

Bruce E. Johansen

Bruce E. Johansen, Frederick W. Kayser Professor, Communication and Native American Studies, University of Nebraska at Omaha, says:

I read in yesterday's Denver Post that the newspaper has editorially called for Professor Churchill to be fired (or to resign) because he is (in the newspaper's view), an activist and not a scholar. One major difference between journalism and the professorate (I used to be a newspaper reporter) is that we may "profess" — that is, we may develop expertise that allows us to take informed positions on issues, political and otherwise. The Denver Post is drawing a line that could be enforced only by making academia a very sterile place. The present controversy has focused on only a tiny fraction of Prof. Churchill's work. I have read some of his books, and find them to be well-argued and intensively documented in a scholarly manner. He occasionally has referenced my work, and he has done so properly. I realize that some of what he has written has incited controversy. I believe that engagement in controversy is proper for a scholar; any line between "activism" and "scholarship" is artificial. In my work I have advanced ideas regarding the role of the Iroquois Confederacy in the evolution of democracy that have become the object of intense scrutiny and intense controversy. Controversy and activism are necessary ingredients in the contest of ideas on which the academy should be based.