. Much of Charlie's work involved speaking and debating on college campuses. He was willing to debate anyone, to hold out his views and be challenged. It was during such an event on the campus of Utah Valley University that he was shot and killed Wednesday afternoon, at the age of 31.

certainty that justice had been served, that a man's death was the proper price for defending his convictions.

Though I cannot mourn Charlie as a close friend, I can mourn what his death represents: the collapse of the great American experiment in self-government, the return to that Hobbesian state of nature where might makes right and the strong devour the weak.

My son, age 13, knew Charlie better than I did, if it can be called knowing to watch a man through a screen. Thirteen is an age suspended between innocence and experience: old enough to see that ideas have consequences, young enough to hope those consequences need not include death.

He would watch Charlie debate, and what he learned was not any particular doctrine but something more fundamental: that it is possible to believe strongly enough to defend those beliefs in public, to submit one's convictions to the test of argument and counterargument.

When he got out of school yesterday, I had to tell him that the man whose clarity of thought he admired had been murdered for, it seems, the crime of thinking aloud. This is the world we are making for the next generation: a place where ideas are so dangerous that men must die for having them, where the ultimate answer to every disagreement is the gun.

Because I associate Charlie with my son, and my son with Charlie, I worry about inheritance—not of money or property, but of the vast structure of beliefs and customs that makes civilized life possible. We inherit the assumption that we can disagree without killing, that ideas can be met with ideas, that the proper response to speech we dislike is more speech, not violence.

And in a single moment, it seems gone.

Charlie's death is a mirror in which we can see ourselves as we truly are: a people who have lost faith in our own founding bet that free people can govern themselves through reason rather than force. If we cannot reclaim the inheritance of reason over violence, of speech over silence, then his death will not be the end of one man's story. It will be the beginning of our own undoing.

Those who did know Charlie, even those who disagreed with his politics, speak of a man who was warm and gracious. This is what we should remember. If there is any redemption in this tragedy, it lies in whether we choose to see in Charlie's death not only what we have lost, but what we must recover.

ALLEN MENDENHALL

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