

## **EMERGENCY FORUM IN SUPPORT OF WARD CHURCHILL**

To whom and what is Ward Churchill such a dangerous and formidable threat, a threat that must be eradicated from the very anodyne and sterile confines of this fine university, which has been targeted by the most reactionary right-wing forces in the country over the last two and a half years? Ward Churchill is a threat to the military-industrial complex, the Neo-Conservative movement, the Bush White House, and the cultural smugness that does not allow us to look into the faces of the victims of U.S. imperial violence. To recognize the gross wrongdoing of one's nation and its leadership, as well as one's individual complicity in condoning—through silence—military actions contributing to such much misery around the world, is quite painful. Who is that person who looks back at us when we look into the mirror? We are not Adolph Eichmann, Julius Streicher, or Joseph Mengele, but decent people who seek to live harmoniously in the world with others of different races, ethnicities, and cultures, right? Indeed, how does one explain the relative silence within the academic community to defend Ward Churchill, who has forced us to think about the implications of silence and passivity and what those things suggest morally, ethically, and spiritually? Churchill declared in his "Some People Push Back: On the Justice of Roosting Chickens," in a subsection entitled "The Politics of a Perpetrator Population," "As a whole, the American public greeted the revelations [of the systematic, deliberate genocide in Iraq due to the U.S. post-war embargo] with yawns.. There were, after all, far more pressing things than the unrelenting misery/death of a few hundred thousand Iraqi tikes to be concerned with. Getting "Jeremy" and "Ellington" to their weekly soccer game, for instance, or seeing to it that little "Tiffany" and "Ashley" had just the right roll-neck sweaters to go with their new cords. And, to be sure, there was the yuppie holy war against ashtrays – for "our kids," no less – as an all-absorbing point of political focus." While some might grimace at Churchill's sarcasm and insensitivity toward American citizens, I think the point of his message should not get lost in his rhetoric: U.S. citizens need to wake up and take note of what is happening to this country, the perverse ways in which patriotism has been hijacked by a group of radical nationalists in the Bush administrations to further the expansion of the military-defense base producing ever larger war profits for the War Hawks in the Pentagon. Ward simply provided a wake-up call.

Let's answer it!

Ward Churchill has forced us to look into the mirror and to assess the human costs that have been endured throughout the world due to U.S. militarism and neo-colonial violence. As Noam Chomsky has repeatedly warned, “Outlaw states can only be stopped from within, by the citizens who give the government its power and its veneer of respectability as a democracy.” Churchill’s “crime” if you will is that he has indicted the citizens of this country for our apathy, our inaction, our fear of speaking out, and our unwillingness to pay the material price that comes with dissent, critical thinking, and radical protest. That Churchill has been denounced from Denver to Washington, from the *New York Times* to *Fox News*, from the liberal left to the far right, from Bill O’Reilly to Todd Gitlin, suggests that the potency of his message—the prescience of his vision—provides a prophetic challenge to those seeking to reverse the disastrous consequences of the U.S.’s illegal invasions and wars throughout the world. Resisting Ward Churchill for these parties is a matter of the utmost importance: If Churchill’s views were to gain mainstream salience, the philosophical basis for U.S. Empire would be in serious jeopardy. From Iraq to Palestine, from Afghanistan to Iran, and from Sudan to Lebanon, U.S. militarism has shown to be based on a tragically flawed conception of the world and the countries with which all of us global citizens share the planet.

Let me talk briefly how the report produced by the investigative committee is a smokescreen for carrying out a political assassination in respectable academic garb. I will do so by providing an example of how the academic world reacts when far more serious academic misconduct takes place in the service of empire, instead of resistance to it, as Churchill’s large political corpus has done. In September of 2003, Harvard Law Professor Alan Dershowitz published his *The Case for Israel*, which in Dershowitz’s words, was supposed to make the liberal case for Israel and to rebut the allegations made by Israel’s fiercest critics (Noam Chomsky, Edward Said, and Norman Finkelstein) that Israel is an apartheid state because of its disparate use of legal structures to separate Jews from non-Jews in a repressive theocracy, enforces an illegal military operation to seize Palestinian land, and commits war crimes in its repeated violations of international law, basic human rights—seeking to enforce a separation between the Israeli and the indigenous Palestinian population by any means necessary. As an example, consider the illegality and size of the separation barrier that winds throughout the West Bank, which was built on the pretext of serving Israeli security needs, but actually contributes to Israel’s illegal seizure of land; it is higher and longer than the Berlin wall, although the

U.S. media never informs us of this fact, much less showing us pictures of the effects the construction of this wall has had on daily Palestinian life. *The Case for Israel* climbed the heights of the *New York Times*' bestseller list, receiving praise from luminaries such as Henry Louis Gates and Elie Wiesel, who claimed that Dershowitz had done the American public a great service in so strongly and convincingly rebuking Israel's critics. A copy of *The Case for Israel* was sent to every member of Congress and to a number of pro-Israel advocacy organizations in an apparent indication of its value for (quote) "proving Israel's critics wrong." In comparison to the supposed academic integrity violations that have been lodged against Ward Churchill, Dershowitz's academic derelictions in *The Case for Israel* are far more serious in that he cites long-ago refuted sources as legitimate authority, attempting to paint Israel as a tolerant, liberal democracy that has better handled threats to its security than any other nation in modern history. In composing *The Case for Israel*, Dershowitz, the Felix Frankfurter chair at Harvard University, borrowed source material without proper attribution from Joan Peters' *From Time Immemorial: The Origins of Arab-Israeli Conflict*, a book that claimed to prove that Palestine was empty on the eve of Zionist colonization; in essence, giving credence to Israel Zangwill's famous statement "A land without a people for a people with a land," justifying Israel's creation while undermining the Palestinians moral claim that, as a people, they were dispossessed.

Luminaries in the American Arts and Letters such as Saul Bellow, Elie Wiesel, and Martin Peretz lined up to praise Peters' book as a significant contribution to the endless debate about the Israel-Palestine conflict, which would provide the definite rebuttal to those who attacked Israel's founding and "fight for survival" as "the only democracy" the Middle East. If as Peters' book suggested, the Palestinians were recent in-migrants to Palestine, and not part of the land "from time immemorial," there could be no moral basis from which to argue that Palestinian land was stolen or that Palestinians were ethnically cleansed in 1948. Finally, a relative unknown such as Joan Peters had provided the scholarly proof that had eluded scholars of the Middle East for centuries: demographic data that showed that the British during the mandate period had expanded the concept of "refugee" to allow migrant workers, who had been in Palestine for only a few years, to claim indigenous status. There was only one problem: Peters' demographic data was deeply flawed. Norman Finkelstein, a graduate student at Princeton at the time, stumbled upon *From Time Immemorial* in a bookstore and read it with great interest. He read the text and footnotes very carefully and was surprised at

what he read. More importantly, he was surprised by the famous names who had attached their reputations to the book. After examining *From Time Immemorial*'s arguments, its demographic data, and footnotes, Finkelstein concluded that Peters had concocted a fraud. Although Finkelstein initially had trouble get his research on the topic published, he is twenty years later universally acknowledged as the person who exposed the fraud. You might imagine Finkelstein's surprise in September 2003 when he found many of the same arguments and source material, contained in Peters *From Time Immemorial*, in Dershowitz's *The Case for Israel. The Case for Israel*, thoroughly demolished by Norman Finkelstein in his *Beyond Chutzpah: The Misuse of Anti-Semitism and the Abuse of History*, is a fraud concocted from another fraud, but it hasn't mattered because Dershowitz labels the right people as the terrorists while keeping the faces of Palestinian victims behind the "terrorist" label. One of the most significant aspects of *Beyond Chutzpah*, is the clear and thorough documentation of Dershowitz's avoidance of the finding of human right's organizations such as B'tselem, HRW, and Amnesty International. What does it mean that a Harvard law professor can write such a ridiculous book, relying upon discredited research to advance a wholly untenable thesis, receive praise from the inner corridors of power in Washington and the U.S. academic community, and not even receive a slap on the wrist from Harvard's administration, which was presented with Finkelstein's evidence documenting that Dershowitz had borrowed material from Peters without proper attribution? As Finkelstein points out: "When you're striking a blow for the cause, anything goes." In other words, Dershowitz can say whatever he likes, as loud as a he likes, as frequently as he likes, as long as he services the propaganda needs of U.S. and Israeli military adventurism. Ward Churchill, of course, is not so lucky since he is interested in the actual historical record and the history of those people who lost their lives, their culture, and their land. That is Churchill's crime: he is writing the history of the victims and not defending the genocidal policies of the conquerors. This isn't a particularly difficult point to grasp—any commissar understands it. Intellectuals have historically served the interests of the powerful, rationalizing disgraceful military policies in service of empire. As Finkelstein writes:

The point, of course, is not that [someone like] Dershowitz is a charlatan. Rather, it's the *systematic institutional bias* that allow for books like *The Case for Israel* to become national best sellers. Were it not for Dershowitz's Harvard pedigree, the praise heaped on this book by Mario Cuomo, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Elie Wiesel, and Floyd Abrams, the favorable notice in media outlets like the *New York Times* and *Boston Globe*, and so on, *The Case for Israel* would have had the same shelf life of a publication of the Flat-Earth society (17; emphasis in original).

So, why is it that a senior Harvard law professor can write a preposterous book on the Israel-Palestine conflict, which draws upon discredited source for some of its conclusions and not face any serious employment consequences within his home institution for misleading and misinforming the public, while Ward Churchill can be placed on the verge of losing his job? Bringing the faces of the victims of U.S. imperial violence into the living rooms of American citizens will not make one popular, it has made Churchill into a loathed political target, not because what he claims about the 9/11 attacks is untrue, but because the truth he seeks to make us understand is troubling, disturbing, forces a recognition of our individual places in the world, and asks us to assess how our very standard of living depends upon humiliating, maiming, and depriving others; can one really rationalize excessive wealth, while others live in deplorable conditions in the Third World?

While we often smirk when we hear the phrases “intellectual honesty” and “intellectual integrity,” because the powerful don’t have to subscribe to these norms, Ward Churchill has exemplified these frequently invoked, but rarely lived-up to, clichés in his rejection of academic decorum and couth, preferring the stridency of the polemicist who seeks to awaken those who have fallen into a anesthetizing slumber. As Tom Mayer has recognized in Churchill’s writings, Ward knows there’s not much time left to reverse the tide of lunacy that currently drives U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, a policy that has set the region on the brink of civil war and political and economic collapse. Churchill’s “On the Justice of Roosting Chickens” simply sought to articulate what any honest student of history should surely be able to recognize: a criminal foreign policy animating the actions of the world’s only superpower will unleash generations of violence by those who are forced to swallow the wrath of a military Spartan. Were 500,000 dead Iraqi children returning home to roost on the morning of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, when 3,000 American citizens were killed at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in the largest terrorist attack on U.S. soil? The question, albeit painful, is necessary and crucial for stopping genocidal policies in the Middle East and elsewhere. That’s precisely what Churchill has sought to do.

How many of Churchill's accuser's have taken the time to actually read Churchill's many books and to truly compare the representations of Churchill's work in the investigative report? Shouldn't Churchill's accusers face allegations of academic misconduct for not taking the time to read Ward's many important books? Churchill's academic work, of course, isn't the focus of this two and a half year witch hunt to have War fired from CU. We are told that Churchill is a liar, a fraud, and a plagiarist. When one speaks truth to power with a clarity and strength of conviction with which Churchill has, these labels are only to be expected; after all, the messenger must be denounced when he announces that, not only does the Emperor have no clothes, but the citizens who condone the naked emperor's actions are guilty for not calling a spade a spade."