

Understanding Liberty

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Chief Justice Warren once expressed doubt at the height of the McCarthy madness, that the Bill of Rights would be adopted without great controversy if it were submitted to the American people then. There was reason for the doubt. It lies in the pathetically low level of understanding among Americans of their richest heritage—the tradition of individual liberty protected against governmental invasion by a written Constitution.

Columbia University has announced a new enterprise that should help to correct this condition—the formation of a Center of Research and Education in American Liberties. Under the auspices of the Center, scholars in law, the social and behavioral sciences, and in the humanities will meet over the next two years to study the realities of liberty, equality and justice in America. Their findings will be used to develop new, and more imaginative, instructional programs. Institutes and courses will be developed to train teachers and adult education leaders. And this program will be supplemented by outstanding civic leaders who will participate actively in the discussion of what American liberties mean today.

Columbia deserves great gratitude for tackling this vital educational assignment. It is carrying into effect a hope expressed more than a year ago by Justice Brennan for the establishment of "a permanent center or institute for the teaching of the principles of the Bill of Rights . . . located at one of our great universities that already has graduate schools both of law and of education." The enduring values of the American past can be carried effectively into the future only by oncoming generations that appreciate and understand them.