



Photos by Dean Krake/Rocky Mountain News

Glenn Morris, co-director of the American Indian Movement in Colorado, carries a staff as he and Wayne Barnett, right, arrive at the Fort Lewis forum. AIM members walked out of the program.

Harsh words, little drama mark dreaded racial forum

Indian activist walks out after calling debate with Klansman criminal event

By Michael Romano

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DURANGO — A long-awaited college forum on racial awareness was punctuated Tuesday by a jaw-dropping history of the KKK and a dramatic walkout by an Indian activist who characterized the debate as "criminal."

Ward Churchill, co-director of the state chapter of the American Indian Movement, stormed off the stage at Fort Lewis College after a 10-minute tirade, leading about a dozen followers from a sparse crowd of some 300 ticket-holders in the gymnasium.

"All speech is not protected — and genocidal advocacy certainly is not," said Churchill, glancing at fellow debater Shawn Slater, the leader of Colorado's Ku Klux Klan. "I will not knowingly participate in a criminal event. I'm calling this event criminal."

"I call on members of the audience and members of the media to join me."

Once Churchill and his supporters marched out, a largely homogeneous crowd of Anglo students sat through a rambling, 15-minute history of the Klan delivered by a nervous, wooden Slater, one of four scheduled participants.

The 25-year-old Auroran, dressed in a gray, double-breasted suit and a tie, invited the crowd to write to the KKK's national headquarters in Arkansas and welcomed one and all to join the annual "triple-cross burnings."

"We can take America back —



Shawn Slater of Aurora, state Ku Klux Klan leader, smiles at Indian activist's criticism.

it is our birthright," he said in conclusion, drawing giggles from the crowd. "Equal rights for whites."

Slater, a neo-Nazi who embraces an "America First" campaign, also derided what he called a nationwide tax on food designed exclusively to benefit Jews.

"Ninety-seven percent of America is unwittingly paying taxes for Jews," he said. "This is not racist. Why pay taxes for these rabbis to go around the country, to buy new cars."

Churchill, a Creek-Cherokee who heads the Indian studies program at the University of Colorado-Boulder, abruptly left the forum to attend a Unity Fest celebration that served as an alternative for students. Almost 400 people attended the celebration at

a hotel north of town.

"This is the puffball Klan," Churchill said of Slater before his departure. "This is the polyester Klan, this is the punk Klan."

At a press conference before the forum, Churchill and Slater exchanged angry words.

"You're just upset," Slater told Churchill, "because the great white Europeans came over here and took your country!"

Slater, asked about the Holocaust during a question and answer period that followed the forum, said, "I didn't live in the 1940s, so I don't care."

Leah Dimarco, a member of the political science club that invited Slater, said afterward: "The aim was to make Shawn Slater look unintelligent. I think our objective has been met."

Judith Berg, former wife of slain talk-show host Alan Berg and one of the four panelists, briefly lost her composure after Slater's comments on the Holocaust.

"I'm ill," she said. "That's ignorant. I'm stumped for words, probably for the first time in my life."

As Slater was leaving, a male student with a pony tail shouted: "Shawn, you did a great job of proving yourself a hypocrite."

"Get a haircut!" Slater replied.

Prepared for a worst-case scenario that never developed, police directed 150 law-enforcement officers and about 50 more volunteer security guards. The event attracted 65 reporters. The forum was anticlimactic for the college and police.

"It's a little bit Kafkaesque," said college president Joel Jones. "I didn't sleep much last night. I wish I had."