

# [***Gen-Z's War With Kyle Rittenhouse***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BTD-RM51-DY68-10KW-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** Students have protested Rittenhouse's talks at college campuses across the country.

**Body**

The man who shot and killed two men and injured another during civil unrest in Kenosha, Wisconsin, in 2020 is winding up his controversial college speaking tour with the final date this week.

Kyle Rittenhouse's talks—dubbed "The Rittenhouse Recap"—have gained attention, but that attention has been centered on the backlash from his peers who are objecting to his appearance on their campuses.

So far, the 21-year-old's talks at three universities— East Tennessee State University, the University of Memphis and Western Kentucky University—have sparked protests. Students at Kent State University in Ohio are also planning to protest Rittenhouse's final talk on their campus on Tuesday, *Newsweek* has learned.

Rittenhouse rose to prominence after being charged in the fatal shooting of two men and wounding of a third during a night of protests against police brutality Kenosha, Wisconsin, after traveling from his home in Illinois armed with a semiautomatic rifle in the summer of 2020.

[*Protesters argued*](https://www.newsweek.com/kyle-rittenhouse-trial-story-explained-verdict-kenosha-1649267?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) that Rittenhouse, who was 17 at the time of the shootings, was a vigilante who went looking for trouble. But [*he was acquitted*](https://www.newsweek.com/kyle-rittenhouse-found-not-guilty-murder-kenosha-jury-1648070?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) of all charges after testifying that he fired in self-defense after coming under attack and fearing for his life.

Since then, Rittenhouse has been embraced as a hero by those on the political right and supporters of the Second Amendment. However, critics view his case as an example of the racial inequities in the criminal justice system. Rittenhouse, like the men he shot, is white.

Rittenhouse was invited by [*Turning Point USA*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/turning-point-usa?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) chapters at four colleges to give a talk about "individual rights, self-defense, and the importance of upholding the rule of law," Turning Point spokesperson Aubrey Laitsch told Inside Higher Ed in March. Laitsch said the talks are not an official tour, but come after the release of Rittenhouse's book, *Acquitted*, last year.

Turning Point USA is a nonprofit that advocates for conservative ***politics*** on high school, college, and university campuses.

*Newsweek* has contacted Rittenhouse for comment via social media and through an email to his lawyer. Turning Point USA has been contacted for comment via email.

At Kent State, the Gen-Z led nonprofit Dream for America has been working to create a coalition of student organizations "to help uplift and amplify the student body's disapproval of such a speaker," the group's organizing director Josh Brons told *Newsweek*. "It is within our mission to aid in the financing and strategizing of such protests at Kent State and other campuses to come."

Dream for America describes itself as "the leading progressive alternative to far-right youth groups like Turning Point USA."

Students at Kent State are especially outraged that someone with a history of gun violence is being allowed to speak on campus given the college's tragic history: the Ohio National Guard [*fired into a crowd of unarmed students*](https://www.newsweek.com/my-god-theyre-killing-us-our-1970-coverage-kent-state-328108?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) protesting the Vietnam War on May 4, 1970, killing four and injuring nine more.

"Fifty-four years later, Kent State students have asked a young man responsible for the deaths of two unarmed protesters to speak on a campus where four unarmed protestors lost their lives," Leah Shepard, a reporter for the university's newspaper wrote in an op-ed last month

"This is a slap in the face of everything Kent State has done to memorialize that day. It desecrates the memories of those who gave their lives for peace and progress."

A petition calling on the university to cancel Rittenhouse's event has amassed more than 3,600 signatures. The talk "is not only insensitive to our community's past, but also threatens to further divide us in these already tense times," Kent State student Ally Greco wrote in the petition.

"We must remember that our university should be a place for learning and growth—not for promoting divisive figures or ideologies that could potentially incite more violence."

Contacted for comment, a spokesperson for Kent State University directed *Newsweek* to a recent statement from university president Todd Diacon.

"Registered student organizations are free to invite speakers of their choosing," Diacon said in the statement. "Legally, as a public university, we are not able to constrain the speech of others, no matter how much we disagree with what any particular speaker is saying. This is not just a Kent State policy, it is the law of our country as clearly established in numerous judicial decisions."

Officials at other universities where Rittenhouse has spoken this year also cited the First Amendment and free speech laws to explain why they permitted Rittenhouse's talks to go ahead despite the protests.

Students at East Tennessee State University (ETSU) demonstrated against Rittenhouse's first talk there in February. Logan Taylor, the rally's organizer and chair of the Young Democratic Socialists of America at ETSU, told the *Johnson City Press* that it was "another instance of a hateful individual getting a platform on our campus."

At Rittenhouse's second stop, at the University of Memphis on March 20, the crowd cheered when he [*apparently left the stage abruptly*](https://twitter.com/laurel_jnf/status/1770636633022304693) after being questioned by a member of the audience about racist statements made by Turning Point USA's founder Charlie Kirk. Rittenhouse denied fleeing the event because of the heckling, [*telling Newsweek*](https://www.newsweek.com/kyle-rittenhouse-flee-memphis-university-heckling-1882210?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) that he "stayed for the scheduled time."

"The event was scheduled for 30 minutes. I spoke for 30 minutes, and then my security team told the coordinator that we were leaving after the question, and we left," he said.

Rittenhouse also denied that the protesters had caused him to end the talk prematurely on social media, saying that the "far left's attempts to intimidate me won't stop me from speaking with college students and sharing my story."

The following week, he headed to Western Kentucky University, where hundreds of students [*reportedly gathered to protest*](https://twitter.com/DreamAmerica_/status/1773357145771090143) his appearance to talk about "the importance of the Second Amendment and the lies of BLM [Black Lives Matter]," according to the event's description.

These protests make clear that Rittenhouse "has no place on college campuses as a speaker," Dream for America's director, Brons, said.

"Turning Point USA's well-funded, top-down effort to force Rittenhouse on young voters is backfiring in a major way," he added. "As we have seen again and again when it comes to these respectful demonstrations, the minute Rittenhouse is confronted with the facts—he flees. Young voters don't agree with what Turning Point or Rittenhouse stand for and no amount of Koch funding will change that."

Dream for America's mission, Brons said, is "to fight back against Turning Point USA's effort to target high school and college students with fascist ideologies and white supremacist propaganda," Brons said.

The group is hoping that by calling out Rittenhouse at his upcoming Kent State talk they show that "the grassroots power of authentic, engaged, young people—who are not being paid to shill bigoted talking points like Rittenhouse—will always ring louder and truer than what Turning Point offers."

Black Lives Matter told *Newsweek* that it backs those who have protested Rittenhouse's talks.

"It's comical that [*Kyle Rittenhouse*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/kyle-rittenhouse?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) thought he would be able to take his [*brand of vigilante white-nationalism*](https://www.newsweek.com/black-lives-matter-says-system-upholding-white-supremacy-after-rittenhouse-acquittal-1649245?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) and murder on the road and not be confronted by [*Black Lives Matter*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/black-lives-matter?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) protesters," a Black Lives Matter spokesperson told *Newsweek* via email.

[*In an interview*](https://www.newsweek.com/kyle-rittenhouse-tells-tucker-carlson-he-backs-blm-shooting-had-nothing-do-race-1651742?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) after his acquittal, Rittenhouse insisted he was not a "racist person" and that he supported the BLM movement.

But Rittenhouse has "become a vivid symbol of a nation deeply rooted and fiercely clinging to white supremacy," the BLM spokesperson said.

"We support the brave souls shutting down his so-called college tour."

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2378083/gen-zs-war-kyle-rittenhouse.jpg)

**Graphic**

Gen Z's War With Kyle Rittenhouse

Photo-illustration by Newsweek/Getty

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