

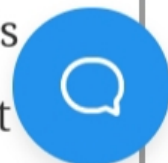
A Critical Analysis of Civil  
Disobedience, an Essay by  
Henry David Thoreau

Henry David Thoreau wrote the essay Civil Disobedience to show his opposition to slavery and American imperialism. His essay has influenced many prominent civil rights activists, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

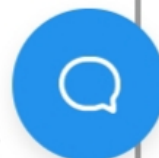
Thoreau's essay *Civil Disobedience* or *Resistance to Civil Government*, published in 1849, is a call to arms similar to the stances that people like Parks and King would later take. Thoreau argued that people owed it to themselves and their fellow man not to blindly follow their government if they believe their rules and laws are unjust. This was partly motivated by Thoreau's dislike of slavery and the American government's support of it.

In his Essay, "Civil Disobedience", Henry David Thoreau argues that society functions the most efficiently when it is not ruled by an overpowering monarch, or by a strong central government, but by the people, essentially having self-reliant peoples that do not necessarily need a government, per se, yet are able to call upon it in times of crisis. Thoreau's estimation of the goodwill, and intelligence of mankind is vastly overreaching, and his theories of government are only applicable in small cases.

Thoreau outright states that, "That government is best which governs least", he is signifying the fact that governments which do not do such, are the superior forms. This is contradictory, in the sense that



such, are the superior forms. This is contradictory, in the sense that one cannot seek to want a government, yet one that governs the minimal amount. By maintaining a government that has strong enough powers to help in times of crisis, yet one that has minimal interference with the peoples, one sets up a paradox. How is it possible to have a ruling body that is strong enough to interfere when needed, yet is trusted, and expected not to interfere otherwise? In order to maintain this type of self-sustaining, non-involved form of rule, one must be in an extremely small group of people, less than 10, even. The overall level of diligence, intelligence, and self-determination within the human population is extremely low. In order to successfully employ a form of government that “is best



which governs not at all”, one must have a population of peoples with similar interests and goals. In a small group of people, in which a common goal was a unifying factor, say in a time when survival was the primary goal, Thoreau’s proposed ideals would be successful. When a peoples are united, under a common cause, each one will work hard to achieve that goal, and the titular “Civil Disobedience” will not be evident. Typically crime, or disobedience arises from complacency,