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Considering the manner in which it has been either ignored for decades in our public schools and mainstream media as irrelevant or dismissed outright as a relic of obsolete confederal thinking, it is perhaps an encouragement that one in five Americans knows what the 10th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution does.

The 20 percent figure was produced in a national survey conducted for the Bill of Rights Institute by Harris Interactive. Overall, the Harris survey found that 55 percent of those interviewed thought education is one of the five freedoms guaranteed to all American citizens by the First Amendment. (Go ahead, ask yourself if you know what those five fundamental freedoms are?)

The survey was conducted as part of the institute's commemoration last week of Bill of Rights Day on Dec. 15.

Perhaps most distressing is this finding from the survey: Nearly a third of those interviewed thought Karl Marx's dictum about taking from each according to his ability to each according to his need is found in the Constitution, The Federalist Papers, or the Declaration of Independence.

What such data show is two-fold: First, public schools stopped many years ago teaching the Constitution and the rest of the founding documents and concepts, so nobody should be surprised to find widespread ignorance and misconception among so many people.

Second, our politicians are too often full of sound and fury about the Constitution and the founding principles it embodied, but their bombast signifies nothing because their actions betray their utter lack of respect for the document.

How serious a problem is this: On [A More Perfect Blog](#), the official blog of the Bill of Rights Institute, Rachel Gillespie reminds us of what James Madison said:

"Should we be worried that Americans do so poorly when quizzed about the Bill of Rights? In a letter to a friend expressing his belief in a strong educational system, James Madison wrote:

"'Knowledge will forever govern ignorance; and a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.'

"And what might be the consequence of a citizenry disarmed of the knowledge of their own rights? We can look again to Madison for an answer, this time to his address at the 1788 Virginia Convention:

"Since the general civilization of mankind, I believe there are more instances of the abridgement of freedom of the people, by gradual and silent encroachments of those in power, than by violent and sudden usurpations."

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