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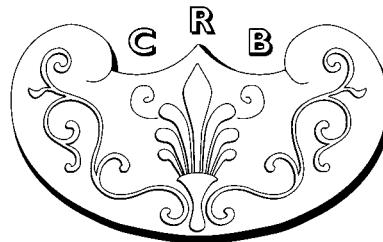


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Essay by Helen Andrews

THE MURDER OF CHARLIE KIRK

A once-in-a-century talent who will not be replaced.

THE ASSASSINS WHO CONSPIRED against Julius Caesar could have stabbed their victim in the street, but they chose to commit their crime in the Curia of Pompey while the Senate was in session. The location's symbolism was part of the message they intended to send. Charlie Kirk was assassinated on a college campus with a microphone in his hand as he answered questions from the crowd. It was the style of debate that earned him the love of millions and the admiration of many powerful figures, including the president of the United States. It was also the activity that led his murderer to mark him as someone who "spreads too much hate" and therefore deserved to die.

Charlie Kirk was a once-in-a-century talent who will not be replaced. He had boundless energy, acute judgment, and a capacity to evolve that was unusual in a public figure. His organization, Turning Point USA (TPUSA), and its political affiliate, Turning Point Action, managed a turnout operation for President Donald Trump's 2024 presidential campaign that helped achieve the biggest popular-vote victory in a generation. Kirk himself could have been on a presidential ticket someday, possibly even the first ticket for which he would have been eligible. Had he lived, he would have turned 35 a month before the 2028 election.

It was a shock, then, to see how Kirk was described in mainstream news outlets in the days following his assassination. The print edition of *The New York Times* in its obituary headline called him "Organizer of Young Voters Who Helped Shape the Rise of the Hard Right." *The Guardian* called him a "divisive provocateur." That was the respectable media. Down in the gutters of TikTok, X, and its liberal alternative, Bluesky, people were proclaiming their indifference to his death or saying he got what he deserved.

Two things were clear from this reaction. These people didn't understand who Charlie Kirk was and what he meant to people, and they didn't grasp how the response to his death would be taken by the Right. Conservatives observed with horror how many people were gloating over the death of a young father because they disagreed with his political opinions. They rightly took it as a portent of a dark period for American democracy.

Open to Questions

CHARLES JAMES KIRK WAS BORN IN 1993 and grew up in Prospect Heights, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. The high school he attended, Wheeling High School, tipped to being majority Hispanic during his time there and many of his classmates were illegal immigrants. His first effort at political

organizing was a success: as a senior, he got his fellow students to protest the raising of the price of cookies in the cafeteria from 25 cents to 50 cents, and the old price was restored.

He chose not to go to college, which led many people in later years to write him off intellectually. This was a mistake. Everyone who thought he was too sophisticated for Charlie Kirk, but gave him a chance, came away impressed. He had an enormous appetite for self-education. One example was his participation in the Claremont Institute's Lincoln Fellowship in 2021. He had already founded an empire by then—Turning Point USA took in over \$55 million in revenue that year—yet he wanted to learn what Claremont had to teach him. He was exceptionally humble for someone with his accomplishments.

Instead of enrolling at a university, at age 18 he founded Turning Point as a student group dedicated to standing up for small government on college campuses. By the time of his death, TPUSA had 900 college chapters and 1,200 high school chapters with hundreds of thousands of members. Like many Republicans, Kirk evolved from the small government emphasis of the Tea Party years to a more rounded conservatism that fit in well with the Trump agenda. On social media, where he had tens of millions of followers, his most popular video clips were taken from his campus appearances in which he would throw



himself open to questions from anyone, on any topic, from the existence of God to the national debt.

All this debating was good for the country, and it was good for Charlie Kirk. It gave him a finely tuned sense of what people really care about. He would never be distracted by the astroturfed issues that loom large inside the Beltway. He talked to enough ordinary people that he could tell which issues really stirred their passions. He could also predict with uncommon accuracy what would play with the base. Politicians sought out his advice for that reason. No one else spent as much time on the road talking to young voters as he did.

He had one of the most-listened-to conservative podcasts in America (which went to #1 across all categories upon his death), and he used it to push the boundaries of debate. Controversial guests like Steve Sailer were welcome on his show. Yet for all his willingness to disregard liberal taboos, he had impeccable judgment. If you or I talked in public for three hours a day for years on end, we would end up saying something stupid and cancelable, but not Charlie. When he died, hostile news outlets published handy collections of his most offensive quotes, and none of them was bad at all. The worst one, which went viral and was cited by liberal commentators as evidence of racism, was not something he ever said but a brazen misquotation.

Washington Post columnist Karen Attiah was among the many commentators taken in by the fake quote, which seems to have originated with an anonymous X post that attributed it to Kirk. Charlie Kirk never said, "Black women do not have the brain processing power to be taken seriously. You have to go steal a white person's slot." He mentioned some specific black women who had called themselves affirmative action picks, including TV host Joy Reid and Representative Sheila Jackson Lee, and said,

They're coming out and they're saying, 'I'm only here because of affirmative action.' We know. You do not have the brain processing power to otherwise be taken really seriously. You had to go steal a white person's slot to go be taken somewhat seriously.

Attiah was fired by *The Washington Post* shortly after tweeting that false quote. She then published a post on Substack titled "The Washington Post Fired Me—But My Voice Will Not Be Silenced," the text of which made it sound as if she had been fired for disrespecting conservatives rather than for gross viola-

tions of professional standards (she repeated the misquote of Kirk in her Substack post and called it "his own words on record"). Barack Obama posted in support of Attiah on X and called her firing a threat to free speech.

Multiple Incidents of Violence

ALL OF THE POSITIONS THAT PEOPLE cited to try to paint Kirk as an extremist were perfectly sensible ones shared by millions of Americans: that affirmative action leads to lower standards; that Christianity has a role in public life; that boys should stay out of girls' locker rooms; that immigration should be reduced. There was never any basis for the claim that Kirk or TPUSA spread hate. Yet that was the grounds on which several schools refused to allow students to organize their own TPUSA chapters. Students trying to launch a chapter at the Illinois Institute of Technology in 2020 were denied recognition

It was unsettling to see how many people reacted to the most dramatic assassination in American politics in over 50 years by shrugging it off, making excuses, or implying it was justified.

over TPUSA's "problematic occurrences of systemic racism." Taft High School in Chicago refused to allow students to form a chapter because, its assistant principal said, "We are a community built on respect and inclusion."

Multiple incidents of violence against TPUSA student activists preceded the ultimate act of violence on September 10. Earlier this year at the University of Minnesota Duluth, the president of the school chapter of the Young Democratic Socialists of America was charged with felony threats of violence and misdemeanor fifth-degree assault for attacking a TPUSA booth. During the attack he said, among other imprecations, "I'd line all you motherf---ers up against a wall and shoot you." The TPUSA chapter head at UMD later transferred to a different school out of concern for his safety.

In March 2025, TPUSA members at the University of Texas, Dallas, were "tabling"—setting up a booth on campus and engag-

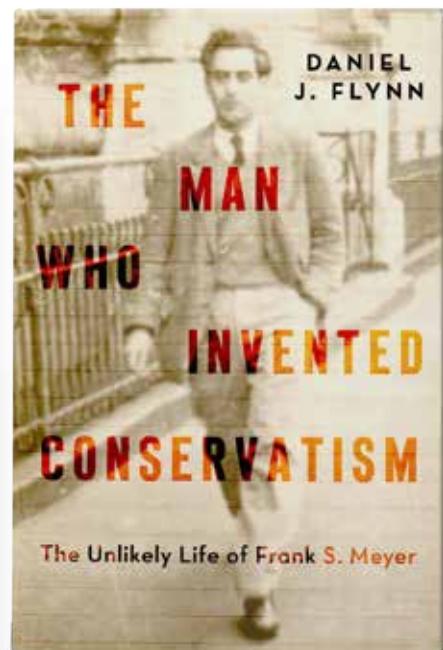
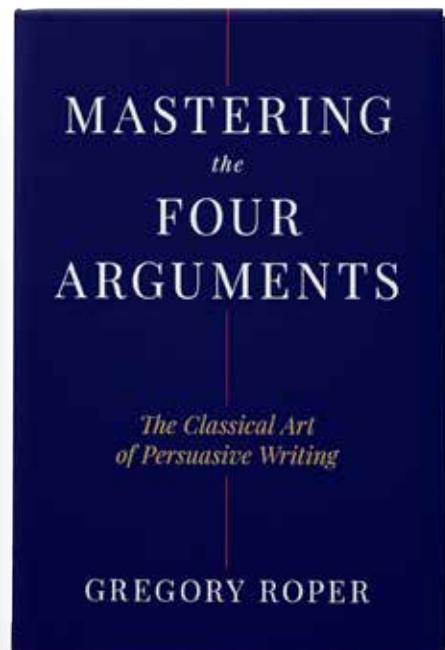
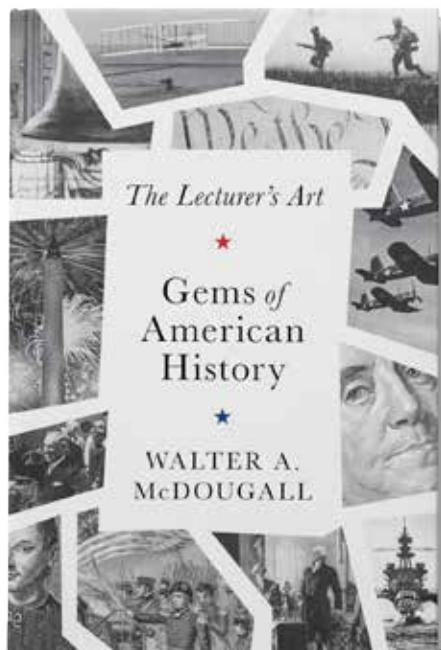
ing informally with other students—when an assailant attacked them with a bike lock, wounding one in the head and breaking two of their phones. He was charged with aggravated assault with a deadly weapon. "If he would have aimed a little bit lower, I could have been paralyzed," said the female student who was hit in the head. "I think he wanted to kill me."

The attacker in Dallas was a biological male who identified as a woman, Liam Thanh Tam "Alyssa" Nguyen. It was not the first act of political terrorism committed by a trans person in the Trump era. In February 2025, Lucy Grace Nelson (born Justin Thomas Nelson) planted incendiaries at a Tesla dealership and defaced it with "NAZI" graffiti. A month later, transgender teenager Owen McIntire also firebombed a Tesla dealership. Ryan Michael English, whom the Associated Press identified as a woman named "Riley English," was caught on Capitol Hill with knives and Molotov cocktails, intent on assassinating Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent during his confirmation hearing in January. The young man who made it within yards of Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh's house with a gun before surrendering himself to police in 2022 now identifies as a woman named Sophie.

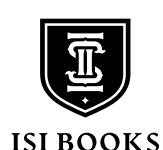
Charlie Kirk's assassin was not trans, but that does appear to have been the issue that motivated him. Tyler James Robinson, 22, shared an apartment in St. George, Utah, with his romantic partner Lance Twiggs, also 22, who was reportedly in the process of transitioning his gender. Robinson's mother told police her son had recently grown "more pro-gay and trans-rights oriented." In text messages from Robinson to Twiggs following the shooting, when his lover asked why he did it, he replied, "I had enough of his hatred." That echoes the answer Robinson reportedly gave his parents when they were persuading him to turn himself in and asked his motive, that he killed Kirk because "the guy spreads too much hate."

Attempts to suppress the killer's ideology began almost immediately. "Charlie Kirk likely was the victim of a white supremacist gang hit," tweeted *The Atlantic's* Jemele Hill on September 12, citing disinformation expert Joan Donovan, who had stated in an interview with the *Los Angeles Times* that the messages on the shooter's bullet casings indicated "extreme right-wing" affiliations. The messages included "Hey fascist! Catch!" and "bella ciao bella ciao bella ciao ciao ciao," an old Italian anti-fascist song. Other commentators, including history professor and popular Substacker Heather Cox Richardson, fixated on the detail that the shooter "is

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a young white man from a Republican, gun enthusiast family."

On September 15, late-night talk show host Jimmy Kimmel said on the air, "We hit some new lows over the weekend with the MAGA gang desperately trying to characterize this kid who murdered Charlie Kirk as anything other than one of them." By this time Utah governor Spencer Cox had already stated that the suspect adhered to a "leftist ideology," which, combined with the bullet casings and the boyfriend, was proof that the killer was not MAGA. Federal Communications Commissioner Brendan Carr raised the possibility that this deliberate attempt to mislead the public constituted a violation of ABC's public interest obligation as a network broadcaster. The network suspended Kimmel's show in response to Carr's veiled threat as well as in response to a revolt by local affiliates saying they would refuse to air the show.

A few things happened during the six days *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* was off the air. Liberals went nuts over the supposed threat to free speech. Anibal Hernandez Santana, a 63-year-old retired lobbyist for public sector unions and environmental groups, fired three shots at an ABC affiliate in Sacramento, injuring no one before being arrested and inexplicably freed on bail. Sinclair Broadcast Group, a large local affiliate covering 40% of U.S. households, planned to air a tribute to Charlie Kirk during Kimmel's time slot but then abruptly pulled the announced tribute just minutes before air. A source told *The New York Post* that this last-minute change was due to "local threats directed at specific local ABC stations resulting from [the] ABC suspension."

Deepest Part of Their Hearts

OF THESE TWO ACTS OF CENSORSHIP, Carr silencing Kimmel and threats of violence silencing Sinclair, one was the lawful if unusual exercise of a regula-

tor's authority and the other was a disturbing sign of a democracy in grave danger.

It was unsettling to see how many people reacted to the most dramatic assassination in American politics in over 50 years by shrugging it off, making excuses, or implying it was justified. A very simple House resolution condemning the killing and honoring Kirk's life received 58 nay votes from congressional Democrats. Masha Gessen in *The New York Times* compared the killing to Herschel Grynszpan's assassination of the Nazi diplomat Ernst vom Rath in 1938: Grynszpan "decided to kill someone he saw as a representative of the force that was immiserating his loved ones. If the information released by the Utah investigators so far proves accurate, Tyler Robinson might have felt a similar desperate fury."

Sometimes assassinations weaken the killer's cause by making people ashamed of it. Québécois separatists kidnapped and killed an innocent provincial politician, Pierre Laporte, in 1970, destroying the cause of Quebec independence for a generation. That is not what we see now. There is a regular anti-Trump protest on a street near me every Friday afternoon. Usually the Boomers there hold signs saying "NO KINGS" and "IMPEACH." Shortly after the Kirk assassination, for the first time I saw one of them waving a trans flag.

The assassination led to a surge of interest from young people interested in starting TPUSA chapters at their schools, yet adults continued to resist these efforts in the name of stopping hate. Parents at Stratford High School in Texas unsuccessfully pressured the faculty sponsors of a new TPUSA club to withdraw, claiming students "would be irreparably harmed by their teachers' support of an organization that has historically supported hate." An Albemarle County, Virginia, school board member publicly compared TPUSA to the KKK when a high school club hosted a lunch talk on trans ideology. "This

is not a matter of free speech, it's hate speech and has no place in our schools," she wrote on Facebook. Both of these incidents occurred less than a month after Kirk was killed.

The memorial service for Charlie Kirk held in Arizona on September 21 and broadcast on CBS News was a galvanizing moment. President Trump and Vice President J.D. Vance both spoke, as did White House Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller, Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard, and cabinet secretaries Marco Rubio, Pete Hegseth, and Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.

The musical performances included several contemporary Christian artists, and the entire event had an evangelical atmosphere. Evangelical Protestants are the core of the MAGA electoral coalition, but they have for years been underrepresented among Republican elites. Kirk had been one of the most prominent evangelicals in Trump circles. Christian love was behind the night's most electrifying moment, when Kirk's widow Erika, with tears in her eyes, said, "My husband, he wanted to save young men, just like the one who took his life. That man, that young man—I forgive him."

Liberals watching at home perhaps did not realize that in many cases the powerful Republicans eulogizing Kirk had not been merely his ally but also his friend. Trump is said to have loved Kirk like a son; Vance, like a brother. Before they saw their friend murdered with exceptional violence, close up and on video, these men and women had been motivated by a desire to make their country better for their descendants. Now they have a new motivation to spur them on, one connected to the deepest part of their hearts where pain is felt most deeply. Their enemies may come to regret it.

Helen Andrews is the author of Boomers: The Men and Women Who Promised Freedom and Delivered Disaster (Sentinel).

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