



On the Duty of Civil Disobedience: Resistance to Civil Government

Henry David Thoreau

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Complete, faithful, and attractive edition of Henry David Thoreau's historically significant and highly influential essay in which he argues that disobedience to immoral government is a moral imperative. Thoreau's writing influenced people of his own time and important figures in future generations from Mahatma Gandhi to Martin Luther King. ---Excerpt--- I heartily accept the motto, "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 are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have. 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 their tool; for in the outset, the people would not have consented to this measure.

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