

SOME QUESTIONS WE SHOULD BE ASKING ABOUT THE ATTACKS ON WARD CHURCHILL

For the past two months University of Colorado Professor Ward Churchill's scholarship and personal life have been put under a microscope. The University is under intense pressure to fire him. Nearly every day the Denver-area media has featured negative allegations as if they were fact. Responses from Professor Churchill and those who support him are rarely printed. What's really going on here?

WHO IS WARD CHURCHILL?

Ward Churchill has written more than twenty books, dozens of book chapters and over one hundred journal articles. As of 2001 he was the most cited scholar in his field. He was hired with tenure in 1991 because he had already published six books, more than most academics ever publish. Prof. Churchill has received numerous teaching awards, four prestigious awards for writing, and was inducted into the Martin Luther King Collegium of Scholars in 2004. Students flock to his classes – which are always oversubscribed – and his public lectures are uniformly well received. His department unanimously voted him chair in 2002. More than 1000 academics and over 5000 others have weighed in to protest CU's current "investigation."

Such accomplishments don't happen by accident, or because of a "false claim" of American Indian identity. Why are they being ignored?

WHY IS HE CONTROVERSIAL?

What Prof. Churchill says – and how he says it – often forces people to confront issues they would rather avoid. His research focuses on the government's failure to comply with the Constitution and with international law, raising troubling questions about the treatment of American Indians and the consequences of U.S. foreign policy. The current controversy was triggered by his suggestion that the best way to ensure American security is to prevent our government from engaging in illegal military interventions which destroy other people's families and communities.

Why has public discussion moved from these substantive issues of U.S. policy to a microscopic examination of Prof. Churchill's life and work?

WHAT ABOUT ALL THESE ALLEGATIONS?

The media has repeated, ad nauseum, allegations of "academic fraud" from a handful of relatively unknown academics, without investigating the underlying facts, while the praise of Prof. Churchill's work by dozens of eminent scholars such as Noam Chomsky, Howard Zinn, David Stannard, Haunani-Kay Trask, Richard Falk and Robert A. Williams, Jr., has been ignored.

Why are the accusers' credentials and motivations not scrutinized? Why hasn't the support of the experts in these fields received at least as much exposure?

Prof. Churchill has provided evidence of his associate (not honorary) membership in the Keetoowah Band of Cherokee, his long-term participation in the local American Indian community, and his support from American Indian organizations nationally. The denials of his identity all stem from a small, self-appointed group calling itself "National AIM" that has spent many years engaging in politically motivated attacks on Prof. Churchill and the Colorado AIM chapter.

What makes these individuals the authority on Prof. Churchill's identity? Why hasn't the local media bothered to investigate them? Or talked to American Indians who have worked with Prof. Churchill for decades?

Initially Ward Churchill was accused of "advocating" the 9/11 attacks rather than trying to explain their causes; then of criminally "inciting" others to violence. As it became clear that these charges were false, these morphed into claims of personal threats of violence – all years (or decades) old, none ever reported to the police, all denied by Prof. Churchill.

Why is the media so determined to paint Prof. Churchill as an advocate of violence? Could it be because he has been such a consistent critic of violence perpetrated by the U.S. government?

WHAT'S BEHIND THIS RELENTLESS CAMPAIGN TO DISCREDIT WARD CHURCHILL?

This is not just about Ward Churchill. The CU Board of Regents is now refusing to stand by its own rules on academic freedom; established tenure and review processes have been discarded; race and gender studies programs, a wide range of professors and the institution of tenure are under attack both here and around the country.

Freedom of speech is meaningless if those who express "unpopular" positions are subjected to onslaughts of unsubstantiated personal and professional attacks. Ward Churchill will not be silenced, but who knows how many others will be?

Are we simply going to sit back and watch?

Paid for by the Ad Hoc Coalition in Support of Ward Churchill