

How henry david  
thoreaus influence is  
evident today  
philosophy essay



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Henry David Thoreau preached the prospects of being non-violent and described the effects wars have had on humans as a whole. To give some background information, David Thoreau was born on 1817 in Concord, Massachusetts. When he was around the age of sixteen, he enrolled himself in Harvard's Latin, Greek, grammar composition, and philosophy classes. While at college he soon became engrossed in Ralph Waldo Emerson's famous writings. Unknown to him, Ralph Waldo Emerson would become a leading example in his decision making and overall, his friend. Henry David Thoreau graduated in 1837 and became a school teacher. During the year 1841 he had the pleasure of living with Ralph Waldo Emerson. While with him he grew in knowledge and thus set off on his own voyage. He soon moved to Walden Ponds where he lived for about two years. During a trip into town he was thrown into jail for refusing to pay a poll tax, which went to help war efforts against Mexico. While imprisoned and unbeknownst to him he would be writing one of the most famous and historic essays of that time entitled, Civil Disobedience. "A broad margin of leisure is as beautiful in a man's life as in a book. Haste makes waste, no less in life than in housekeeping. Keep the time, observe the hours of the universe, not of the cars." (All quotes are from [http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/h/henry\\_david\\_thoreau.html#ixzz1KT5xN8ne](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/h/henry_david_thoreau.html#ixzz1KT5xN8ne))

"A truly good book teaches me better than to read it. I must soon lay it down, and commence living on its hint. What I began by reading, I must finish by acting." "As for doing good; that is one of the professions which is full. Moreover I have tried it fairly and, strange as it may seem, am satisfied that it does not agree with my constitution." "Books are the carriers of

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civilization. Without books, history is silent, literature dumb, science crippled, thought and speculation at a standstill. I think that there is nothing, not even crime, more opposed to poetry, to philosophy, ay, to life itself than this incessant business.” “ Go confidently in the direction of your dreams! Live the life you’ve imagined. As you simplify your life, the laws of the universe will be simpler.”

How did Henry David Thoreau view non-violent resistance? He felt that all of humanity had a right to decide whether to fight or not. He viewed this as much more than actions but as a state of mind. Just not taking part in war wasn't enough. You had to truly understand the principles. He along with Ralph Waldo Emerson thought that each person was entitled to his own opinion and decision making. “ That government is best which governs least”. That quotation was taken from his famous essay entitled Civil Disobedience. Henry David Thoreau wasn't against the government, but just a few laws and mandates. Henry David Thoreau thought that even though America, as a whole was gaining prosperity, it was also losing integrity. As time progressed he witnessed America losing its values and foundation, which had made it such a noble nation. Another thing he noticed about the Government was that they did not keep the country free. They proclaimed many times about America being the land of the free, but he viewed that as a false statement. Henry David Thoreau was anti-statism. “ That government is best which governs least”; and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe,-“ That government is best which governs not at all”; and when men and women are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which

they will have. He felt strongly about his beliefs and as a result he didn't want to take part in wars. Since he was a scholar and was very knowledgeable, surely he had read about the effects of past wars. He knew that wars only brought about pain, suffering, and more turmoil. "Ending One war would bring about 10 fold" he stated. "You must live in the present, launch yourself on every wave, find your eternity in each moment." "Disobedience is the true foundation of liberty. The obedient must be slaves." "All endeavor calls for the ability to tramp the last mile, shape the last plan, endure the last hours toil. The fight to the finish spirit is the one... characteristic we must possess if we are to face the future as finishers."

How did Henry David Thoreau practice non-violent resistance? Henry David Thoreau didn't take part in the government's wars. He simply refused no matter the consequences. His example should be commended because he stood by his beliefs no matter what. "As a single footstep will not make a path on the earth, so a single thought will not make a pathway in the mind. To make a deep physical path, we walk again and again. To make a deep mental path, we must think over and over the kind of thoughts we wish to dominate our lives." "From this quote we can see that he didn't give up. He also made it clear what he believed not only in his essays but also to government officials. Every man casts a shadow; not his body only, but his imperfectly mingled spirit. This is his grief. Let him turn which way he will, it falls opposite to the sun; short at noon, long at eve. Did you never see it?" "I am sorry to think that you do not get a man's most effective criticism until you provoke him. Severe truth is expressed with some bitterness." Henry David Thoreau did not live in a big city. He knew that only trouble could

come from being a non-violent resister. So too make his life easier he never got married and he lived in the woods. " I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived." " If a man walks in the woods for love of them half of each day, he is in danger of being regarded as a loafer. But if he spends his days as a speculator, shearing off those woods and making the earth bald before her time, he is deemed an industrious and enterprising citizen." " I have never found a companion that was so companionable as solitude. We are for the most part more lonely when we go abroad among men than when we stay in our chambers. A man thinking or working is always alone, let him be where he will.

What individuals did Henry David Thoreau influence? Unfortunately Henry David Thoreau died of tuberculosis May 6, 1862, at the age of 44. After his death the world changed drastically. As he passed away a new light shined over America. President Abraham Lincoln freed all slaves in the United States. This would lead to a momentous future for African Americans. One in particular was Dr. Martin Luther King. He was an important figure in African American literature and in history in general. Like Henry David Thoreau he believed you could conquer the evil with the good. Dr. Martin Luther King was not anti-government. All he fought for was true freedom and equality. He felt that black weren't being treated fairly. He knew what America motto was, " The Land of The Free", and that's what he wanted. He wanted that prospect not only for himself but also for the other millions of other African American in the United States. About half way across the world another

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individual took a stand for non violent resistance. His name was Mohandas Gandhi. During the time he lived in, he too was surrounded by war. The British had taken control of Gandhi's nation and their people were prepared to take it back. Gandhi preached about not taking up arms and told his fellow countrymen what war would do to the country and to future generations. Some listened, but many opposed his teachings because they thought of him as not being loyal to the government and to the main religion in India, Hinduism. Loyalty was very important during that time because the nation needed to join together in order to become free from the British. "It is better to have your head in the clouds, and know where you are... than to breathe the clearer atmosphere below them, and think that you are in paradise." "Make the most of your regrets; never smother your sorrow, but tend and cherish it till it comes to have a separate and integral interest. To regret deeply is to live afresh." "Live the life you've dreamed." "Justice is sweet and musical; but injustice is harsh and discordant." "It is what a man thinks of himself that really determines his fate." "It is the greatest of all advantages to enjoy no advantage at all." Both of these two individuals had an important impact on history, not only in the United States but all over the world. Since Dr. Martin Luther King fought so hard for the rights and freedom of African Americans, everyone today has the privilege of living their dreams and not being held back. We have a prime example of one individual who wasn't held back by anything, and that is President Barack Obama. Many years ago Dr. Martin Luther King spoke about such freedom and how we needed a change, and now we have it. Thanks to him our possibilities in the world are limitless.

The second individual Henry David Thoreau influenced was Gandhi. We benefit from his actions to day because a lot of our leaders in the world, base <https://assignbuster.com/how-henry-david-thoreaus-influence-is-evident-today-philosophy-essay/>

their decisions on his way of thinking. Being peaceable was truly the right way to take and a lot of our political leaders are that way.

What was Henry David Thoreau's Message? Basically Thoreau wanted, not only for himself but for everyone, the prospects of free will. He felt that the government was abusing their right to rule. He also believed that people should decide for themselves whether or not to take another human's life and participate in war efforts. Thoreau wasn't all talk. He too was persecuted for his actions. "There is no value in life except what you choose to place upon it and no happiness in any place except what you bring to it yourself." "Truth is always in harmony with herself, and is not concerned chiefly to reveal the justice that may consist with wrong-doing." "We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aid, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn." "Why should we be in such desperate haste to succeed, and in such desperate enterprises? If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer." Henry David Thoreau is impacting humans today because he used a logical method of reasoning. The information he wrote in his essays are just as important and beneficial today as it was 100's of years ago. The things he wrote down can help us all to become a better nation and better people. Next we will consider an excerpt from his essay entitled Civil Disobedience. "Government is at best but an expedient; but most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inexpedient. The objections which have been brought against a standing army, and they are many and weighty, and deserve to prevail, may also at last be brought against a standing government. The standing army is only an arm of the

standing government. The government itself, which is only the mode which the people have chosen to execute their will, is equally liable to be abused and perverted before the people can act through it. Witness the present Mexican war, the work of comparatively a few individuals using the standing government as they do not keep the country free. It does not settle the West. It does not educate. The character inherent in the American people has done all that has been accomplished; and it would have done somewhat more, if the government had not sometimes got in its way. If true; for in the outset, the people would not have consented to this measure. After all, the practical reason why, when the power is once in the hands of the people, a majority are permitted, and for a long period continue, to rule is not because they are most likely to be in the right, nor because this seems fairest to the minority, but because they are physically the strongest. But a government in which the majority rules in all cases cannot be based on justice, even as far as men understand it. Can there not be a government in which the majorities do not virtually decide right and wrong, but conscience?—in which majorities decide only those questions to which the rule of expediency is applicable? Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator? Why has every man a conscience then? I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterward. It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. The only obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any time what I think right. It is truly enough said that a corporation has no conscience; but a corporation of conscientious men is a corporation with a conscience. He who gives himself entirely to his fellow men appears to them useless and selfish; but he who gives himself partially to them is pronounced a benefactor and

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philanthropist. How does it become a man to behave toward the American government today? I answer, that he cannot without disgrace be associated with it. I cannot for an instant recognize that political organization as my government which is the slave's government also. I have contemplated the imprisonment of the offender, rather than the seizure of his goods—though both will serve the same purpose—because they who assert the purest right, and consequently are most dangerous to a corrupt State, commonly have not spent much time in accumulating property. To such the State renders comparatively small service, and a slight tax is wont to appear exorbitant, particularly if they are obliged to earn it by special labor with their hands. If there were one who lived wholly without the use of money, the State itself would hesitate to demand it of him. But the rich man—not to make any invidious comparison—is always sold to the institution which makes him rich. Absolutely speaking, the more money, the less virtue; for money comes between a man and his objects, and obtains them for him; it was certainly no great virtue to obtain it.” ([http://www.transcendentalists.com/civil\\_disobedience.htm](http://www.transcendentalists.com/civil_disobedience.htm))

In conclusion, how can we use his message in our daily lives? Henry David Thoreau would have wanted the United States to be a place where people held the power, or in other words the majority rules. It may seem like that today but, if there was a draft, any and everyone the government wanted to fight, would have to fight. We could stand firm against opposition and keep Thoreau's words at the forefront of our minds. We could stop paying our taxes, just like he did but that would lead to calamity on down the road. His being neutral in politics and wars could prove to be beneficial in the future,

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because staying out of wars could save our lives despite some government persecution. " So behave that the odor of your actions may enhance the general sweetness of the atmosphere, that when we behold or scent a flower, we may not be reminded how inconsistent your deeds are with it; for all odor is but one form of advertisement of a moral quality, and if fair actions had not been performed, the lily would not smell sweet. The foul slime stands for the sloth and vice of man, the decay of humanity; the fragrant flower that springs from it, for the purity and courage which are immortal."

" Only nature has a right to grieve perpetually, for she only is innocent. Soon the ice will melt, and the blackbirds sing along the river which he frequented, as pleasantly as ever. The same everlasting serenity will appear in this face of God, and we will not be sorrowful, if he is not." " Our moments of inspiration are not lost though we have no particular poem to show for them; for those experiences have left an indelible impression, and we are ever and anon reminded of them." " Politics is the gizzard of society, full of grit and gravel, and the two political parties are its opposite halves - sometimes split into quarters - which grind on each other. Not only individuals but states have thus a confirmed dyspepsia." " Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumb-nail." " The youth gets together his materials to build a bridge to the moon, or, perchance, a palace or temple on the earth, and, at length, the middle-aged man concludes to build a woodshed with them." " To read well, that is, to read true books in a true spirit, is a noble exercise, and one that will task the

reader more than any other exercise which the customs of the day esteem. It requires a training such as the athletes underwent, the steady intention almost of the whole life to this object.”

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