

Charlie Kirk and the Fragility of Civic Peace

By Patrick Keeney

The brutal assassination of Charlie Kirk was shocking not only for its violence but for the chilling aftermath – the revelling on the left, the mendacious reporting, and the calls for more political violence.



Kirk embodied a conversational politics now rare. As founder of Turning Point USA, he brought millions of young people to conservatism by touring campuses and inviting critics – not just supporters – to the microphone. He strode into the lion’s den of higher education, taking hostile

questions with civility, good humour, and reasoned argument rather than rancour.

“Disagreement,” he liked to say, “is a healthy part of our systems.”

It wasn’t necessary to share his convictions to recognize his courage and composure.

The reaction to Kirk’s death on September 10 at Utah Valley University was particularly disturbing. News outlets and social media overflowed with callous gloating and demands for further violence. “He got what he deserved” was among the milder responses. A conservative group logged more than 50,000 such comments in four days. Democratic members booed a motion for silence in Congress. A Secret Service agent called Kirk’s

death “karma.”

How did it become virtuous to cheer a fellow human being’s death? Part of the answer lies in what literary critic George Steiner called the passing of the tragic vision. In [The Death of Tragedy \(1961\)](#), Steiner argued that tragedy – once the highest expression of human dignity amid suffering – had perished in Western culture, and its loss was civilizational.

The tragic view holds that suffering is an inherent part of the human condition. Chance, flaw, and necessity are woven into our very existence. This recognition distinguishes the tragic sensibility from utopian schemes of collective redemption. Enlightenment rationalism envisioned the world as scientifically perfectible; Marxism reinterpreted conflict as a class struggle culminating in utopia; the managerial state promised that expertise would eliminate disorder.

But when we forget life’s limits, politics ceases to be the art of prudence and compromise and becomes a fever dream of utopia. Once utopia is the aim, violence is reimagined as a form of purification. The French Revolution’s Terror, Stalin’s gulags, Mao’s Cultural Revolution, Pol Pot’s killing fields – each arose from rejecting Kant’s warning: “Out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing was ever built.”

Tragic sensibility is not fatalism. It tempers ambition with humility, recognizing that motives are mixed, victories partial, and knowledge flawed – and that opponents share our frailties. To acknowledge this crookedness is clarity, not despair. Only those who accept tragic limits can build anything lasting.

Politics lacking tragic sensibility becomes a substitute religion, promising salvation through power. Opponents become enemies; compromise becomes betrayal; violence follows. Those convinced of their righteousness feel justified in demonizing others. This tendency is especially apparent on today’s left;

its 'virtuous' rhetoric of compassion often masks self-righteousness – and self-righteousness without humility can be deadly.

Consider Kirk's accused assassin, 22-year-old Tyler Robinson. Raised in a stable, conservative family, Robinson drifted leftward and was recently radicalized, seemingly influenced by his transitioning roommate. He referred to himself as a leftist who loathed Trump. One can envision him then, cloaked in righteousness, believing he struck a blow against evil. The opponent becomes not a fellow human being but a symbol of oppression. Murder is no longer malice but moral necessity – the cost of purity. As Robespierre said, "Terror is nothing other than prompt, severe, inflexible justice; it is therefore an emanation of virtue."

Canadians often imagine themselves immune to such eruptions. Yet our history tells another story: the October Crisis, the Air India bombing... seventy churches burned after unproven residential-school claims, and on-going anti-Jewish protests. Violence disguised as virtue is not alien to our soul.

Canadian academics exhibited hatred comparable to Kirk's worst American foes. "Shooting is honestly too good for so many of you fascist c--," posted [University of Toronto professor Ruth Marshall](#) hours after Kirk's death. Toronto schoolchildren reportedly cheered the news, while teachers watched passively.

This moment is perilously fragile. Social media amplifies outrage, rewarding anger while penalizing restraint. Every disagreement becomes an "existential crisis." Every opponent is Hitler. The language of "emergency" and "genocide" floods politics, quickening the slide from rhetoric into violence.

The antidote is not repression but the recovery of tragic wisdom: we must temper politics with humility. This requires cultural renewal and virtues that allow citizens to live with differences: prudence, courage, humility, and charity. We need

a civic ethos that balances rights with responsibilities, diversity with shared norms. Without restraint, pluralism degenerates into tribalism.

As Solzhenitsyn wrote in *The Gulag Archipelago*: “the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.” This understanding counters ideologies dividing the world into pure and impure, oppressor and oppressed. The battle is within each heart – and that recognition demands humility.

Kirk’s assassination serves as a grim warning. The decline of civic peace is never accidental; it springs from ideological fanaticism, the conviction that one’s cause is so virtuous that opponents must be demonized and destroyed. Every destructive ideology cloaks itself in righteousness even as it paves the road to cruelty.

Charlie Kirk’s death exposes the danger of politics detached from a tragic sensibility. We must foster a politics tempered with humility, recognizing that our victories are partial and our understanding imperfect. Without this humble wisdom, freedom itself cannot survive.

This is an op-ed version of his longer piece on Charlie Kirk, first published in [Todayville](#)