

Alien challenge to tenure

EDITORIAL

Tenure is safe for another year in South Carolina; a bill to abolish it didn't escape a House committee. Meanwhile, the limits — or lack of them — to academic freedom, which tenure is intended to guard, are under scrutiny at Harvard University. At that Olympia of professorial life, a peer committee is reviewing the work of a tenured psychiatry professor who studies and writes about alien abductions.

The year-long review of John Mack's work, which includes *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens*, has upset academia. Some say investigating Mack impinges on his academic freedom to explore any subject of interest. Others question his methodology, scholarship and ethics in treating and writing about

his patients. The people he treats believe they were kidnapped by creatures from outer space and subjected to medical experiments or forced to have sex for their sperm or eggs.

Mack, who won a Pulitzer Prize in 1977 for his psychoanalytic biography of Lawrence of Arabia, has appeared on "Larry King Live" and "The Oprah Winfrey Show" to defend his patients. He has said he believes his patients are describing something that "has authentically happened to them."

Some Americans have a firsthand reason to agree. According to a 1992 Roper Poll, commissioned by a group who believe in alien abduction, 2 percent of Americans claim they have been abducted by beings from outer space.