

Open Letter from Faculty Calling for Churchill Report Retraction

Today, Monday April 23, 2007, we, the undersigned nine professors, call on the University of Colorado at Boulder--especially the Standing Committee on Research Misconduct (SCRM) and the Churchill Investigative Committee of the SCRM--to rescind the "Report of the Investigative Committee of the Standing Committee on Research Misconduct at the University of Colorado at Boulder concerning Allegations of Academic Misconduct against Professor Ward Churchill."

Through a process of careful investigation guided by two experts in the field of American Indian Studies who did not know Churchill before 2006--Prof. Eric Cheyfitz, Ernest I White Professor of American Studies and Humane Letters at Cornell University, and Prof. Michael Yellow Bird, Associate Professor, Center for Indigenous Nations Studies at Kansas University--we have found the Report to contain violations of standard scholarly practice that are so serious that we are now considering the additional step of filing charges of research misconduct against the authors of the Report. These violations include:

- relying on a biased and flawed source for major arguments;
- relying on the artificial exclusion of reputable independent sources that contradict the Report's argument in order to support its argument;
- suppressing text from a cited source that contradicts the Report's argument;
- distorting the weakness of the Report's case;
- artificially limiting scholarly interpretation in violation of norms of scholarship.

These and further violations are explained more fully in the attached summary and documentary evidence packet.

Prof. Wesson, the chair of the committee that authored this report, has already publicly acknowledged and corrected one of these violations in the report (Silver & Gold Record, April 12). But our investigation has uncovered such a pattern of these violations that the report cannot be salvaged through individual corrections. As with any scholarly document found to be so deeply compromised, the Report must be retracted. The violations of standard scholarly practice that are contained in the Report are serious enough to justify failing a PhD thesis, let alone an investigative report that is to serve as a basis for firing a tenured, full professor.

Our concerns transcend the Churchill case altogether. We feel compelled to take this action not only because of the seriousness of the violations themselves, but because the consequences of allowing them to go unchallenged reverberate far beyond anyone's individual career. As faculty, we trust that the procedures governing reviews, due process, academic freedom and faculty governance are, in fact, fair, appropriate, and duly constituted. We trust that when these procedures are carried out, they will meet the norms of standard scholarly practice and the minimum standards of professional integrity. Yet, the pattern of violations of standard scholarly practice in the Report compromises not only its own scholarly integrity but also the integrity of the protocols and principles that protect academic freedom. To allow the firing of any professor on the basis of an

investigative document that is so fundamentally compromised is to lower the bar of due process so dangerously that it puts any professor at risk of arbitrary dismissal.

We do not know what motivations or intentions could have produced this pattern of violations. We are only convinced that the report contains them and that any faculty member who studies the documentary evidence we are attaching to this letter will find themselves confronted with the same grave concern. We believe that the University, the SCRM and Churchill Investigative Committee of the SCRM can accept our call in good faith and rescind the report, making it unnecessary for us to consider research misconduct charges. Because of the urgency of the situation and the seriousness of our concerns, our only focus is the rescinding of the Report—an action which is crucial in and of itself, regardless of what next steps may follow.

Signed,

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