



Political and  
Geostrategic  
**OBSERVATORY**  
of the United States

# THE ASSASSINATION OF CHARLIE KIRK

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at Columbia University

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Lincoln Mitchell** / Political analyst, essayist, lecturer  
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Lincoln Mitchell, based in New York City and San Francisco, is a political analyst and a writer who teaches at Columbia University. He has contributed to CNN Opinion, NBC News, the San Francisco Examiner, and other outlets. Lincoln has authored nine books covering topics from democratic development to urban politics to baseball.

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## PRESENTATION OF THE OBSERVATORY

Under the direction of **Romuald Sciora**, Associate Research Fellow at IRIS, the IRIS Political and Geostrategic Observatory of the United States aims to provide new insights into contemporary developments in the United States, particularly their impact on Franco-American cooperation, the European Union, and the wider world.

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Sometime back in 2020 I was invited to be on a panel on *Fox Nation*. I had, and have, mixed feelings about appearing on right-wing propaganda platforms, but decided to do it. On the day of the show, while in the green room, I found myself talking to a man much younger than me who struck me as unpleasant and full of himself. Shortly before going on the air, one of the hosts congratulated him because his new book had just been mentioned by Donald Trump. As you can probably guess, this man was Charlie Kirk.

Going on *Fox Nation*, something I only did twice, always struck me as strange because it meant entering an alternate universe where instead of grounding discussion in reality, I had to, if not fully understand, then at least recognize the right-wing fantasy mirror world in which those people live. As you can imagine, I always found this a bit disorienting.

Over the course of that program, Kirk and I had a few exchanges. At one point when he began calling Joe Biden a socialist, I told him that liberals have been called socialist for so long that it didn't mean anything anymore, and that my grandparents had been called socialist for their liberal views decades ago. He then said something that was very on brand for a man who later denounced the idea of empathy. "I don't care about your grandparents." He was that kind of a guy.

A few minutes later, the discussion turned to why Jews vote for Democrats. As I began to answer this tedious and vaguely antisemitic question, I noted that it was a Democratic president who first recognized the state of Israel and that for a lot of Jews of my parents' and grandparents' generation, that was one of the reasons why they voted Democrat.

Kirk did not believe that and challenged me. I realized I was on television with a man claiming to be a political expert of some kind who did not know who the president of the United States had been in 1948. I left thinking I disagree with that man on almost every political issue, but those differences aside, I disliked him largely because he was arrogant, self-righteous, condescending and ignorant.

I write all this to indicate that I have no illusions about who Charlie Kirk was. Nonetheless, I cannot in any way support, endorse or celebrate his assassination. It is not simply because he left behind two young children who will never have a father. After all, this is a man who seemed to believe it was okay to shoot school children as long as the most extreme interpretation of the Second Amendment was protected and his friends in the gun industry were making money. In general, Kirk never hesitated to incite and celebrate right-wing violence, but that still does not make his assassination okay.

This assassination is a terrible thing because it escalates tensions that already exist in our society and it gives other far right provocateurs, including the President, an opportunity to call for more violence and repression. Nonetheless, while I found myself angry and afraid for the country after hearing of this assassination, we need to be honest about who Charlie Kirk was.

Kirk was not a free speech warrior as some have suggested. He was not, despite the claims in the bizarre and morally tone deaf apologia penned by Ezra Klein, who is the official voice of donor class liberals and center-right critics of Trump's excesses, somebody who practiced politics the right way. Kirk was a fascist propagandist. I do not support the assassination of fascist propagandists, but when they are assassinated, they should not be turned into martyrs, nor should, to turn that Shakespeare line on its head, the evil they do "be interred with their bones."

What made Charlie Kirk a uniquely dangerous figure both in life and now and death was his ability to synthesize a Trump-like charisma with an understanding of how not just to organize angry, right-wing young men, but how to appeal to powerful and right-wing donors. The political views Kirk pedaled to these young men and wealthy donors cannot be described as simply conservative but were both fascistic and explicitly dangerous.

Kirk was a man who rose to fame and wealth by inciting and celebrating violence and hatred with a kind of blustery and sneery panache. To describe Kirk differently, despite the violent and horrific last seconds of his young life, is to be intellectually dishonest and unfair to his memory, and to those whose lives he sought to ruin during his brief career.

It is also critical to recognize that denouncing political violence, as so many have done, is only meaningful if all political violence is denounced. Kirk himself was largely silent, or worse, in the face of political violence aimed at Democrats. However, political violence does not just mean violent acts aimed at high-profile people, but also the daily political violence of life in America. That means speaking out school shootings enabled by Republican elected officials, but also against the violence committed on an almost daily basis by Trump's 21<sup>st</sup>-century American Gestapo known as ICE, as well as the widespread violence of the carceral state.

I remain afraid that Kirk's death will lead to even more violence in the United States, but we have long been a deeply violent culture. Wrestling with that is much more difficult than making the obvious, but nonetheless important point, that we cannot solve our problems by shooting political figures, even ones as morally repugnant as Charlie Kirk was.

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