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Jour608

Mini Essay 2

### Henry David Thoreau and Black Lives Matter

*“The rich man is always sold to the institution which makes him rich.” -Henry David Thoreau*

In his essay, *Civil Disobedience*, Thoreau advocates for the same principles as the current Black Lives Matter Movement. Both argue that social justice and morality issues resolved solely through government majority rules are destined to deem unjust rulings (Thoreau). Thoreau claims reform comes from the acts of the individual, not through loyalty or blind cooperation with government institutions. Black Lives Matter activists work to combat this blind cooperation, encouraging policy reform for racial and economic disparities in the U.S. today. Black Lives Matter is considered the largest social justice movement in history (Alexander). It began in protest of the murder of Trayvon Martin, a young, innocent, Black man that was targeted and killed by police in 2016 (Alexander). The movement has further progressed to bring awareness to a variety of social justice issues and promote a call to action for systemic reform and an end to racism.

Thoreau also fought for reform and advocated for revolution. He argued that if the government cannot correct its evils, or do enough good to counteract them, rebellion is necessary (Thoreau). Individuals, “must at least not be guilty through compliance,” (Thoreau). Claiming the true opponents of reform are individuals that continue to cooperate with the unjust system. He supports the right to withdraw support for the government when they are undeserving. Thoreau implies he did want to conform to the laws of his land, however, the laws were not honorable (Thoreau). Therefore, not applicable to a morally conscious man. Thoreau is in favor

of a government that doesn't intrude upon peoples' lives. After all, it exists solely to ensure individual freedom for those it represents.

“Individuals must resist institutional injustice evolved in response to specific national and local events,” (Thoreau). Police-involved murders are the sixth leading cause of deaths among Black men (Alexander). In a study about racial discrimination, results concluded an average of 70 racially discriminant experiences during a two-week period (Alexander). Black Lives Matter has worked hard to bring awareness to and encourage ethical obligation to address issues rooted in racism, injustice, and inequality. Police brutality, the unjust murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony, McDade, Elijah McClain, and many innocent others have increased involvement in the Black Lives Matter movement (Alexander). They focus on the political, economical, and cultural structures that work hard to uphold racism and the engrained systems perpetuating continuous inequalities (Jerbi).

Like Thoreau said, action is required for reform. Words and awareness are not enough. Black Lives Matter has implemented justice through a variety of activist tactics. Such as, coming up with alternatives to policing and imprisonment, protesting to defund the police, eliminating symbols of structural racism like native-themed mascots and statues that celebrate slavery, renaming military bases and historic public buildings, removing advertising from divisive platforms, and encouraging support of minority-owned businesses and diversity in executive positions (Alexander; Jerbi). The Black Lives Matter Movement and *Civil Disobedience* bring forth the opportunity and presumed responsibility to work towards reform in our schools, work environments, communities, and nations to ensure all people are respected, represented, and not discriminated against.

Business representatives and government officials must be a part of this conversation, too. Civil disobedience may be the only way to truly get their attention. Thoreau wished not for no government, but for a better one. For, “a government in which the majority rule in all cases cannot be based on justice,” instead, power and privilege (Thoreau). He encourages us through words and his own efforts to, “quietly declare war with the state... though I will still make what use and get what advantage of her I can...” The Black Lives Matter Movement and Thoreau’s ideas combine to encourage U.S. citizens to stand up for themselves against an unjust government, even if that means breaking the law. This duty not only applies to those who are directly affected, but also to those who can use their privilege within the system, to oppose and dismantle the system entirely.

*“I please myself with imagining a state at last which can afford to be just to all men, and to treat the individual with respect as a neighbor,” -Henry David Thoreau*

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