

Barbara Alice Mann

Barbara Alice Mann, Ph.D., Author and Lecturer, University of Toledo, says:

Ward Churchill is renowned for his leadership in the discipline of Native American Studies, not only in his forthright presentation of Native history, but also for his unflinching review of the lingering effects of European colonialism on North America. Over my several years as a practicing scholar of Native American Studies, I have had countless occasions to note Churchill's citations. In tracking down points referenced by him, I have always found that what he said was there, was there, exactly where and as he said it was. I therefore find the recent, incendiary attacks on his scholarship to be highly dubious, emanating as they do from sources who are entirely unknown in the field and who, up to this point, have few credentials and no accomplishments in Native American Studies. The cavalier misrepresentations of his work now being bandied about can derive from only one of two causes: an inability to read for content, or deliberate misrepresentation.

The first arises from a lack of competence, and the second, from a lack of ethics. I cannot say which is the culprit here, but the purveyors of the invective leveled against Churchill all hie from the right wing, whose agenda it has long been to shout down minorities who challenge any repression of the more seedy aspects of U.S. history, from the seizure of land from Native Americans to the enslavement of Africans.

I am also disturbed by the blatantly racial content of ad hominem attacks I have seen on Churchill. It is bad enough to smear the man, instead of considering his work, but to slur an individual on racial grounds can in no way enhance public discourse. I am old enough to remember Dr. Martin Luther King and the racist vituperation heaped on his head; I am also old enough to remember Senator Joseph McCarthy and his witchhunts. It seems to me that the current political atmosphere has given permission to some of the ugliest elements of American culture to rear their heads again in the public forum. It is incumbent upon Americans to resist the pressure to go with this hateful flow. The alternative is to forfeit what is best in American culture.