
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 . . ."

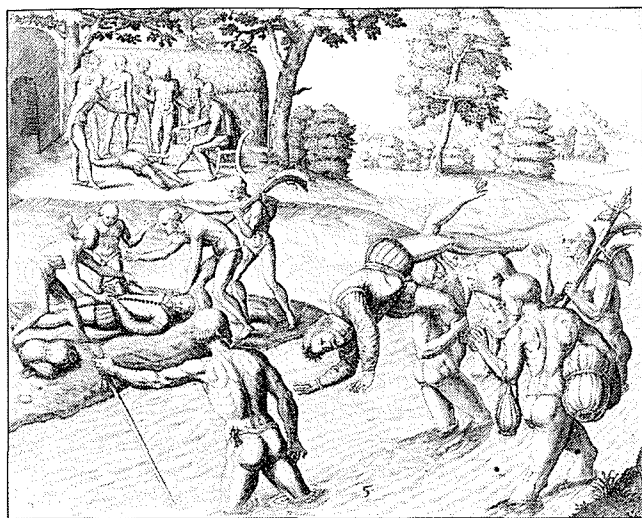
In general, Coleman says, any research that would hinder policies "intended to aid the poor, or to aid blacks or Hispanics or women" is likely to win disapproval. The fact that the consequences of such policies may be quite different from the intentions behind them is why dispassionate research often 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



In this engraving from Theodore de Bry's *Historia Americanae sive Novi Orbis* (1596), Indians prepare to test the immortality of a Spaniard by holding him under water.

had no practical worth—only symbolic value—to the native peoples who took them in trade. But Trigger, an anthropologist at McGill University, contends that these “romantic” interpretations do not stand up to scrutiny.

It is true that, according to Indian folk traditions, native North Americans, on first seeing European ships, believed them to be, in Trigger's words, “floating islands inhabited by supernatural spirits.” These strange beings appeared with increasing frequency, giving away trinkets, carrying off natives, and leaving behind diseases.

But when the initial encounters gave way to more direct and frequent ones, Trigger argues, the native Americans before long came to see the newcomers “as human beings with whom . . . they could do business.” By the beginning of the 17th century, he notes, Europeans and Indians were engaging in trade in practical goods

more than in glass beads or liquor. “The first Indians who traded with Europeans may have hung metal axes and hoes on their chests as ornaments and used stockings as tobacco pouches,” he says. But the Indians came to recognize that some European tools and other goods were more useful than their own. By the 1620s, the Montagnais at Tadoussac, near the mouth of the St. Lawrence River, “were using large quantities of clothing, hatchets, iron arrowheads, needles, sword blades, ice picks, knives, kettles, and preserved foods that they purchased from the French.” Similarly, the Mohawks, near what is now Albany, in the 1630s were buying a wide range of clothing and metalware,

and the Hurons, further inland, were purchasing knives, axes, and arrowheads.

The fur-trading Hurons and their neighbors probably continued to believe in the supernatural powers of the French, Trigger says. “Yet in their eyes this did not make Europeans intrinsically different from the Indians, who were also able to practice witchcraft and whose amulets and relations with appropriate spirits enabled them to hunt, fish, and move about on snowshoes and in canoes more effectively than Europeans did.” Even though the Hurons were becoming dependent on the French, the Huron chiefs felt confident they could outwit them.

In the end, of course, the Hurons and other Indians were overwhelmed. But this was not because they failed to realistically understand European behavior, Trigger says. The native Americans grasped all too well what was happening to them.

Underground Disorder

“Reclaiming the Subway” by George L. Kelling, in *NY* (Winter 1991), 42 E. 71st St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

New York City boasts the country's largest subway system—as much a symbol of the city as the bagel and the Empire State

Building—and for nearly two decades now, authorities there have been trying to reclaim it for the populace. After years of