

Opposition Mounts As Showdown Approaches Over The Firing Of Ward Churchill - Open Letter From Concerned Academics

Dismissal hearings for University of Colorado professor Ward Churchill were held this past week. Ward Churchill appeared before the Privilege and Tenure Committee with many witnesses speaking in his behalf. The committee will have 30 days to issue its findings to CU president Hank Brown. Brown will weigh the findings and make a recommendation to the Board of Regents. Opposition to his dismissal is growing on campuses across the country. The firing of Churchill, a tenured professor and former head of the Ethnic Studies Department at UC Boulder, is increasingly being seen by those in academia as an attack on academic freedom, dissent and critical thinking that must be stopped. In a recent statement the Colorado branch of the American Association of University Professors notes “we believe that the investigation [into alleged research misconduct] now is widely perceived to be a pretext for firing Churchill when the real reason for dismissal is his politics.” The AAUP statement raises serious questions and concerns over the handling of the Ward Churchill case, and calls for the reversal of the decision to fire him.

This growing movement of opposition to the firing of Professor Churchill includes some of this country’s most prominent scholars and public intellectuals, including Noam Chomsky, Derrick Bell and Richard Falk, Professor Emeritus of International Law and Practice at Princeton University. In an essay recently solicited by the journal of the International Studies Association entitled “On Behalf of Robust Academic Freedom” Professor Falk writes, “The relentless pursuit and persecution of Ward Churchill is a revealing instance of the witch-hunting McCarthyist ethos that is currently threatening academic freedom.” And he concludes, “When academic freedom is threatened, the most sustaining response, is vigorous defense on principle”. In August, Anthropology Today published an editorial entitled “Education and the Dangerous Professor: The Challenge for Anthropology” written by University of Denver Anthropology Professor Dean Saitta. Richard Delgado’s recent review of Ward Churchill’s latest work *On the Justice of Roosting Chickens*, published in the *American Indian Law Review*, makes it quite clear that the attacks are a result of Ward’s political speech.

On September 29 –30th “The Emergency Summit Of Scholars And Activists Defending Critical Thinking And Indigenous Studies” was convened in Lawrence, Kansas. It produced a resolution written to the P&T Committee calling on the University of Colorado Boulder to reinstate

Professor Churchill because of a deeply flawed investigation.

Thousands of academics have signed petitions and visited websites spawned by this movement to defend dissent and critical thinking in academia, now focused on the case of Ward Churchill, including Ward Churchill Solidarity Network, <http://www.defendcriticalthinking.info/>, www.teachersfordemocracy.org and more.

There is also increasing student activity in support of Ward Churchill. In December of 2006 a student group was formed at the University of Colorado called Students for Academic Freedom (SAF). On December 16, they held a press conference to protest the “politically motivated” investigation of Churchill, and to call for him to receive the UCB Alumni Association Teaching Recognition Award that he won in 2005 which was withheld pending the outcome of the investigation. An SAF spokesperson said “We are prepared to take organized action against the administration between now and the month of February to ensure that our demands are met,” “If this process goes forward, it would set a precedent that, despite the traditional peer review process, and despite tenure, professors must always censor the conclusions of their research to popular acceptance, or face harsh repercussions. This threatens the nature of academia. This precedent should send a shock wave of fear to all professors nationwide.”

Natsu Saito, Law professor at Georgia State College of Law and wife of Professor Churchill, wrote in a recent letter, “We are at a critical stage with respect to CU’s attempt to fire Ward Churchill.” Academics across the country are increasingly speaking out to say that Ward Churchill must not be fired. The Open Letter From Concerned Academics issued at the beginning of this case and signed by over 600 faculty stated: “This attack is intolerable and must stop now. The precedents already set in this case – that a professor can be publicly pilloried and threatened with dismissal for what he writes – must not be allowed to stand. The University of Colorado Board of Regents must drop any effort to fire Churchill... and repudiate its actions up to now; and all colleges and universities must reaffirm, in word and deed, their commitment to defend critical thinking.”

Media Contacts:

Ruth Hsu - e-mail: rhsu@hawaii.edu

Ph:808-595-018

Henry Silverman - e-mail: silverma@msu.edu
(517) 339-3357

Dean J. Saitta e-mail: dsaitta@du.edu
home: 303-871-2680

Fax: 303-871-243

Vinay Lal - e-mail: vlal@history.ucla.edu

Ph: 818-990-1719

Ken Bonetti – e-Mail: kenecon2004@yahoo.com

720-985-5364 (cell)

720-565-9291 (land line at home)

303-492-8291 (work)

Dana Cloud - e-mail: dcloud@mail.utexas.edu

Ph: (512) 471-1947

Matthew Abraham – email matthew.mabraha2@gmail.com

Ph: 773-682-9322

Endorsed by:

Matthew Abraham
Professor of English
De Paul University

Elizabeth Ammons
Harriet H. Fay Professor of Literature
Tufts University
Andrew Austin
Associate Professor
Social Change and Development
University of Wisconsin-Green

Bob Buzzanco
Professor of History
University of Houston
Ken Bonetti, Academic Advisor
College of Arts and Sciences
University of Colorado
Boulder, CO

John M. Cammett
Professor Emeritus, History
John Jay College and the Graduate School - City University of New York

Dana Cloud
Professor Department of Communication Studies, University of Texas
Sandi E Cooper
Professor of History
City University of New York at Staten Island and The Graduate School

Frank Deale
Associate Professor

CUNY Law School
Flushing, New York

David Gabbard, EdD
Professor
Dept of C&I
College of Education
East Carolina University

Philip Gasper, Ph.D.
Professor & Chair
Department of Philosophy & Religion
Notre Dame de Namur University
Belmont, CA 94002

John Gorman,
freelance journalist
author King of the Romans,

Sondra Hale, Professor
Anthropology and Women's Studies
University of California, Los Angeles

Ruth Hsu
Associate Professor of English
University of Hawai'i at Manoa.

Alan Jones
Dean of Faculty
Pitzer College

Daniel Jordan, PhD
Sociology Instructor
Ventura Community College
Ventura, CA

Christine Karatnytsky
Scripts Librarian
Billy Rose Theatre Division
The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

Katherine Callen King
Professor of Comparative Literature and Classics
UCLA

Vinay Lal
Assoc Prof/Chair, Center for Southeast Asian Studies
UCLA

Tom Mayer
Professor
Department of Sociology
University of Colorado at Boulder

Peter McLaren
Professor
UCLA

Kerby Miller
Professor of History
University of Missouri-Columbia

Kamala Platt
Professor
University of Texas-PA

Peter Rachleff,
Professor of History,
Macalester College

Dean J. Saitta
Professor, Department of Anthropology
President, Faculty Senate
University of Denver

Henry Silverman
Professor and Chairperson Emeritus
Department of History
Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI

Peter Spitzform
Assistant Library Professor
University of Vermont
Burlington, VT 05405
Michael Vocino
Professor of Film Media
University of Rhode Island
Kingston, RI 02881
Nancy Welch

Professor
Department of English
University of Vermont
Burlington, VT 05405
Tim Wise
Author, Anti-Racism Educator