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The free-speech chickens come home to roost at CU.

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BODY:

On the first day of school I awoke with a sick feeling in my stomach. It did not hurt, it just made me feel weak. The sun did not sing as it came over the hill. -- **Bless Me, Ultima**

By now, University of Colorado president Betsy Hoffman must long for the days when all she had to worry about was a sex-recruiting scandal in the athletic department, and a football coach with a big mouth, and a dead student with a not-big-enough tolerance for alcohol. As she heads off to her increasingly smudged ivy tower, she must fondly recall her days as a medieval scholar, when her toughest task was parsing the meaning of "cunt" in *The Canterbury Tales*.

Because now controversy has CU by the short hairs and isn't letting go. Or, as Chaucer might say (and did), "He made a grab and caught her by the queint."

This is officially Higher Education Awareness Week, but the whole world is already all too aware of Colorado's flagship educational institution. No matter how many postcards student leaders send to state lawmakers with the message that higher education can't take any more budget cuts -- one of several pathetic "positive" efforts that CU is pushing -- legislators are very clear about one thing they'd like to see on the chopping block.

So what if shutting up Ward Churchill would also shut down free speech?

"We have to get the hell out'a here...this hick town is killing me." -- **Bless Me, Ultima**

While the Western Slope town of Norwood found Rudolfo Anaya's 1972 **Bless Me, Ultima** too racy, too obscene to allow in its schools -- it was "garbage," said Bob Conder, the superintendent of the Norwood School District, who didn't finish reading the book before banning it last week -- Boulder considered the novel mild enough to choose it for "One Book, One Boulder," the first community-wide reading event announced last month.

But then, three fictional murders, a whorehouse and a dozen or so swear words are nothing for a town with an unsolved child-beauty-queen murder that still makes headlines, a former CU employee busted for using a university cell phone to call an escort service, and these immortal words from Gary Barnett about the football team's female kicker: "Katie was not only a girl, she was terrible. There's no other way to say it."

I wanted to ask her immediately about the magic in the letters, but that would be rude and so I was quiet. I was fascinated by the black letters that formed on the paper and made my name. -- **Bless Me, Ultima**

CU's chickens have come home to roost. Over ten years ago, the National American Indian Movement, led by Clyde and Vernon Bellecourt, complained about "wannabe" Indians like ethnic-studies professor Ward Churchill -- who at the time was claiming he was one-sixteenth Cherokee and today is taking the fifth on that score. The Bellecourts even demanded that CU officials review Churchill's credentials, to determine whether he'd received tenure through deception by "billing himself as an American Indian writer, scholar and artist."

But CU didn't do the requested review then, and so last Thursday -- over a decade late and many, many dollars short -- the CU regents ordered Interim Chancellor Phil DiStefano to conduct essentially the same investigation and report back to Hoffman by mid-March. The regents also apologized to the entire nation for Churchill's statements, yet failed to recognize that they had much more to apologize for.

"I appreciate the fact that the CU regents have taken the necessary first step in the formal evaluation of Ward Churchill's employment status," said Governor Bill Owens, who quickly showed his appreciation by using the Churchill controversy to boost his national profile on shows like The O'Reilly Factor. "However, I deplore the behavior displayed by some students at the regents' meeting. Their abhorrent behavior underscores the culture of violence that can be spawned by inflammatory speeches and essays such as those by Mr. Churchill."

That sort of behavior and speech should be saved for the football field, where it belongs.

It clearly doesn't belong at the Universal Memorial Center, where CU had canceled, then rescheduled a speech that Churchill was set to make Tuesday night, a speech in which he discussed his 9/11 essay, "Some People Push Back; On the Justice of Roosting Chickens." That essay had escaped the notice of CU's thought police for more than three years, even though excerpts were published in the spring/summer 2002 issue of Green Anarchy, an environmentalist publication that also contained "Hit Where It Hurts," an essay by Ted Kaczynski. Churchill's screed made the Unabomber's ramblings look mild; about the only thing he didn't suggest was that he'd killed JonBenet. Even so, it wasn't until an enterprising Hamilton College student publicized "Roosting Chickens" that CU caught on -- and the controversy caught fire.

Even as Churchill's supporters threatened to sue the school so that the show could go on -- and on -- CU was preparing for its next "positive" push: an appearance Wednesday by freshmen launching a campaign to educate students about the dangers of excessive behavior fueled by alcohol, drugs and violence, freshmen who say they will no longer tolerate their school's degree value being tarnished by a "party-school reputation."

Tarnished by a party-school, rather than a war-party, reputation? Oh, those were the days.

"I don't know, except that people, grown-ups and kids, seem to want to hurt each other -- and it's worse when they're in a group." -- **Bless Me, Ultima**

When free speech is stifled, it explodes elsewhere. Last week, CU's Department of Environmental Studies voted to end classes taught by longtime instructor Adrienne Anderson at the end of the semester, citing budget cuts as the reason.

Anderson doesn't buy it. "While CU President Elizabeth Hoffman has touted the 'University Without Walls' concept," she argues, "and service learning programs are promoted as a viable means for involving students in community-based service as an important component of their educational experience, one must wonder why walls go up when certain practices and policies have been revealed, especially when some of CU's major donors' practices and pollution records are at issue, along with failed oversight by the Governor and his agencies."

No, Anderson doesn't buy the budget-cut explanation -- and thanks to CU's boneheaded behavior, she doesn't have to.

It was like a tomb, without the kids the schoolhouse was a giant, quiet tomb with the moaning wind crying around its edges. It was strange how everything had been so full of life and funny and in a way sad, and now everything was quiet. Our footsteps echoed in the hall. -- **Bless Me, Ultima**

Ward Churchill's latest book, *On the Justice of Roosting Chickens*, which contains the offensive essay of the same name, recently won an honorable mention in the Gustavus Myers Human Rights Award. "The bottom line of my argument," Churchill says in a statement posted last week on the website of CU's Department of Ethnic Studies, the department he'd headed until three days earlier, "is that the best and perhaps only way to prevent 9/11-style attacks on the U.S. is for American citizens to compel their government to comply with

the rule of law. The lesson of Nuremberg is that this is not only our right, but our obligation. To the extent we shirk this responsibility, we, like the 'Good Germans' of the 1930s and '40s, are complicit in its actions and have no legitimate basis for complaint when we suffer the consequences. This, of course, includes me, personally, as well as my family, no less than anyone else."

He should have won the award for revisionist history.

Still, when the chickens come home to roost, CU's response remains chickenshit.

"I will tell you as I see it. I think most of the things we call evil are not evil at all; it is just that we don't understand those things and so we call them evil. And we fear evil only because we do not understand it." --
Bless Me, Ultima

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