

Charlie Kirk's Toxic Legacy of Hatred and Division

We can condemn political violence and this hideous murder while also condemning Charlie Kirk for the rotten, vile hatred he fomented.

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In the wake of the Charlie Kirk assassination, part of a distressing wave of political violence stalking this country, it would seem that the United States is coming apart at the seams, poised at the precipice of disintegration. So much hatred, so much anger, so much toxic rot, and so many, many guns. We are boiling a poisonous stew. Can anyone save us? Is there anyone or anything that can possibly cool us to a simmer, at least? At this time, it appears not—in fact, frighteningly, the rage that got us to this grim, spooky moment seems only to be spiraling.

Charlie Kirk had barely been declared dead when President Trump hideously used his killing to falsely blame and attack the Left. Trump seized the moment of widespread mourning to spread more hatred and division, in a reckless, angry televised speech that hurled blame at the Left despite not a scintilla of evidence about Kirk's assassin or their politics. In a predictable yet grotesque display, Trump raged, “For years, those on the radical Left have compared wonderful Americans like

Charlie to Nazis and the world's worst mass murderers and criminals. This kind of rhetoric is directly responsible for the terrorism that we're seeing in our country today, and it must stop right now."

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Trump went on to enumerate the attempts on his own life, the shooting of United Healthcare's CEO, the shooting of Steve Scalise, and "attacks ICE agents"—zero mention of the assassinations of Democratic Minnesota lawmakers or others who don't fit Trump's vision of worthy right-wing martyrs.

It is not clear how we climb out of this cauldron we are boiling in. We must all condemn political violence on all fronts. We must also acknowledge that Kirk's legacy of bigotry and division wages its own violence...

The man who said there were "good people on both sides" of the Charlottesville killings by right-wing white supremacists could not bring himself to even mention the tragic shootings of people on the other side of the political aisle.

Soon after Kirk's murder, Senator Nancy Mace (R-NC) lunged for the political jugular, telling reporters, "Democrats own what happened today....some raging leftist lunatic put a bullet through his neck." Mace hurled this profoundly reckless, irresponsible attack without a shred of evidence about the assassin's politics.

These are not the people who are going to lead us out of this ugly toxic pit. They, along with Charlie Kirk, led us into it. Kirk became a wealthy influencer by spreading toxic rage and fear and division.

We can honor the sadness millions are feeling over Kirk's murder, and maintain basic civil human decency, while also being honest about the deeply harmful and offensive things Charlie Kirk said. We can condemn political violence and Kirk's murder while also condemning Charlie Kirk for the rotten, vile hatred he fomented.

And yes, while respecting that many are mourning, this is precisely the time to remind people of the hatred and division Kirk sowed and profited handsomely from.

Consider what Kirk said about Black women leaders and affirmative action. Assailing affirmative action "picks" Joy Reid, Michelle Obama, Ketanji Brown Jackson, and Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, Kirk said, sickeningly, "you do not have the brain processing power to otherwise be taken seriously" without affirmative action. "You had to steal a white person's slot."

Let's sit with that for a moment. Charlie Kirk said these exceedingly smart, strong, successful Black women do not have brain processing power. This is the supposed hero for whom Trump lowered the flag to half-mast.

Kirk was an equal opportunity hater who called Martin Luther King, Jr. "awful," and "not a good person," while insisting, "We made a huge mistake when we passed the Civil Rights Act in the 1960s."

In his gruesome rage against affirmative action and diversity, equity, and inclusion, Kirk also spat out, "If I see a Black pilot, I'm going to be like, 'Boy, I hope he's qualified.'" That is some deeply racist garbage.

Kirk called gay and transgender people “groomers” who are “destructive,” opposed gay marriage, and campaigned against gender-affirming care for transgender people, insisting, “We must ban trans-affirming care—the entire country. Donald Trump needs to run on this issue,” Media Matters reported.

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When Zohran Mamdani shocked the nation by winning the New York City Democratic primary, Kirk vented, hideously, “Twenty-four years ago a group of Muslims killed 2,753 people on 9/11...Now a Muslim Socialist is on pace to run New York City.” Kirk peddled in paranoid, racist, and Islamophobic right-wing nonsense. He called Islam “the sword the Left is using to slit the throat of America.” How profoundly rotten and hateful can one be?

Because Kirk was so energetically prolific, one can find endless examples of his fearmongering and bigotry. What needs to be said now, even or especially in this moment, is that Charlie Kirk mightily helped foment the rage and division that seems to engulf and define our nation today. Kirk helped create this toxic, poisonous stew we are drowning in—he fed it and profited from it.

Despite the unseemly frothing of Trump, Mace, and others, we do not know—as of this writing—who shot Kirk or why. We do not know if it came from the left, the right, or something else altogether. It is reasonable and right to condemn all shootings and political violence. I absolutely condemn the violence and this murder, just as I condemn the bigotry Kirk fomented in his brief time on this earth.

It is not clear how we climb out of this cauldron we are boiling in. We must all condemn political violence on all fronts. We must also

acknowledge that Kirk's legacy of bigotry and division wages its own violence—a cultural, social violence that causes real pain, rage, enmity, fear, and isolation. The legacy Kirk leaves behind burns on, a flame of reactionary anger and bigotry that keeps this country at a boiling point.

No one person will save us. We can hope (and work) for a cooling period that at least lowers the flame and slows the spiral. We can all say, stop the violence, stop the shootings. And let's also say, just as strongly—stop the hatred, stop the fearmongering, stop the bigotry.