

Eric Cheyfitz

October 3, 2006

Dear Chancellor DiStefano:

I am writing in support of the letter of my colleague, Professor Brett de Bary, "urg[ing] you in the strongest possible terms to reverse your recommendation to fire Professor Ward Churchill."

I have read the entire Report of the Investigative Committee of the Standing Committee on Research Misconduct...concerning Allegations of Academic Misconduct against Professor Ward Churchill. While the Committee acknowledges the political context that generated the review of Professor Churchill's scholarship, while it also acknowledges that the very scholarship now judged to be calculatedly dishonest was open to inspection during Professor Churchill's hiring as a tenured Associate Professor at the University of Colorado at Boulder in the fall of 1991 and his promotion to (full) Professor in the fall of 1997, and while it calls into question the integrity of the University's procedures in prosecuting Professor Churchill, it, nevertheless, effectively dismisses these crucial matters and asserts its own ability to disengage its judgment from them and engage in a fair-minded review of the scholarship.

Setting aside the question of double jeopardy in this matter (the unprecedented re-review of work presumably already inspected and validated during hiring and tenure), I find the Committee's claims to objectivity in this matter disingenuous at best and at worst endorsing a political witch hunt under cover of issues of academic misconduct.

I am a professor of American Indian Studies here at Cornell and so, having read the report in its entirety, I am perfectly capable of entering into a discussion of the charges at hand, which I think at most are matters for discussion between Professor Churchill and his department and would never have been formulated and brought to bear against him in the first place were it not for his provocative essay on 9/11, which stimulated the ire of the usual suspects on right-wing radio and the political leaders of the state of Colorado.

But clearly, having found it impossible to fire Professor Churchill for his essay on 9/11, because of the protections of academic freedom, these forces, concentrated in your office, were able to co-opt and corrupt normative academic channels of review in order to subvert academic freedom, the very basis of the integrity of our profession, by other means.

I am copying this e-mail to Professor Cary Nelson, current president of the AAUP, of which I am a member, in the hope that, should you not reverse your recommendation to fire Professor Churchill, the AAUP, which has been for the most part remarkably silent on this issue, will conduct a full review of and report on the case. Further, until such a review and report can be undertaken and published, I hope the AAUP, in the strongest possible terms, will urge your institution to act with the integrity it has so far not displayed in this matter and suspend any action against Professor Churchill.

Sincerely,

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