

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

BY JOSHUA FRANK

06.09.2021

Revisiting 9/11, Ward Churchill and Those “Little Eichmanns”



Image [Aidan Bartos](#).

In July 2007 Ward Churchill was dismissed from his teaching position in the Ethnic Studies Department at the University of Colorado (CU). While CU administration attested that his ousting was due to scholarly fraud, Churchill argued it was most certainly not, and had much more to do with his controversial political writings on 9/11. The fiery rage directed at Churchill had been fanned by New York’s Republican Gov. George Pataki, Fox News, along with a few liberal windbags. Churchill would later take CU to court where a jury ruled in his favor, noting that not one witness that testified against him on

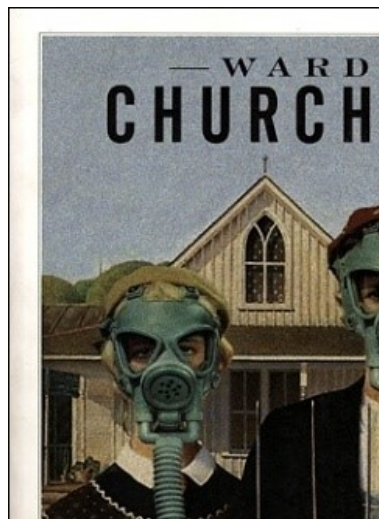
www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

behalf of CU was credible. The jurors also overwhelmingly determined his scholarship was sound and that he was indeed wrongfully terminated. Nevertheless, the judge vacated the ruling. Churchill appealed his case all the way up to the Supreme Court but was denied. The orchestrated witch hunt had served its purpose. He was done.

“If there was a better, more effective, or in fact any other way of visiting some penalty befitting their participation upon the little Eichmanns inhabiting the sterile sanctuary of the twin towers, I’d really be interested in hearing about it,” wrote Churchill in his 2003 book, *On the Justice of Roosting Chickens*.

Churchill’s “little Eichmanns” was an obvious reference to Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, in which she detailed the trial of Adolf Eichmann for his role in orchestrating the Holocaust, coining the phrase “banality of evil”. Eichman, Arendt contended, was not particularly sinister or demented, but a thoughtless dupe in service of mass murder. He was simply carrying out orders, she contended, never weighing their moral implications.



In 2005 I wrote a defense of Churchill and was even invited to debate Joe Scarborough on his old MSNBC show. It was my first appearance on his program and my last on the network. Scarborough was intent to focus on Churchill’s comments, and my response to him was simple: Churchill’s opinion, was just that, an opinion, no matter how unsavory it may have been to Scarborough and others, it was not a scholarly work. In other words, one could disagree with his assessment all they wanted, in fact, they could be vilely offended by it, but his public comments should have absolutely no bearing on his academic scholarship or his job at CU. My second response, which Scarborough especially did not care to hear, was that he was ignoring the context in which Churchill made his statement and the clarification that followed.

It wasn't only Scarborough or Bill O'Reilly over at Fox that went after Churchill, they were joined by Marc Cooper, who wrote on [his blog](#):

Move over, Mumia. The Left has a new cause celebre that's a guaranteed loser: Ward Churchill. I saw the essay at the time and was nauseated by it. I have been tempted over the years to write something about it, but have always decided not to. Only because I consider Churchill to be an irrelevant and clearly deranged loner on the edge of the looniest left.

Now I regret not having denounced him. Too bad others on the left also didn't quickly hurry to divorce themselves from this guy.

Churchill, as you know, surfaced in the news last month when he was invited to speak at an upstate New York university and some conservatives raised a ruckus as they damn well should. If this guy can hang on to his tenure at CU fine. But damned if student funds from somewhere else should be used to host him as some sort of guest speaker.

There was good reason Alexander Cockburn despised Cooper (and rumor has it he even knocked him to the ground after a spat during the 2000 Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles). It was the kind of cheap jab Cooper was known for. He'd spelled out all sorts of ad hominem over the years — from the bashing of Mumia to the castration of Hugo Chavez — Cooper claimed to have reread Churchill's essay, only to find "it more offensive than when I originally saw it right after 9/11." If one only read Cooper's grotesque distortions of Churchill's analysis (thinking a liberal would at least give Ward a fair crack), they would most likely believe the professor deserved the filthy shit that was shoveled all over his career.

It was easy for Cooper to tear down Churchill because he had taken Churchill's comment out of context. Prior to his Eichmann line, Churchill set up his case: "They [the 9/11 terrorists] did not license themselves to 'target innocent civilians.'"

There you have it. Churchill was making the argument that the 9/11 terrorists did not target the WTC simply to kill innocent Americans. According to him, the 9/11 attackers went after the WTC because it was a legitimate military target in an act of war.

Of course, Churchill should have clarified his position in his original essay, which was sloppy given the weight of his argument and his tone (he defended and explained himself later, which we'll get to in a moment). Unfortunately, his vagueness aroused a plethora of reactionary attacks, both from the right and left.

Churchill should have also emboldened this "little Eichmann" argument in his original piece by pointing out that CIA offices were housed in the WTC along with a large office

of the cruise missile manufacturer, Raytheon. He could have also stressed the terrorists likely attacked the WTC in hopes of inflicting a massive fracture in the US economy, the driving force behind the violent US war machine. Instead, he left his readers to sit quietly with his “little Eichmanns” reference.

Even so, Marc Cooper and many others who criticized Churchill’s statement failed to point out that nowhere in his original essay did he argue that the WTC attacks were justified. In fact, he said it was an act of war, of which he detests.

Churchill wrote that “if what the combat teams did to the WTC and the Pentagon can be understood as acts of war — and they can — then the same is true” for the US conduct in the Middle East.

He went on to compare the terrorists to Madeline Albright, who oversaw the US imposed UN sanctions of Iraq, which killed tens of thousands, mostly elderly and small children. “Evil for those inclined to embrace the banality of such a concept was perfectly incarnated in that malignant toad known as Madeline Albright, squatting in her studio chair like Jaba the Hutt, blandly spewing the news that she’d imposed a collective death sentence upon the unoffending youth of Iraq.”

Does such a harsh critique of the US military actions, and Churchill’s comparison of these ventures to the WTC attacks imply that he was delighted people were killed on 9/11?

Not in the least.

In fact, Churchill argued that these were not individual acts of terror (unless you can also categorize US military activity as terror): “This is to say that since the assaults on the WTC and Pentagon were an act of war, not ‘terrorist incidents’ they must be understood as components in a much broader strategy designed to achieve specific results.”

Of course, those results can be debated, and alleged al Qaeda operatives have since attacked many civilian centers in Europe and elsewhere since 2001, and are still operating in Afghanistan twenty years later. But on 9/11, perhaps they knew the US government would react violently, attacking countries in the Middle East — which would only inflame more rage against the US and consequently aid in the recruitment of more young men to sign up for bin Laden’s jihad. Days after Cooper ripped Churchill, CommonDreams ran a bitter column entitled “Ward Churchill’s Banality of Evil” by Anthony Lappé. Like our pal Cooper, Lappé, who is a friend, argued that the prof’s critique of 9/11 was utterly reprehensible:

Consider the professor’s twisted logic: People who work in the financial industry are legitimate military targets. Where do you draw the line? What about the secretaries who

serve coffee to the little Eichmanns? They keep the evil system caffeinated, should they die? What if you own stock? Does earning dividends on GE mean your apartment building should be leveled with you in it? What if you keep your money at Chase or Citibank? Buy stuff at Wal-Mart? Pay federal taxes? Or better yet, what if you work for the government? Churchill himself works for a state university. He takes a paycheck from an institution that in all likelihood does military research and is probably ten times more complicit in the actual machinery of war than any junior currency trader.

Lappé really got off track when he implied that Churchill somehow condoned the attacks on the WTC and the Pentagon. In response to misinterpretations such as Lappé's, Churchill laid it out clearly in his essay, "Lessons Not Learned and the War on Free Speech":

It should be emphasized that I applied the 'little Eichmanns' characterization only to those described as 'technicians.' Thus, it was obviously not directed to the children, janitors, food service workers, firemen and random passers-by killed in the 9-11 attack. According to Pentagon logic, was simply part of the collateral damage. Ugly? Yes. Hurtful? Yes. And that's my point. It's no less ugly, painful or dehumanizing a description when applied to Iraqis, Palestinians, or anyone else. If we ourselves do not want to be treated in this fashion, we must refuse to allow others to be similarly devalued and dehumanized in our name.

The fuzzy nature of "collateral damage" is what I think Churchill was really getting at. And Churchill's rejoinder to critics was only clarifying his earlier position, not backpedaling, as Lappé contested. Indeed, Churchill saw the WTC attack as it was — "ugly" and "hurtful." He also thinks such militaristic conceptions, when applied to other US ventures such as Iraq and Palestine, are also "ugly" and "hurtful."

This isn't "twisted logic," as Lappé put it. Or rather, it isn't Churchill's "twisted logic," but the "twisted logic" of the US imperialism. Churchill simply took the WTC massacre, looked at it through the lens of the US government's rationale, and pointed out why the attack on the WTC could be justified militarily (but not morally).

And that is the key point. Churchill's larger parallel is what critics like Lappé seemed unable to stomach: that the US "military" interventions can also be classified as "terror." Churchill's argument, despite what Cooper and Lappé claimed, was, and is, sound. Does his interest "in hearing about" other ways and places the terrorists could have struck to inflict some "penalty ... upon the little Eichmanns" still bother you?

His question, to me, seemed to express that if the assault on the WTC was only about killing innocents: then how can one ignore the fact that the WTC housed a CIA office and a weapons producer? Was this irrelevant or coincidental? Like it or not, Churchill forced us to address his claim that the WTC was a legitimate military target.

Churchill, due to the misinterpretations of his Eichmann statement, later clarified his original essay in a piece titled “On the Injustice of Getting Smeared,” where he writes:

I am not a “defender” of the September 11 attacks, but simply pointing out that if U.S. foreign policy results in massive death and destruction abroad, we cannot feign innocence when some of that destruction is returned. I have never said that people “should” engage in armed attacks on the United States, but that such attacks are a natural and unavoidable consequence of unlawful U.S. policy. As Martin Luther King, quoting Robert F. Kennedy, said, “Those who make peaceful change impossible make violent change inevitable.”

This is not to say that I advocate violence; as a U.S. soldier in Vietnam I witnessed and participated in more violence than I ever wish to see. What I am saying is that if we want an end to violence, especially that perpetrated against civilians, we must take the responsibility for halting the slaughter perpetrated by the United States around the world

Finally, I have never characterized all the September 11 victims as “Nazis.” What I said was that the “technocrats of empire” working in the World Trade Center were the equivalent of “little Eichmanns.” Adolf Eichmann was not charged with direct killing but with ensuring the smooth running of the infrastructure that enabled the Nazi genocide. Similarly, German industrialists were legitimately targeted by the Allies.

The Churchill saga, his firing, and his banishment from public life lead us to the much larger and more important issue: The implications left-wing academics and tenured professors face when they voice publicly their objectionable opinions concerning American Empire. What happened to Ward Churchill was pure intimidation and career assassination, which was spearheaded by Gov. Pataki, exacerbated by Fox News, MSNBC, and condoned by liberals like Marc Cooper. Sadly with the cases of Steven Salaita, George Ciccariello-Maher, and others, it’s clear Churchill’s tale is one that continues to wag all these years later.

JOSHUA FRANK is managing editor of CounterPunch. His most recent book, co-authored with Jeffrey St. Clair, is Big Heat: Earth on the Brink. He can be reached at joshua@counterpunch.org. You can troll him on Twitter [@joshuafrank](https://twitter.com/joshuafrank).

CounterPunch 03.09.2021