

Late August, 2006

From initiators of the [Open Letter](#) From Concerned Academics:

Defend Dissent and Critical Thinking on Campus –
An Urgent Call to Organize Opposition to the
University of Colorado’s Decision to Fire Ward Churchill

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

On June 26th the University of Colorado at Boulder announced its intention to fire tenured Ethnic Studies Professor Ward Churchill. Coming in the wake of the appearance of David Horowitz’ book “101 Most Dangerous Professors,” and ACTA’s May ’06 Report “[How Many Ward Churchills?.](#)” this decision has been a wake-up call, energizing a potentially significant movement both at Boulder and across the country to oppose the attack on Professor Churchill as a concentration of the wider assault on dissent and critical thinking in academia.

Professor Churchill has appealed the decision of Interim Chancellor DiStefano to the internal faculty (Privilege & Tenure) committee. According to Churchill’s wife Natsu Saito, that committee can only make recommendations; their recommendation goes to the President Hank Brown; Brown’s recommendation goes to the Regents; the Regents have the power to fire Ward. How long it would then take for a decision to come from the Regents we can’t say.

Important developments so far:

There have already been some important developments in this battle: faculty at Boulder have stepped forward to form a group to oppose this decision and issue a public call to defend Ward Churchill; a number of letters and articles opposing this decision have appeared in the Boulder papers, at various websites, and in the current issue of [Anthropology Today](#); a petition circulated by Teachers for a Democratic Society has already been signed by over 450 professors nationwide; and the NACCS conference (National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies) held in Guadalajara, Mexico in July passed a resolution opposing this firing. To learn more, go to www.defendcriticalthinking.org

There is real potential, but also urgency, for a movement to take root and reach a whole new level in the coming weeks and months, with the aim of creating a situation where the administration at CU at Boulder is compelled to reverse its decision, and arousing the academy and broader society to the danger posed by the highly orchestrated war on radical and critical thinking scholars being waged by powerful forces closely connected to the Bush administration. This letter is an effort to propose some key, specific ways that all who share this sense of urgency can and must act now to make these goals a reality. We welcome and hope to hear from you with ideas and suggestions of your own about how to mount a commensurate response.

Proposed plan of Action:

1. **Get the word out far and wide. Organize faculty departments, campus faculty groups and professional organizations to pass resolutions and issue statements in opposition to this decision.** Forward this email to colleagues and friends and talk with them about what you can do. Encourage student groups to do the same. Write letters and submit articles to the Chronicle of Higher Education, www.insidehighered.com and other professional publications. Sign the petition at www.teachersfordemocracy.org. The AAUP in particular should be called on by individual colleagues and faculty groups to sanction the University of Colorado if they fire Professor Churchill. Submit letters and OpEd pieces to campus papers, to professional journals, and to local and national papers and magazines;
2. **Flood the University of Colorado and the newspapers there with letters and e-mails.** Demand that they reverse this decision to fire Professor Churchill. We’re including the addresses provided by the Boulder faculty group. Copy (cc) your email to the university administration and to the board of regents, and to us:
TO: Members of the University of Colorado System Committee on Privilege and Tenure c/o Chair Weldon Lodwick
CC: Interim Chancellor DiStefano, Chancellor Peterson, President Brown, and the Board of Regents of the University of Colorado (e-mail addresses are listed at the end of this letter); send us a copy of what you send;
3. **Make a “day after” plan.** Mobilize now on your campus for a day of action if the CU Boulder administration announces that they are going ahead with their decision to fire Churchill. This could take any number of forms, from faculty bodies issuing press statements, to more public and publicized events on campus involving students as well as faculty in forums, conferences, or teach-ins that dig into the bigger ramifications of their getting away with firing Churchill. We at www.defendcriticalthinking.org

will be making suggestions and sharing ideas of things to do as we hear from you. As part of that, we want to set up a **speakers bureau** that can provide speakers to take part at campuses where events of a bigger scope are planned; that can speak to the press in response to breaking developments on this topic; and in response to press releases that we might issue in relation to this initiative. Also, we need colleagues who can attend and speak about these issues at academic conferences taking place in at the beginning and end of September, and beyond. Let us know if we can add your name to the speakers bureau;

4. **Mobilize public support for faculty at campuses where they have been targeted for attack.** Wherever faculty have been targeted - by Horowitz in his book and at his website; by ACTA; by right wing students and alumni like those that attacked 30 UCLA professors by name with a high profile press coverage; by the Wisconsin politicians who want to fire a Madison lecturer, and more – organize public expressions of support for these scholars (from luncheons to press conferences) as part of opposing the whole atmosphere of intimidation;
5. **Publish an updated version of the [Open Letter in a high profile national publication, such as the New York Review of Books, in this period.](#)** Think about the impact of having this statement from scholars across the country, condemning the attack on dissent and critical thinking, coming to national prominence at this time. We are in the process of editing the statement; when that's done, and we have a suggested publication, deadline, and price, we will be calling on colleagues to contribute and help raise funds from other colleagues to cover the cost of publishing the statement.

What's at Stake:

As the Open Letter From Concerned Academics said over a year ago:

"The issues here have nothing to do with the quality of Ward Churchill's scholarship or his professional credentials. However one views his choice of words or specific arguments, he is being put in the dock solely for his radical critique of U.S. history and present-day policy in the wake of the events of September 11, 2001. Apparently, 9/11 is now the third rail of American intellectual life: to critically probe into its causes and to interrogate the international role of the United States is treated as heresy; those inquiring can be denied forums, careers, and even personal safety..."

"The Churchill case is not an isolated incident but a concentrated example of a well-orchestrated campaign launched in the name of 'academic freedom' and 'balance' which in fact aims to purge the universities of more radical thinkers and oppositional thought generally, and to create a climate of intimidation. While the right-wing claim that the universities are 'left-wing dictatorships' is specious beyond belief, it is unfortunately true that the campus remains one of the few surviving refuges of critical thinking and dissent in this country. This is something to defend and strengthen." (to read and sign the Open Letter, go to: <http://www.defendcriticalthinking.org/>)

As we've been emphasizing, it would be hard to overstate the serious nature of what has already happened, let alone what it would mean should the Regents fire Churchill. If this assault on academe succeeds, the consequences will be bad and threatening for American society as a whole.

From: www.defendcriticalthinking.org

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Please send us a copy of any letters you send.