

HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW THE

BILL OF RIGHTS?

A poll of high-school students revealed a poor understanding of this famous document which guarantees our individual liberties; see how well you do on this test

By THEODORE IRWIN



MOST INDEPENDENCE DAY speakers will mention the Bill of Rights. It's a tradition. But unfortunately it's almost equally certain that a large part of their audience will not really know what they are talking about.

The Bill of Rights, which forms the first 10 amendments to the Constitution, is the foundation stone of American democracy; it states our essential rights which cannot (or should not) be violated by the government or our fellow citizens. Yet this 462-word document is still widely misunderstood 171 years after its adoption.

For instance, there's an "appalling disregard" for the Bill of Rights in the curricula of the nation's high schools, according to the National Assembly on Teaching the Principles of the Bill of Rights, a newly formed group of which Supreme Court Justices William J. Brennan, Jr., and William O. Douglas are honorary chairmen.

When 12,000 high-school students across the nation were polled by the Purdue Opinion Panel on their attitudes toward everyday problems involving civil rights, the results revealed a serious lack of understanding of the basic document of our republic. These are some of the positions taken by teen-agers:

- Three out of five students favored censorship of books, newspapers, and magazines.
- Two out of five said there should be restrictions on the right to vote.
- One-fourth believed the government ought to prohibit some people from making speeches.
- One out of three was willing to abolish the right of petition.
- 39 percent believed that a person who refuses to testify against himself should "either be made to talk or severely punished."

The Purdue report noted: "The education of these young people missed the whole point of the Bill of Rights. These rights are intended to protect every individual against arbitrary and capricious judgment of government officials. Any discrimination against individuals is the entering wedge of ultimate tyranny."

Another study, covering 1,000 University of California students, indicated that 56 percent of the students would deny some accused persons the right to confront their accusers and a similar number would allow some persons to be tried twice for the same offense.

Shocking, you say? But how do *you* feel our rights should be interpreted today?