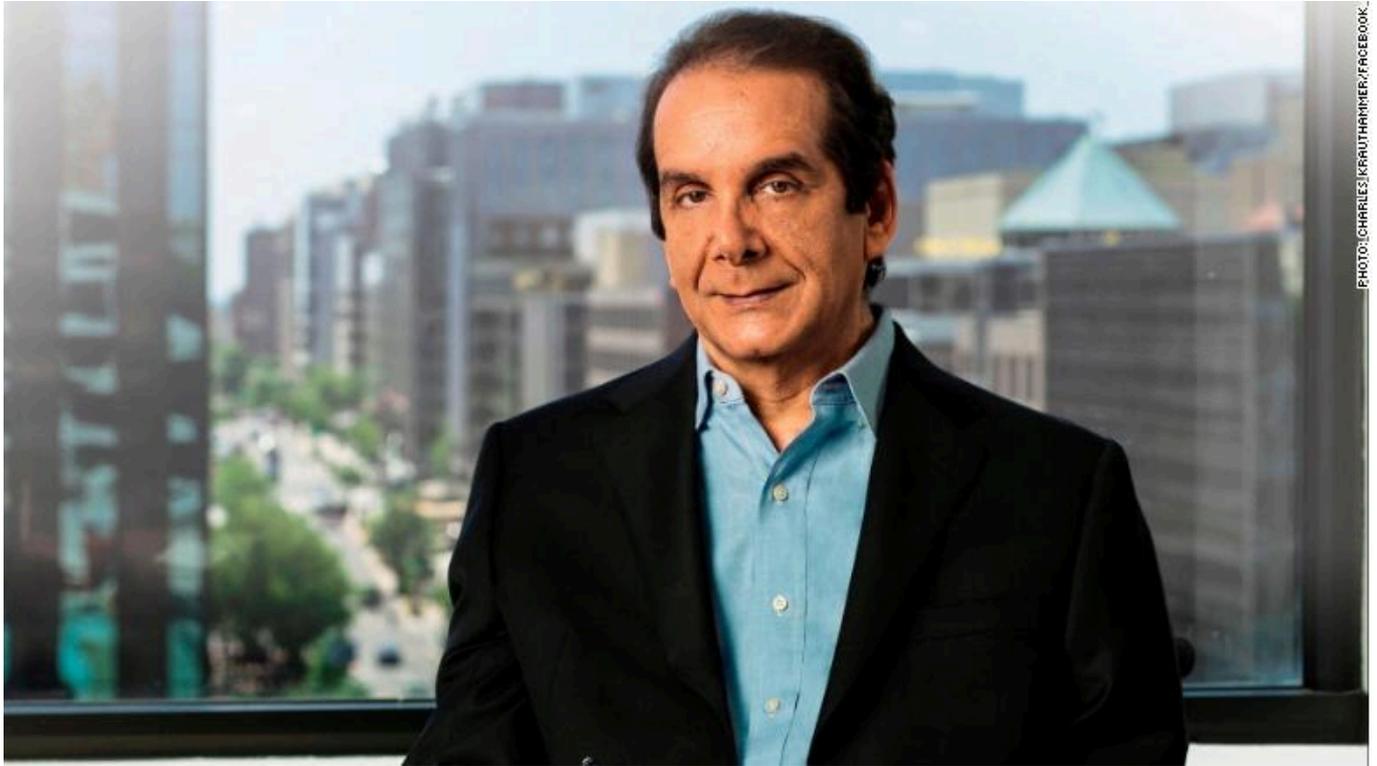


Praise Krauthammer, but Also Learn From Him



Last Thursday, conservative commentator Charles Krauthammer passed away. Though his terminal illness had been reported days earlier, along with a characteristically elegant farewell letter that he had written to his friends and fans, news of his death hit a lot of people hard. It certainly did me.

I had already paid [tribute of sorts](#) to Dr. Krauthammer in a column on this website. I say “of sorts” because the piece was less about the life of this great man ([those who knew him were in a better position to write such accounts](#)) than it was about what he and his legacy meant to me as a conservative writer. As is the case with many political commentators on the Right, Krauthammer was one of my heroes.

Ben Shapiro captured the essence of this sentiment in a piece he wrote the other day:

“Charles Krauthammer is the thinker I aspired to be, the

writer I wanted to emulate. I failed; I'll always fail. But, to be fair, that's not my fault. He was just that good."

Shortly after my column was published, a friend of Krauthammer's emailed me to express her appreciation for what I'd written. I thanked her, but added that there were more things I wanted to say about the meaningfulness of Krauthammer's legacy – things I felt were important as I listened to a number of media personalities weigh in on his life. I decided that those thoughts could (and probably should) wait until after he had passed. What I wasn't expecting was to turn on Fox News on Friday morning (the day after Krauthammer's death), and hear *National Review's* Jonah Goldberg channeling my exact feelings.

In a [segment on America's Newsroom](#), Goldberg paid fine tribute to Krauthammer (who was a friend of his). He shared some heartwarming stories of their relationship, as well as a few of the many traits he admired in his *Special Report* colleague. He then took the opportunity to get something off of his chest, doing so in an emotional appeal:

"I really hope a lot of my friends and colleagues on the right, who are now in this sort of '*say anything conceivably possible, no matter how nasty and vicious it is, so long as it makes liberals angry*' – [which] seems to be one of the motivating passions on the right among a lot of my friends these days. And it's destroying conservatism. *That wasn't Charles*. And all of the people who are celebrating his life and his contribution: maybe they should take a few seconds and think about how he modeled a different way. He never gave an inch when he was on principle. He never gave an inch when he thought he was right. But he wasn't vicious and cruel. He didn't mock children with Down Syndrome who were in a cage. He didn't do anything like that, that we see so much of on the right these days, because he was a decent man who took the higher road even though he was in a wheelchair."

Goldberg took some heat online for closing out the segment in such fashion, primarily from Trump supporters who interpreted his words as a veiled shot at the president (at the expense of Krauthammer's memory). Of course, Trump wasn't the target of his criticism. He was referring to those in the conservative media who've been – in the era of Trump – reducing conservatism to a doctrine of impassioned anti-Left rancor.

His description was accurate, and we know why it has happened. It's a cultural byproduct of an election cycle that often associated derision with courage, and malice with strength. In its path and in its wake, opportunistic media figures have increasingly pandered to a transformed, more tribal political base in order to generate bigger ratings, listenership, and readership.

And no, the liberal media isn't any better. Many on that side of the aisle have been doing the same things, and for a longer time. But we were supposed to be different, and we no longer are.

For the conservatives who don't fit into this new base, it has been jaw-dropping to listen to some of the Modern Right's worst offenders praise Krauthammer for espousing traits and principles that they have not only abandoned, but have been downright hostile to over the past few years. It's not that I would expect or prefer these people to deride Krauthammer, especially at a time when his death is being mourned and his life is being celebrated. On the contrary. I'm glad that respects are being paid (no matter who's paying them).

But if these individuals are going to portray Krauthammer as the *gold standard* of his profession (which many of them have), one would hope they would exercise a little self-reflection over their choice to resoundingly reject the professional standards he conducted himself by.

A lot has been made of Krauthammer's kindness and

thoughtfulness, and we can *all* stand to improve in those areas. But what made his commentary so valuable was his unwillingness to put politics before principles. His views were formulated through earnest (sometimes intense) examination of facts, practices and policies, and they were always grounded in decency. Those views didn't change in accordance with which party held power in Washington, or with which politicians' capital or personal egos might be damaged by his assessment of them.

What motivated Krauthammer wasn't popularity or job security. His interest was in the betterment of society and the advancement of peace and prosperity. He respected his audience enough to be honest with them, even when what he had to say wasn't what they wanted to hear.

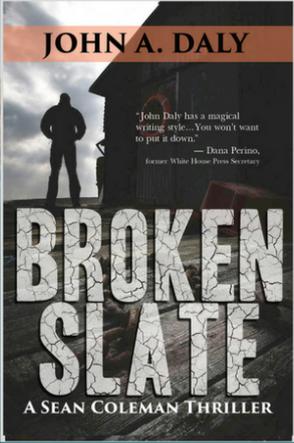
Krauthammer had little patience for hypocrisy. He didn't defend or shrug off dishonesty. He rejected straw-man arguments. He rejected demagoguery and conspiracy theories. He didn't use whataboutism to excuse conduct he had previously denounced, or to denounce conduct he had previously excused. He unflinchingly retained his character, even as he watched so many of his colleagues relinquish theirs in order to maintain personal and professional relevance in this radically altered political landscape.

Krauthammer was indeed the gold standard by which political commentary should be evaluated, yet that legacy is nearly the antithesis of today's prominent conservative-media creed. Thus it sure would be nice if many of those who've been expressing their deep admiration and gratitude for Krauthammer's contribution would take a step back and recognize all that they've done to undermine it. And if they could manage to do that, perhaps they could even take steps to help rectify the situation.

It's a nice thought, but at a time when constructive analysis and intellectual consistency comprise a far riskier revenue

model than tribal warfare, I just don't see it happening. It's a damn shame, especially being that Krauthammer's death, and these important discussions about his life, provide such a strong opportunity for reassessment.

Still, one can always hope.



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