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BOOK REVIEW

GREED, GOONS AND GENOCIDE: THE ESSAYS OF WARD CHURCHILL

Peter C. Astor*

From a Native Son: Selected Essays on Indigenism, 1985-1995. By Ward Churchill. Boston: South End Press. 1996. Pp.588. \$22.

The essays selected for *From A Native Son* are an excellent display of the analytical skill and wit Ward Churchill¹ uses in his analysis of a wide range of Indian issues. Readers unfamiliar with Churchill's work should take note that Churchill's pen is not polite, especially when the criticism of actions by the federal government, politicians, and the FBI are involved. While it may appear at times that Churchill's revelations of government involvement in Indian affairs are those of a paranoid, leftist revolutionary, Churchill supports his contentions with numerous sources, lending credence to his many accusations of governmental malfeasance and ignorance.

Churchill's essays in *From A Native Son* sum up the basic struggles and deprivations American Indians have endured "since predator came" in 1492. Although *From a Native Son* contains twenty-three articles and essays written between 1985 and 1995, this review will focus only on a few of those essays, hoping to capture the essence of Churchill's viewpoint on the plight of Native Americans.

There has perhaps been nothing so devastating to American Indian tribes than the taking of their land by the federal government. Churchill's writings define this action as nothing less than genocide; genocide waged against tribes to allow rich, white-owned companies to exploit the natural resources under Indian lands or for other purposes. Churchill demonstrates this "genocide" in the essay *Genocide In Arizona?: The 'Navajo-Hopi Land Dispute' in Perspective*. Churchill explores the history and activity surrounding the Navajo-Hopi Land Settlement Act of 1974, which Churchill refers to as Public Law 93-531,² an act that has the purpose of relocating Navajo and Hopi tribal

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1. Ward Churchill is a professor of Native American studies at the University of Colorado at Boulder. In addition, he is a member of the Governing Council of the Colorado chapter of the American Indian Movement and a national spokesperson for the Leonard Peltier Defense Committee.

2. Navajo-Hopi Land Settlement Act of 1974, Pub. L. No. 93-531, 88 Stat. 1722 (codified as amended at 25 U.S.C. §§ 640d-640d-22 (1994)). For further legal analysis of the Navajo-Hopi land dispute, see James M. Goodman & Gary L. Thompson, *The Hopi-Navajo Land Dispute*, 3 AM. INDIAN L. REV. 397 (1975); Charles F. Wilkinson, *Home Dance, The Hopi, and Black Mesa*

members from an Executive Order Area in northeastern Arizona and northwestern New Mexico. In the 1860s, U.S. troops waged a war against the Dine (Navajo) tribe. The Dine were eventually forced onto a reservation in western Arizona. However, the Dine were pushed eastward into New Mexico when it was discovered the reservation was prime for grazing and farming (p. 107). Land given to the Dine (the Executive Order Area) engulfed land that had already been reserved for the Hopi Tribe. Despite this encroachment by the Dine, the tribes coexisted with little trouble. The Dine, whose living was based on herding sheep, lived out on the land while the agriculturalistic Hopi's lived in permanent villages. (p. 108).

It was when mineral companies wanted to execute mineral leases on Dine land in the 1920s that trouble began. (p. 108). The traditional Dine government rejected any execution of mineral leases, so the companies lobbied, and "the federal government replaced the traditional Dine government with a 'Grand Council' composed of individuals of its own choosing. Being made up of men compulsorily educated off-reservation rather than traditionals, and owing their status to Washington rather than to the people they ostensibly represented, the new council promptly signed the leasing instruments." (p. 108). What followed was a series of political and legal maneuvers that eventually culminated in Public Law 93-351.

After the federal government replaced traditional Indian governments, an elite, acculturated Hopi family, filled up the posts of the newly formed tribal government, which were formed through the Indian Reorganization Act.³ This family owed their allegiance to the federal government and their own pecuniary interests. (p. 110). They hired one John Boyden, a Mormon with ties to many corporate interests, as their tribal attorney. Beginning in the 1950s, Boyden would bring a series of lawsuits to clear the Navajo out of the Executive Order Area. (p. 112).

Being only partially successful with litigation efforts, Boyden tried to get legislation passed, with the help of the mineral interests lobby, that would clear out the Navajo tribe, and give outright ownership to the Hopi tribe. This was the 1970s, and there was an energy crisis. The tribal land was rich in mineral deposits, a ripe field for strip-mining. Churchill writes that politicians such as Barry Goldwater and Sam Steiger "saw a way to put their state on the energy map of 'national interest.'" (p. 115). Thus, legislation was introduced with the ultimate purpose of getting the Dine and their livestock off the rich land. When it became apparent that legislators would not be willing to commit political suicide by carrying out the forced migration of the Dine, Boyden hired a public relations firm to fabricate a scenario, whereby it would appear that the Navajo and Hopi were warring over land ownership in the

Coal: Conquest and Endurance in the American Southwest, BYU L. REV. 449 (1996).

3. Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, ch. 576, 48 Stat. 984 (1934) (codified as amended at 25 U.S.C. §§461-479 (1994)).

Joint Use Area (JUA), a section of the Executive Order Area. (p. 115). Churchill writes that the PR firm would reinforce the range violence by getting snapshots of "out-building and junk vehicles abandoned at various locations in the JUA. These were subsequently used for target practice by teenaged 'plinker' (a common enough practice throughout rural America), and were therefore often riddled with bullet holes." (p. 116). After bombarding the media with pictures of a war torn land, Congress, by the prompting of key legislators from Arizona (Barry Goldwater among them), had to take action and divide and separate these "warring tribes."

Thus, Public Law 93-351 was enacted, with the purpose of relocating both Navajo and Hopi tribal members occupying the JUA. As it turned out, there were very few Hopi living in the JUA, (p. 115) so it was primarily the Dine who were suffering the ill effects of relocation. By "the mid-'80s, relocatee reports of increased physical illness, stress and alcoholism, and family breakup were endemic. At least one member of the relocation commission itself had publicly denounced the program as being "'as bad as . . . the concentration camps in World War II,' and then resigned his position." (p. 126).

Throughout this essay and others in *From A Native Son*, Churchill paints a picture of greed; the greed of corporate America exploiting Indians for their own gain, willing to use any means possible to get what they want, whether it is putting politicians in their pocket or concocting fire fights. However, the greed did not stop with just the corporations.

In *Death Squads in the United States: Confessions of a Government Terrorist*, Churchill recounts the "reign of terror" in the early 1970s at the Pine Ridge Sioux Reservation in South Dakota, which is the home of the Oglala Lakota tribe. Churchill writes that the deaths and injuries of American Indian Movement (AIM) members, traditionals, and FBI agents that occurred over a span of 3 years had its basis in a government desire to control land reserved for Indians. As it turns out, the reservation rests upon rich uranium deposits, among other minerals, in which the government has a great interest. (p. 237). Uranium deposits were particularly concentrated on the reservation under the Sheep Mountain Gunnery Range. The connection between the government's desire for the uranium and the violence that ensued on the reservation is former Pine Ridge Tribal President Dick Wilson and his GOON (Guardians of the Oglala Nations) squads. Wilson was able to fund the GOONs through an initial BIA grant to form a ranger group on the Pine Ridge reservation, and by subsequently misappropriating money intended for safety and housing programs. (p. 237). The

quid pro quo seems originally to have been that Wilson would receive quiet federal support in running Pine Ridge as a personal fiefdom in exchange for his cooperation in casting an appearance of legitimacy upon an illegal transfer of the Sheep Mountain

Gunnery Range—approximately one-eighth of the total reservation area—from Indian to federal ownership. (p. 237).

This transfer was, of course, opposed by traditional Oglalas. Churchill writes that when "AIM moved in at the request of the traditionals, the ante went up appreciably, and the GOONs shifted from intimidation tactics to outright death squad activities" (p. 237).

What ensued over the next three years was a virtual bloodbath. Between mid-1973 through mid-1976 at least sixty-nine AIM members were murdered, and about "350 others suffered serious physical assaults, including gunshot wounds and stabbings, beatings administered with baseball bats and tire irons, having their cars rammed and run off the road at high speed, and their homes torched as they slept." (p. 233). Those responsible for the bulk of the murders and beatings were, of course, the GOON squads. (p. 236).

Churchill relies heavily on the interview of Duane Brewer, a professed GOON during the "reign of terror," to describe the general organization of the GOONs as well as the alleged GOON/FBI alliance. Brewer describes GOONs as being "hard core" squads organized into groups of ten to fifteen members. (p. 239). One GOON, for instance, earned the nickname "Charlie Manson," and would later be sent to prison for holding a gun to the head of a tribal police officer in 1978. (p. 264, n. 33).

More controversial is Churchill's revelation, based on the Brewer interview and other sources, that the FBI was not only aware of GOON-promulgated violence, but went so far as to help arm the GOONs with high-tech weaponry. (pp. 245-46). One method of the arms transfer from FBI to GOONs is right out of a spy thriller. Brewer states that "most of the rest of the hard-to-get gear came in clandestine fashion from FBI personnel and/or 'black drug-gun dealers' in Rapid City motel rooms, usually at the local Holiday Inn." (p. 246). As to why the FBI would go to so much trouble to help the GOONs, "Brewer was unequivocal: 'They just didn't want them [AIM] people to survive. I thought that maybe they was hoping that we would just kill them all, you know?'" (p. 247).

Churchill further supports his contentions noting that the FBI alone has the authority to investigate murders on Indian reservations. However, the FBI failed to solve any of the AIM murders, "despite the fact that in a number of instances the assailants were identified by one or more eyewitnesses." (p. 234).

The widespread violence would eventually culminate in the killing of two FBI officers at Oglala on June 26, 1975, out of which came the much celebrated trial of Northwest AIM leader Leonard Peltier.⁴ Churchill writes

4. For a recounting of Leonard Peltier's trial and subsequent appeals, as well as a recounting of the events surrounding the Oglala firefight, see Joseph C. Hogan, III, Note, *Guilty Until Proven Innocent: Leonard Peltier and the Sublegal System*, 34 B.C. L. REV. 901 (1993).

that by "the spring of 1975, the level of GOON violence on Pine Ridge was so pronounced—and the lack of FBI response so conspicuous— that local traditionalists requested that AIM undertake a policy of armed self-defense in order that opposition to Wilson might continue." (p. 250). Churchill contends that the FBI "seized upon this situation as affording the opportunity to provoke an incident spectacular enough to bring about public acceptance of another massive paramilitary invasion of Pine Ridge." (p. 250). Churchill chalks up the deaths of the officers, Williams and Coler, as the FBI's plan going awry. However, he writes that the Oglala firefight served a purpose for the FBI: getting AIM to retreat from the reservation. (p. 251). In addition, Churchill writes that the incident at Oglala prompted a Senate committee that was going to conduct an investigation of "the FBI's anti-AIM campaign" to postpone that investigation indefinitely. (p. 251). Finally, Churchill noted that Dick Wilson transferred the Sheep Mountain Gunnery Range over to the National Forest Service a few days after the firefight. (p. 252).

The bulk of essays in *From A Native Son* address cultural issues affecting Native Americans. Churchill attacks these issues with substantial bite, wit and sarcasm. In *Spiritual Hucksterism: The Rise of the Plastic Medicine Man*, Churchill attacks non-Indian writers such as Carlos Casteneda and Jay Marks for distorting Indian spiritualism to make a buck. (p. 355). Churchill, quoting a traditional Indian chief, writes that mass-market spiritualism causes non-Indians to reject genuine Indian spiritualism coming from traditional Indians. (p. 356).

In *Indians "R" Us: Reflections on the "Men's Movement"*, Churchill stabs at Robert Bly, leader of the Men's Movement by characterizing this Movement as a feeble attempt by white males to get in touch with their true masculinity by ripping off Indian ceremonies. Churchill does not hold back when he begins his essay:

There are few things in this world I can conceive as being more instantly ludicrous than a prosperously middle-aged lump of pudgy Euroamerican verse-monger, an apparition looking uncannily like some weird cross between the Mall- O-Milk Marshmallow Man and Pillsbury's Doughboy, suited up in a grotesque mismatch combining pleated Scottish tweeds with a striped Brookes Brothers shirt and Southwest Indian print vest, peering myopically along his nose through coke-bottle steelrim specs while holding forth in stilted and somewhat nasal tonalities on the essential virtues of virility, of masculinity, of being or becoming a "warrior." (p. 367).

Churchill writes that Bly and his Men's Movement is outright degrading to Indians, stealing, distorting, and perverting their culture.

Churchill's essays have a valuable contribution to the study and understanding of Native American issues. He criticizes and analyzes

unsparingly, allowing him to get deep inside an issue and reveal its heart so that its pleading and pounding cannot go unheard. His aim is true, and it is best summed up in *Indians "R" Us*. Churchill writes that Euroamericans should go beyond viewing people such as Bly as kooks or crackpots, but as menaces instead. Indeed, Churchill contends that "only then will we be able to say that the 'Indians 'R' Us' brand of cultural appropriation and genocide has passed, or at least is passing, and that Euroamericans are finally coming to terms with who they've been and, much more importantly, with who and what it is they can become." (p. 396).

