

Lyons: The termination and removal of Ward Churchill

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by: [Scott Richard Lyons](#)

cannot feign innocence when some of that destruction is returned." His point of departure was the 500,000 Iraqi children who died as a result of our 1991 bombing of water and sewage facilities. Churchill quoted former Secretary of State Madeline Albright shamefully remarking on "Meet the Press" that the death of those children was "worth the cost" of achieving U.S. interests.

Add to that indifference toward other people's children the continued American support for Israel over Palestine, U.S. military bases located on sacred ground in Saudi Arabia, and the constant creation of ruthless military and theocratic dictators who keep Americans rolling in oil - all the while contributing to more pain and death for poor brown people in the Middle East - and you have a recipe for disaster.

Predictable, painful, pointless disaster - not just for "them," but occasionally for "us."

Because sometimes people push back.

Churchill also made the rational point that from the point of view of a suicide bomber, the Pentagon and the World Trade Center constituted legitimate military targets. They were the "command and control infrastructure" of a globalized but U.S.-led military and economic system that is at the root of so much of the world's pain. From that same suicide bomber's perspective, the occupants of those buildings were either justified military targets (in the case of stockbrokers and generals) or, using Pentagon-speak, "collateral damage" (in the case of janitors and secretaries). The attackers did not target the Super Bowl.

It is in this context of Churchill's attempt to read the scene of 9/11 as a calculated military assault - as opposed to the random attack of "evil terrorists" - that he used those oft-quoted expressions "little Eichmanns" and "combat teams." He wasn't "siding" with the attackers or against the victims when he used those terms; he was simply trying to make people understand that 9/11 was a strategic military initiative, not some fanatical bloodbath committed by crazy, civilization-hating savages.

These ideas, presented with Churchill's usual wake-up-and-smell-the-coffee bluntness, are supported by uncontroversial facts and clear logic. One doesn't have to agree with the argument to admit this. He didn't "lie" (which is a whole lot more than we can say about Bill O'Reilly's well-documented program of deceit); and any "disrespect" folks might find in the essay would be their own interpretation as much as anything else.

The essay most certainly contradicts the official party line on 9/11 ("You are either with us, or you are with the terrorists"), but most people on the planet find that orthodoxy repellent. I think that's the real reason people are now howling for Churchill's head: he committed the cardinal sin of asking Americans to consider the facts and think for themselves, when what we are supposed to be doing is worship at the altar of American exceptionalism. Well, that and the fact that few have ever read the essay. That's unfortunate.

Remember that question everyone was asking after the 9/11 attacks: "Why do they hate us?" That was such an important question, but it was buried as quickly as it emerged. Churchill's essay was one of the few public attempts to answer it. He tried to start a national discussion about anti-

Americanism; and while his tone might be abrasive, the answers he offered were (as always with his work) well-supported and reasonable: Americans are hated not because of some vague notion of their "freedom," but for the specific reason that the United States is engaged in truly despicable practices abroad. Alongside those already mentioned, we can now add the return of such medieval practices as detainment without charge, "trial" without attorneys, and worst of all, torture.

Ultimately, Churchill's point was to wake Americans up to the impending Israelification of this country: the making of an absolute security state defined by perpetual cycles of militarism, attack and response. Do you want to live in a country like that? It doesn't have to be that way, but the United States is hurting the planet and its peoples.

If we live in a democracy, Churchill implies, then we need to take responsibility for the actions of our government. Otherwise, some people on the receiving end of U.S. brutality will see no viable option but to push back, as did past figures like Crazy Horse, Geronimo and Tecumseh. Remember them?

Hey, come to think of it, those Indians were "unenrolled," too. But I digress.

Let there be no mistake, the forces of censorship currently afflicting Churchill for committing the crime of truth-telling will not be satisfied with only his demise. Churchill had no sooner been skewered when the Right quickly turned its attention to Shahid Alam, a soft-spoken professor of economics at Northeastern University who had the gall to suggest in an op-ed that the 9/11 attackers may have believed they were fighting against foreign occupation of their homelands. All critical educators are now at risk of being targeted including, I might add, Native American Studies professors (who are not exactly known for pro-American cheerleading).

Unless citizens raise up a firm, collective "No," this witch-hunt is likely to continue. The goal of the Right is to make our universities sound exactly like "Fox News."

The last thing we should do right now is try to terminate Ward Churchill by haggling over his identity. It's a red herring. Bill O'Reilly, Rush Limbaugh and Ann Coulter are already making hay out of the ethnic fraud allegations, and anyone who thinks they are doing so to promote tribal self-determination ought to have their head examined.

Meanwhile, politicians and university administrators are trying to remove him from his post in Colorado - which would set an extremely dangerous precedent - and O'Reilly has raised the question of charging him with treason. I hope Ward resists every step of the way.

And despite nagging questions of ethnic exaggeration, which have by no means been conclusively answered, I believe Indians should support him. After all, with all these attempted terminations and removals in his life, how could Ward Churchill, that great warrior of the pen, be anything but an Indian?

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