

The importance of civil disobedience

Government



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Gandhi, Martin Luther King Junior, Rosa Parks, Cesar Chavez. Each of these people were leaders and role models to different civil rights movements. However, they all share similar views on how society should react to oppression. The motive behind each and every protest in American History is civil disobedience, an idea thought up by Thoreau while he spent the night in jail, due to tax evasion. He believed “ that government is best which governs least. ” 1 His revolutionary idea weaved its way into the fabric of American life.

As free people, we see it as our right to protest any laws we see unjust. In a society which controls, the need to rebel will always be present. This theme is abundant throughout the many different time periods in *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail*. Early American newspapers were often opinion based. These articles slowly became less and less fond of the King and his laws. For example, the *Pennsylvania Gazette* contains many articles pertaining to the injustice of the stamp act. This particular paper contains a segment from a meeting with the Sons of Liberty.

The first point states, “ we will cheerfully, to the utmost of our power, defend all of our just rights and privileges, as they have always been heretofore allowed us” 2. The Sons of Liberty make it clear to the public that no injustices will go unnoticed. The paper continues, “ that we will oppose all attempts to deprive us of our rights and privileges as Englishmen. And therefore will at all events oppose the operation of that defeatable thing called the Stamp Act, in this colony” 3 This article is one of the first to take a stand against oppression.

The Sons of Liberty published many columns similar to this one in papers throughout the colonies. Although these articles may seem aggressive the motive is still passive. “ That we will, in all cases, behave ourselves peaceably as far as our influence extends, we will preserve the public peace... ” 4 They are recognized as pioneers in the field of civil disobedience.

Thoreau can be thought of as the father of civil disobedience, turning what was once a bloodbath for power into a peaceful yet effective plan for change.

In all of his writing it is clear that Thoreau is not fond of American government, or any other government. Henry Thoreau once said, “ any fool can make a rule, and any fool will mind it” 5. This quote summarizes how Thoreau felt about politics. It is frustrating how one fool can pass a law which effects everybody, however what Henry could not stand, is how the majority of people would stand by and let it happen. Anyone who has studied Thoreau would know that his biggest pet peeves are the government and conformity. He believed that “ disobedience is the true foundation of liberty.

The obedient must be slaves” 6. As Americans, we deserve the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The dictionary definition of liberty is “ freedom from arbitrary or despotic government or control. ” 7 This means that we deserve the right to rebel against government control. Maybe Thoreau was not as revolutionary as some thought, he was simply quoting the Constitution of the United States of America. Civil disobedience was catching on in the colonies as taxes got higher.

However the phenomenon was not as popular in Britain. “ It has been reported to the King that several writings... nder the title of Revolutions, or

Protests or different bodies and communities, carry with them an air of disobedience and revolt. These writings are in their form-illegal-in the effect that they are intended to produce-fallacious superiority over the royal authority” 8. These letters were a response to articles such as the one put forth by the Sons of Liberty. The King would send ultimatum after ultimatum, attempting to stop civil disobedience from becoming mainstream.

“ The King being in his council, orders that the deliberations and protests of his courts and other assemblies made since the publication of his laws of the 8th of May... articularly officers of the courts, or other judges, to afflict just penalties... ” 9 Yet his threats did not stop the rebellion from coming. Like previously stated, in a society which controls, the need to rebel will always be present. Through thehard workof Henry Thoreau, the Sons of Liberty, and all those who opposed British rule, America is now a separate and free country. However as long as a government controls the way people live there will always be a need to rebel. Society’s right to free speech is essential in the preservation of freedom.

Hopefully citizens will always see the positive outcomes of peaceful rebellion, it has and continues to shape the way our country works. The American society would not be what it is today without people crossing the line in order to show better ideas that will benefit the future that we live in today. Martin Luther King proved this when he crossed the line and protested in order to eliminate segregation. Now Americans can live freely together, in a society that rebelled, and is now better off than it ever has been before.