

To Assemble Peaceably

I'M worried about education in these United States. Current events would seem to indicate that the teaching of American history is not being done well. Too many people seem ignorant of the rudiments of the subject. Take the Constitution, for example. Too few people remember, if they ever learned, that this is the foundation of our way of life.

The first ten amendments to that document, which have been in force since Dec. 15, 1791, are properly called "The Bill of Rights." I consider it a public service, an act of public education to reprint the First Amendment in full:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

Those words merit reading, rereading, and pondering by every citizen. Particularly pertinent at this moment in time are the words guaranteeing "the right of the people peaceably to assemble." There is nothing, I repeat, nothing in those words that would limit that right in any way. It is a right fully and freely given. Those who would deny that right, regardless of the pretext they might give, are undermining a bulwark of American freedom.

THERE is nothing in the First Amendment to suggest that the right of assembly should be limited to those who agree with the majority, or are uncritical of our economic system, or concur with every aspect of national policy.

The people, all the people, have a right to gather, to protest, to make their dissatisfactions known. This is a basic law of the land, yet some persons in authority seem unaware of it.

Some months ago a group of young people opposed to the war wanted to have a peace



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rally. Those who govern this city went to great length to prevent the people from peaceably assembling. A judge had to remind the opposition of the First Amendment before the rally could be held.

AFTER a group of dissenters, "Vietnam Veterans Against the War," had secured permission to have a rally at Valley Forge, benighted patriots deficient in their knowledge of constitutional rights tried to have to permis-

sion withdrawn.

During the same period, efforts were made to stop the Black Panther-sponsored convention.

Fortunately, the governor of the commonwealth and the president of Temple University had a clearer understanding of the First Amendment than their critics. Both deserve the gratitude of those who believe the foundations of government must not be undercut by the hysteria of the moment.