

Little Eichmanns & 9/11: Ward Churchill Revisited - Marlena Gangi

When I was the editor of the PSU Rearguard in spring of 2005, Bill O'Reilly and other conservative pundits were busy dragging Ward Churchill through the gutter because of a piece that he had written after the downing of the Twin Towers by Muslim freedom fighters.

In his article, "Sometimes People Push Back: On the Justice of Roosting Chickens," Churchill compared those killed on 9/11 to Adolf Eichmann, the high ranking Nazi who was responsible for facilitating the mass deportation of Jews to concentration camps.

When I ran an editorial in support of Churchill's stance, I received hang up calls to my office along with strange, threatening notes left at my door (not really scary unless you are alone in your sub-basement office at 2 in the morning deadlining by yourself, which I often did...). Someone also tore up a stack of Rearguards and left them at my office door. PSU Facilities also gave me a call to stop "recycling" papers in one of the men's bathrooms on campus because it caused the wastebasket to overflow. I don't know who was "recycling" our papers there, but it sure as hell wasn't me...below is an article with interview from last year.

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An Interview with Ward Churchill
By: Marlena Gangi

Professor Ward Churchill opened his Portland, OR Reed College April 16 presentation "The Indigenous Alternative" with a greeting of "Hello my relatives. I bring you greetings from the Ketoowah band of Cherokees, my people, and from the Colorado Chapter of the American Indian Movement [AIM]." He also offered a clarification. Referring to his 9/11 essay "Some People Push Back: On the Justice of Roosting Chickens (forever doomed to be known as the 'Little Eichmann article')," Churchill stated, "Ward is not a pseudonym. It's not a cover for the name Osama Bin Churchill. You can read the essay forwards, backwards, upwards, downwards, front wise; no matter how you read it, the word 'justified' does not appear. Nor does the word 'advocate'. Nor could you interpret that essay as advocacy."

He went on from tearing apart the corporate media and uninformed public's claim that his essay clearly stated that 9/11 was justified and that Churchill therefore is an advocate of terrorism to, his astonishment that almost immediately into the 9/11 coverage, corporate media was portraying the attack as "a senseless act of violence." "Wait a minute,"

Churchill stated. "Two planes have just flown with a considerable degree of precision into two obvious targets. A third has crashed into the pentagon. A fourth has gone down over Pennsalyvania. Somebody went to a lot of trouble to plan, coordinate and execute an action. It had purpose which implies motive. Take motive and purpose and you should realize that there was nothing senseless about this act."

In a presentation that ran about 90 minutes, Churchill gave a powerful and impassioned talk that chronologically addressed imperialist, terrorist actions taken by the U.S. and provided clear reason regarding the counter actions taken by the victims of U.S. violence.

With this, one does see that the word 'senseless' finds itself deleted in seeking an answer to so called terrorism; sometimes people simply do indeed push back.

In closing, Churchill reiterated that, when addressing an essay that breaks down U.S. terrorist action and its resulting counter action, one must also take into account an Indigenous Alternative. As the Indigenous are continually targeted by the violent acts of the U.S., it follows that the alternative must prevail in order to shift the paradigm of oppression.

Some of Churchill's suggestions for change under this alternative are;

"Actually move legal documents of the International Human Rights Law into law. We've got a whole range of rights that are constitutionally vested that we not even aware. These rights that we are not aware of are now more than ever being violated by the very lawmakers who created them. The ruling elite have forfeited our rights as they see fit to do so... it is important to understand, when dissecting recent acts of so called terrorism, that we share this commonality with the indigenous of Iraqi."

"Insist that the 400 U.S Indian Treaties that have systematically been whittled away by the U.S. government that they themselves initiated are honored; they are after all the law that applies to the rights of brown skinned people... with these treaties the U.S. has no jurisdiction to remove one inch of land from Indian territory... the Indigenous Alternative is... equal rights to all people, self determination for all people... simply stated, do unto others as you would have them do unto you...obedience and respect for law...you do what is necessary to get your government to comply with the law that they are required to uphold... Malcolm [X] said it, Justice Jackson said it, the Nuremburg Tribunal said it as a whole; by any means necessary. Your going to have to suck it up and do whatever it is that you need to do in order to retaliate for what is being done in the world today, take up the gun if you want to. The point of the matter is, it has got

to get done. You can start out there by showing solidarity to people in armed resistance to what is being done to them in the name of U.S. policy and aggression. You can take it right back home and do it here."

"I've taken part in a number of activist actions during my life time... some of these actions carried buzz phrases to capture the attention of the public... U.S. out of Viet Nam, U.S. out of Central America, U.S. out of South Africa, U.S. out of the Caribbean Basin, U.S. out of the Persian Gulf... the only one that never get's said, and this is what I mean when I say [that violation of law is] felt by the citizens of the United States, the one that never get's said is 'U.S. out of North America... 'we need a different entity, it can call itself the United States of Swiss Cheese as long as it complies with the rule of law, I really don't care. This would be the natural and inevitable replacement of what we have now... its natural consequence would be the end of carnage everywhere."

The presentation was followed by a Q & A in which a variety of sadly pathetic questions were asked, some by the crème de la crème of Reed's student body. With every argument, Churchill butchered, filleted and skewered their each and every arrogant, uninformed thesis. The more notable questions and comments posed (paraphrased but true to statement);

"I have a few Navajo friends who tell me that violence and alcoholism on Indian land is really bad. Also, Indian bloodlines have been so watered down that I wonder if it really makes sense for Native Americans to continue with the quest for the return of their land since they can't function on the land that they have and also because they carry so little Indian blood anyway. How do you feel about this?"

"Your Indigenous Alternative thesis suggests that Indian land be returned to what you call the rightful owners. What about the white people that have been living there for generations? What's gonna happen to them?"

"You seem to be against U.S. intervention. I am really, really concerned about the child soldiers of Uganda... isn't there any case that you feel that U.S. intervention is justified? (I could not contain myself at this point... and I just happened to be sitting right by the mic used for audience questions. I interrupted this kid with, "Hey—there's a militarized zone 4 blocks north of where I live. It's called the ghetto. Child soldiers have to defend themselves daily there against the occupation of the Portland Police. Fuck Uganda. Get your ass over to NE Alberta Street and be concerned with the child soldiers there!")

The next comment came from a kid who ran all the way home to get his

copy of the Constitution in order to proudly and publicly state that Churchill had misinterpreted Article 9 in order to suit his own argument. This kid, of course was, dead wrong.

The last question came from a middle aged woman. "Things are so much worse now than when I was an activist during the Viet Nam war. It is so dangerous now in the U.S. to engage of any form of dissent. I am so afraid. What can I possibly do to change anything?"

What was utterly amazing about folks who went to the mic was that they would not give up—after their questions were asked and answered they insisted on arguing with Churchill about the rationale of their argument. All, by the way, were white...

I sat down with Churchill at my apartment toward the end of the evening for a late dinner of my slammin' enchiladas and a chat. I found him to have great humor, defiance, intellect and courage. We started off with a discussion of the Q & A.

MG: The Q & A seemed to me to really address the hubris of arrogance of the privileged class. What's your take on this?

WC: Ditto. I think you've framed it very well. They can't get past it.

MG: They want so much to be right; it does not seem to appear on their radar that they can possibly be wrong.

WC: I don't know if they care one way or the other about whether they're right. It's just a presumption of right or wrong, okay; they want you to tell them that they're right. They want you to affirm their entitlement. That's their game. If your challenging that, they're going to go to neurotic lengths to prove you wrong like that little boy who ran back to his dorm room to get the copy of the Constitution so he could read what I said and pretend that it was the opposite of what I said.

MG: "Little Eichmanns." Two little words.

WC: Right. One phrase, a descriptor out of an essay that runs 40 pages. It was a stream of conscious, not particularly well refined. It's been refined since. They don't want to talk about the fact that it's been refined. They say it should have been annotated. There are 178 footnotes in the final version that they don't want to mention. [The unrefined version] was written on the day of the event, basically an op-ed piece. No one's going to fully annotate a stream of conscious piece, not even Bill O'Reilly.

MG: After running my editorial in support of your essay, I was stopped on campus by a young man that I don't know personally. He, however, knew who I was. He yelled out to me, "He should be stripped of his citizenship and tried for sedition!" Obviously, he was talking about you. I asked if he had actually read your essay and he answered, "I don't need to. All I need to know is that he called the people who died little Eichmanns." Where, do you think, that this "I don't need to know" statement is based? Is it that they don't need to know or don't want to know? What is this fear? What is the danger to them in actually gaining clarity about what you wrote?

WC: It destroys their truth. Their truth exists not only independently of facts but, in the face of facts. The simple version is "the truth hurts." [They feel that] they're divinely entitled not to be hurt in any respect at all. Ever. Or even inconvenienced. Unfortunately, this applies to the so-called American opposition as it does to the status quo. This touches on the last question that was asked tonight [assumes whiney voice], "How can we do anything? We could get hurt doing this. It's so much worse now. They [ruling elite] might even hurt us!" It's not like you can take a pill to achieve the transformation of a genocidal system-what did [she] think?

MG: I'm reminded of the John Trudell quote, "Sometimes they have to kill us; they have to kill us because they can't break our spirit [of resistance]." If you even have to ask the question, there isn't a damn thing that you're even capable of doing.

WC: Yeah! That's what it's about; that's the numbers of people dying, of being killed on systemic basis. That's what they [those who have to ask what they can do] say they oppose. But they should be able to confront it in some way that does not inconvenience them. It's not about feeling better about yourself, it's not about your purity, either. It's about changing this motherfucker, actually. You're probably not going to be able to change it with a fashion statement or petition drive or speaking truth to power. Power knows the truth better than you do. They invented it. So, what, you're going to inform them of what they're doing and that's going to change something? No, you don't speak truth to power. You speak truth to people. And you speak it in a way that frames their responsibility to transform power.

MG: Do you care to respond to extremely negative statement that the Americana Indian Movement Grand Governing Council made regarding your essay?

WC: That Corporation? What do you expect from a federally fully funded entity chartered under the state of Minnesota purporting to be national AIM? Whose nation would they be national to? There are about 400

indigenous nations here.

MG: Who are some of their corporate funders?

WC: Honeywell. That's the big one, has been all along. It's public record. Clyde Bellecourt came down to a tribunal in San Rafael California in 1994 and proudly announced that he had received 3.1 million dollars in corporate funding.

MG: They know where their bread is buttered.

WC: Exactly. Since when did federal corporations start funding national liberation movements? The idea that they are in any sense self-empowered to make such commentary places them in the position identical to the federal government. It's the usurpation of indigenous sovereignty. Straight up. This may explain why they are in lock step with the O'Reillys of the world—that's who's confusing the so called opposition? To the extent that that's true, the opposition wants to be confused and they don't want to deal with what's being said and the responsibilities projected. They're completely off the hook.

MG: The young lady who approached you outside Kaul Auditorium after your talk who insisted in arguing that you are not 'authentically Indian' [along with the attack on his essay, the question of Churchill's 'authentic Indianess' has also been posed] -She claimed Native American heritage. Why is it so important for people to need clarification from you about your tribal affiliation?

WC: She didn't want to know about my tribal affiliation, she wanted to know my blood line pedigree, like I'm a dog. This is about the internalization of colonial imposition. We never even had a word for race. We intermarried among each other. This whole racial paradigm is something that's been imposed and internalized. Ibero-America had an amazingly set of complicated categories of [race] that went on forever. The tag line on this has always been to define Indians out of existence. You know, anything remotely resembling a traditional society it would have been absolutely unthinkable for her to do what she did. That's why I asked her if she knew anything about her own tradition. I wasn't going to answer her questions I get those questions from David Duke and the KKK. Who in the hell does she think she is to justify my existence to her satisfaction? You set whatever standards you want with your own group. You do not impose those standards on me. I don't care what color your eyes are. Do not come up in my face imposing your shit.

MG: As part of the work that I do, I seem to find myself sitting down to talk with folks who, like yourself, carry a passion for justice in their hearts and minds with every breath that they breathe. Because of this that you all carry, you are put through hell. You continually find yourselves up against it. I'm going to close with the question that that I end my interviews with; what is it that sustains you?

WC: I'm contrary as hell. All of those points of vulnerability that they think that they have against me, I don't give a good goddamn about them. Bring it.

MG: (Breaking out in laughter,) Whoa—I expected to hear about some great intense, spiritual practice that you use to keep yourself sane—

WC: No, no, no. I just shift balance a little bit and move forward. You want to fight? Okay, let's fight. I will not compromise.

MG: Is there anything else that you feel is important to include in this article?

WC: Never give a goddamn inch, you know? They always expect people to give an inch; "You've got these rights. You've compromised these rights, so now let's compromise the compromise. So now just be reasonable." With that you end up being reasonable with people who have no reason at all. Do not give one inch! They're not ready for that. Basically, that's it.

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