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Churchill Affair: A Matter of Hypocrisy

By [Candace de Russy](#)
[Hudson.org](#) | **February 15, 2005**

As the sordid controversy of University of Colorado (UC) professor Ward Churchill plays itself out, what is perhaps the most damaging aspect of it has largely escaped notice: campuses' double standard in First Amendment matters.

Churchill, as widely reported, compared the World Trade Center victims on 9/11 to Nazis and praised their murderers as "gallant...combat teams." In the ensuing national uproar, Hamilton College in New York, which had invited Churchill to speak, decided to cancel the event, stating it had received threats of violence against Churchill and college officers. The college's president, Joan Hinde Stewart, covered her back with bogus free speech proponents by declaring: "We have done our best to protect what we hold most dear, the right to speak, think and study freely." UC initially responded to the scandal by evoking the First Amendment, although the system's Board of Regents later, to its credit, issued an apology "to all Americans" for the professor's comments, acknowledging that they had "brought dishonor" to the university.

It should not go unremarked, however, that Hamilton has one of the many hundreds of speech codes on the nation's campuses. Such official policies spell out what is or is not "politically correct" for students to say, and students may be severely punished for expressing ideas, words and behavior which do not conform with the leftist ideology that dominates higher education.

As for UC, last year it originally banned its College Republicans from holding an "affirmative action bake sale" on campus. As Greg Lukianoff of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) reported, these "sales" have been organized across the nation to satirize affirmative action by charging black and Hispanic students less for baked products than white and Asian students. Even though UC eventually permitted the sale protest to take place, the university did not stop pro-affirmative action students from (as reported in a local newspaper) forming a "mob," surrounding the sale, shoving the organizers, and tearing down their signs. As Lukianoff asks, would UC have allowed such "unlawful intimidation" at a "Free Tibet" event? "Sadly," he concludes, "while universities seem willing to abuse 'intimidation' to punish individuals they dislike, they are unwilling to apply the principle when it is warranted."

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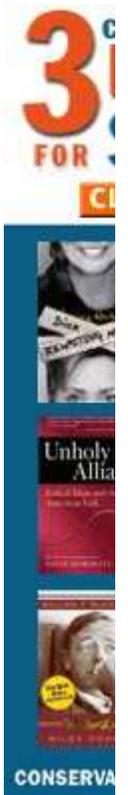
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Thus one of the more sobering lessons of the Churchill disgrace: colleges and universities, whose special mission it is to foster unfettered intellectual expression and exchange, loudly profess the First Amendment but do not in fact truly protect it.

As FIRE also points out, students on campuses across the nation have been stigmatized, forced to submit to psychological counseling, made to participate in "re-education" sessions in diversity sensitivity, and even expelled. FIRE has tracked myriad instances of the theft and destruction of college newspapers by groups, on and off campuses, who disagree with the views expressed therein.

In an article for the *Chicago Sun-Times* titled "Students have appallingly weak grasp of free speech," Thomas Lipscomb reports that less than a dozen of those responsible for these incidents involving newspapers have to date been disciplined or even investigated by college administrators - and that even the mayor of Berkeley, California, had no qualms about confiscating copies of a student newspaper that opposed his election!

As Lipscomb also observes, college administrators until recently excused the campus thought police by referring to conditions laid down by the Office of Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Education. In July 2003, however, a letter of clarification was issued by that office which eliminates this legal excuse.

Nonetheless, Lukianoff notes that "in the past year, I have seen the worst incidents in my career." And, placing blame where blame is due, his colleague at FIRE, David French, attests, "80 to 80% of the cases brought before this organization involve censorship by the left."

Who can blame students for anger and cynicism in face of such hypocrisy in colleges and universities? And what irony, one might add, that the likes of Ward Churchill, while free to spew poisonous hatred of this nation, take refuge in the very freedoms it ensures.

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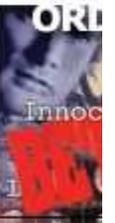
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