

## **AAUP Statement on Professor Ward Churchill Controversy**

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We have witnessed an extraordinary outpouring of criticism aimed both at Professor Ward Churchill of the University of Colorado at Boulder, for his written remarks describing victims of the attacks on September 11, 2001, as "little Eichmanns," and at the invitation for him to speak at Hamilton College in New York. Television commentators urged viewers to write to Hamilton College to condemn what the professor had written and the college's decision to invite him. More than 6,000 e-mail messages were sent to Hamilton College president Joan Hinde Stewart, who described them as "ranging from angry to profane, obscene, violent." The governor of New York wrote a letter of protest to President Stewart and in a dinner banquet described Professor Churchill as a "bigoted terrorist supporter." The governor of Colorado called on the professor to resign from the University of Colorado and, one day later, called for his dismissal. Professor Churchill reports that he and his wife have received more than 100 death threats. The prospect of violence at Hamilton College led the administration there to cancel the visit.

The American Association of University Professors, since its founding in 1915, has been committed to preserving and advancing principles of academic freedom in this nation's colleges and universities. Freedom of faculty members to express views, however unpopular or distasteful, is an essential condition of an institution of higher learning that is truly free. We deplore threats of violence heaped upon Professor Churchill, and we reject the notion that some viewpoints are so offensive or disturbing that the academic community should not allow them to be heard and debated. Also reprehensible are inflammatory statements by public officials that interfere in the decisions of the academic community.

Should serious questions arise about Professor Churchill's fitness to continue at the University of Colorado—the only acceptable basis for terminating a continuing or tenured faculty appointment—those questions should be judged by a faculty committee that affords the essential safeguards of due process, as required by the university's and the Board of Regents' official policies. Special care must be taken, however, to avoid applying harsher standards in such a case, or following less rigorous procedures, because of the statements made by Professor Churchill about the tragic events of September 11, 2001. While members of the academic community are free to condemn what they believe are repugnant views expressed by a faculty member, any charges arising from such statements must be judged by the same standards and procedures that would apply to statements unrelated to the terrorist attacks and the loss of life on that fateful day. We must resist the temptation to judge such statements more harshly because they evoke special anguish among survivors and families of the September 11 victims. The critical test of academic freedom is its capacity to meet even the most painful and offending statements. A college or university campus is, of all places in our society, the most appropriate forum for the widest range of viewpoints.