

*CBS News Sunday Morning*

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5 minutes and 37 seconds

JANE PAULEY: To start us off this morning, a look back at another troubling week of violence in our country. Wednesday's assassination of conservative activist Charlie Kirk. We've asked our Robert Costa for some perspective.

ROBERT COSTA: What's the state of the American soul today?

MEACHAM: I think that we are in a dangerous place. There's never been a once-upon-a-time in American history. There's not going to be a happily-ever-after. But there are moments that you and I could agree we would like to see replicated — and this is not one of them.

COSTA: For Jon Meacham, the Pulitzer Prize-winning historian, and author of *The Soul of America: The Battle for Our Better Angels*, this past week has been disturbing — and all too familiar. So often you are asked at these moments to put it in context. What's the context here?

MEACHAM: I think the context is political violence erupts in America when there is an existential question -- who is an American? Who deserves to be included in "We the people," or "All men being created equal"? When that is in tension, when we don't have common agreement about that, then, if you look at it historically, violence erupts.

COSTA: And on Wednesday, it did. At Utah Valley University, the crack of a gunshot once again rattled America.

[VIDEO FROM KIRK ASSASSINATION]

COSTA: Charlie Kirk, just 31 and a prominent conservative activist, was assassinated as he engaged in public debate. By Thursday, a suspect was in custody: 22-year-old Utah resident Tyler Robinson.

GOVERNOR SPENCER COX (R-UT): And there is one person responsible for what happened here and that person is now in custody and will be charged soon and will be held accountable.

COSTA: On Friday, Erika Kirk, his widow and mother to their two children, spoke out.

ERIKA KIRK: No one will ever forget my husband's name, and I will make sure of it.

COSTA: Kirk had a fervent following on the right, and was a key organizer in President Donald Trump's movement.

CHARLIE KIRK [on 08/24/20]: Trump is the bodyguard of Western civilization.

COSTA: He also had his critics, who called him an incendiary voice —

KIRK: The entire Democrat Party project is how quickly can we turn America into a third-world hellhole.

RCOSTA: — his death has become the latest convulsion in a divided country.

MEACHAM: We do not want to be in a place where because you disagree with someone, you pick up a gun. That is not what the country can be. And if it is, it's something different.

COSTA: It's not America.

MEACHAM: It's not the America we want.

COSTA: There have been numerous acts of political violence since last summer. The assassination attempts on former President Trump at the time in 2024, the firebombing of the Pennsylvania governor's home, Democrat Josh Shapiro, the killing of Democratic lawmaker and her husband in Minnesota, the murder of Israeli embassy officials in Washington, a police officer outside the CDC in Atlanta. And that's just to name a few. Are we in a particular time in America when all of this seems to keep happening?

MEACHAM: We are, self-evidently. And I think it's because we are experiencing an era in which we are debating, not only the means of politics, but the purpose of politics. Are we going to see each other as neighbors?

COSTA: Meacham says the purpose of America is an urgent cause for leaders, and for citizens.

MEACHAM: When we lose the capacity to engage in argument and dissent and debate peaceably, we are breaking faith with the American covenant. And the American covenant is that we live in contention with each other, but we're not at each other's throats.

COSTA: What can political leaders do to keep that covenant?

MEACHAM: Make the case. Tell the story. What do you want the country to be? And this is why history matters, I think, more than ever, because there's not a hell of a lot going on in the present that you want to say, "Yeah, we want more of that," right? You want to tell the story of Omaha Beach. You want to tell the story of the Pettus Bridge. You want to tell the story of Gettysburg. Because those were moments where imperfect people actually created a more perfect union. It's not that they were superhuman. Quite the opposite.

COSTA: They got through it.

MEACHAM: They got through it barely.

COSTA: But even if Americans can just barely carry on this weekend, Jon Meacham says we

must.

MEACHAM: If they could do it, then we can, too, if we decide that this country is about a more perfect union, it is about dissent, it is about respecting each other, and it is not about hunting each other down.