
SOCIETY

'Correct' Suppression

"A Quiet Threat to Academic Freedom" by James S. Coleman, in *National Review* (Mar. 18, 1991), 150 E. 35th St., New York, N.Y. 10016.

Whence comes the most serious threat to academic freedom? According to University of Chicago sociologist James S. Coleman, it comes not from craven university administrators or a philistine public, nor even from "politically correct" students, but from the very highest priests of the temples of learning—the professors. "There are taboos on certain topics," he says, and when the taboos are violated, "one's own colleagues" impose sanctions. Research on "inappropriate" questions is suppressed—often in advance by the researcher himself.

Among the foremost taboos confronting sociologists, Coleman says, are "those concerning questions of differences between genders or differences among races which might be genetic in origin." Inquiries into homosexuality that start with the premise that it is "less natural" than heterosexuality also are forbidden.

Coleman, whose own research during the 1960s on race and schooling was extremely influential, offers a personal example of self-censorship. The study he directed for the then-U.S. Office of Education—the famous Coleman Report of 1966—indicated (among other things) that black children did better in schools whose students were predominantly mid-

dle-class. *That* finding was widely cited by plaintiffs in school desegregation cases. But the research uncovered something else: Students' verbal achievement was related to their teachers' performance on vocabulary tests. *This* attracted scant attention, even though it might well have had an important implication. Black teachers from the South's formerly segregated systems were generally "less well prepared, less qualified, with lower verbal skills, than their white counterparts." Black teachers, in short, might not be good for black students. Because of this uncomfortable possibility, Coleman and his colleagues did not pursue the question. And that, he says, may have contributed to "the sacrifice of educational opportunity for many children, most of them black . . ."

In general, Coleman says, any research that would hinder policies "intended to aid the poor, or to aid blacks or Hispanics or women" is likely to win disapproval. The fact that the consequences of such policies may be quite different from the intentions behind them is why dispassionate research often meets with censure. It is also why such research is necessary. Academic communities, Coleman insists, should put a higher value on freedom of inquiry than on equality.

Dances with Romance

"Early Native North American Responses to European Contact: Romantic versus Rationalistic Interpretations" by Bruce G. Trigger, in *The Journal of American History* (Mar. 1991), 1125 Atwater St., Ind. Univ., Bloomington, Ind. 47401.

When Christopher Columbus came upon what he called San Salvador in 1492, the natives of that island thought he had fallen from the sky. As native North Americans encountered the Europeans who arrived in the century after Columbus, did they perceive them in much the same fashion? Were the Indians, in other words, utterly

innocent victims whose pristine cultural and religious beliefs long prevented them from even beginning to comprehend the behavior of the rapacious white men? Some specialists have recently lent support to that view. As late as the 17th century, say a growing number of historians and anthropologists, European goods still