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Thoreau's civil disobedience from Concord, Massachusetts: global impact

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Major wars or battles, political revolutions, scientific breakthroughs, or profound social changes often constitute substantial historical turning points. The nineteenth century was a period of intense struggle for America, wrestling with its identity and unity, the quest for emancipation, and conflicts with Mexico. Amid these turbulent times, an initially inconspicuous essay, "Civil Disobedience," penned in 1849 by a then-unknown Henry David Thoreau, proved to be a turning point that eventually changed the world. The essay provided the framework for a conscience-driven protest, which, when applied on a mass scale, gave the world an effective and non-violent method of war. The power of the voice rooted in conscience and courage, an approach sans violence, inspired "successful" movements across cultures, countries, and time. The essay Civil Disobedience laid the foundation for a conscience-driven, non-violent struggle against injustices that changed the course of human history and remains the best hope for fighting injustices in the future. While less recognized in the annals of popular culture than the political machinations of Machiavelli or the strategic doctrines of Sun Tzu, Thoreau's essay on civil disobedience has wielded a far more profound influence. In a world still riven by conflict and injustice, Thoreau's 1849 essay offered the most impactful turning point in humanity's struggle against injustice. It remains as compelling as ever, offering a blueprint for confronting tyranny not with arms but with the power of human conscience. It serves as a reminder that revolutionary changes sometimes begin with the quietest voice.

KEYWORDS

non-violence, Satyagraha, conflict, Israeli-Palestine conflict, revolution, Nazi

Introduction

On April 6, 1930, The New York Times reported a crisp Associated Press cable: "Mahatma Gandhi manufactured salt from seawater at Dandi this morning, thereby breaking the British law establishing a monopoly on salt manufacture" (see [Figure 1](#); [The New York Times, 1930](#); [Mahatma Gandhi Walking to Shoreline during Salt Protest, 2024](#)). This act of rebellion marked the commencement of a mass civil disobedience campaign in India, ultimately contributing to the British Empire's downfall in 1947. This event not only signaled the end of centuries of British dominion but also inspired a wave of non-violent movements and revolutions worldwide over the next century and a half. History is often shaped by singular incidents or anecdotes that precipitate revolutions, wars, or inventions, transforming societies for generations. The foundation for Gandhi's march and the backbone of many subsequent non-violent movements can be traced back to a century earlier and thousands of miles away in the United States ([Sinha and Mitra, 2011](#)). In 1849, in the town of Concord, Massachusetts, a then-obscure writer named Henry David Thoreau published a short essay titled "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience" (shortened to



FIGURE 1
Mahatma Gandhi and some followers marched to the shore at Dandi to break the unjust British salt laws.

Civil Disobedience in later editions) (see [Figure 2](#); [On the Duty of Civil Disobedience, 1849](#); [Gandhi, 1983](#); [Resistance to Civil Government, 1849](#); [Thoreau, 2009](#); [Thoreau, 2019](#)). This essay, advocating for a conscience-driven, non-violent resistance to government injustices, laid the groundwork for twentieth-century movements against colonialism, civil rights abuses, communism, and apartheid, significantly altering the course of history ([The New York Times, 1930](#); [Mahatma Gandhi Walking to Shoreline during Salt Protest, 2024](#)). The central tenet of Thoreau's essay provided a framework and inspiration that continues to influence contemporary movements, demonstrating the power of an idea - an essay - to turn the course of history.

Throughout human history, the struggle against oppression has been a recurring theme, often manifesting as violent or armed resistance. However, a different voice emerged in mid-nineteenth century America, advocating for an alternative approach. This voice was that of Henry David Thoreau, an American writer, activist, and environmentalist, whose seminal essay "Civil Disobedience" redefined resistance to government injustices as an act of conscience and courage ([Walls, 2017](#)). He presented a novel method of protest that relies on personal integrity and non-violence ([Walls, 2017](#)).

While the historical roots of nonviolent resistance can be traced back to the peaceful philosophies of ancient India, including Jain and Buddhist traditions, the secession of the Plebs, and the stoic defiance of early Christians against the Roman Empire, it was Thoreau's articulation in "Civil Disobedience" that provided a clear blueprint for nonviolent resistance, influencing the course of modern history ([Walls, 2017](#)). According to Hegel, history is a dialectic process where the synthesis of opposing ideas fosters new understandings and advancements for humanity ([Hegel and Sibree, 2004](#)). Thoreau's work exemplifies this process, transforming the notion of resistance on its

head from a violent struggle to a method of non-violence rooted in conscience ([Thoreau and Meltzer, 1963](#)). The context and legacy of "Civil Disobedience" serve as a reminder of the importance of learning from pivotal historical events. By understanding the shifts that have shaped our past, we can better comprehend our present and forge a path toward a more just and peaceful future.

Thoreau and civil disobedience

Thoreau was sui generis, a gadfly of his times. Critics, both during Thoreau's life and in the years following, often focused more on his personality than his ideas ([Walls, 2017](#); [Thoreau and Meltzer, 1963](#)). He lived during the ascent of the Transcendentalist movement, challenging conventional views on religion and society ([Schreiner, 2006](#); [Buell, 2006](#)). Known for advocating simple living in his book, "Walden," Thoreau was far from an isolated figure; he was actively involved in the era's pressing concerns ([Walls, 2017](#); [Richardson and Moser, 1988](#)).

In the tumultuous 1840s and 1850s, the United States grappled with the Mexican-American War, the moral and political implications of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, and teetered on the brink of Civil War. Thoreau was a staunch supporter of the anti-slavery movement; he supported radical abolitionist John Brown and the Underground Railroad ([Walls, 2017](#); [Richardson and Moser, 1988](#)). He viewed the American war with Mexico as unjust and believed that it would extend slavery's reach ([Walls, 2017](#)). He protested these government policies by not paying taxes for 6 years. He instead courted arrest as an act of defiance and public statement ([Walls, 2017](#); [Thoreau and Meltzer, 1963](#); [Richardson and Moser, 1988](#)). When Ralph Waldo Emerson visited him in jail, he questioned, "David, what are you doing there?" Thoreau

“Civil Disobedience” (Abridged) – (1849)
by Henry David Thoreau

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 a great evil, and most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inequitable. 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 few individuals using the standing government as their tool; for, in the contest, the people would not have consented to this measure —

But, to speak practically and as a citizen, unlike those who call themselves no government men, I ask for, not at once no government, but at once a better government. Let every man make known what kind of government would command his respect, and that will be one step toward obtaining it.

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 rule in all cases cannot be based on justice, even as far as men understand it. As God is a very few, as heroes, patriots, martyrs, reformers in the great sense, and men, serve the state with their consciences also, and so necessarily resist for the most part; and they are commonly treated as enemies by it —

which followed them out again without let or hindrance, and they were really all that was dangerous. As they could not reach me, they had resolved to punish my body; just as boys, if they cannot come at some person against whom they have a spite, will abuse his dog. I saw that the State was half-witted, that it was timid as a lone woman with her silver spoons, and that it did not know its friends from its foes, and I lost all my remaining respect for it, and pitied it.

Thus the State never intentionally confronts a man's sense, intellectual or moral, but only his body, his senses. It is not armed with superior wit or honesty, but with superior physical strength. I was not born to be forced. I will breathe after my own fashion. Let us see who is the strongest. What force has a multitude? They only can force me who obey a higher law than I. They force me to become like themselves. I do not hear of men being forced to have this way or that by masses of men. What sort of life were that to live? When I meet a government which says to me, “Your money or your life,” why should I be in haste to give it my money? It may be in a great strait, and not know what to do. I cannot help that. It must help itself; do as I do. It is not worth the while to snivel about it. I am not responsible for the successful working of the machinery of society. I am not the son of the engineer. I perceive that, when an acorn and a chestnut fall side by side, the one does not remain inert to make way for the other, but both obey their own laws, and spring and grow and flourish as best they can, till one, perchance, overshadows and destroys the other. If a plant cannot live according to its nature, it dies; and so a man.

FIGURE 2

Henry D. Thoreau's essay “Civil Disobedience”.

soldiers, colonel, captain, corporal, privates, powder-monkeys, and all, marching in admirable order over hill and dale to the wars, against their wills, against their common sense and consciences, which makes it very steep marching indeed, and produces a palpitation of the heart. They have no doubt that it is a damnable business in which they are concerned; they are all peaceably inclined. Now, what are they? Men at all? or small movable forts and magazines, at the service of some unscrupulous man in power? Visit the Navy Yard, and behold a marine, such a man as an American government can make, or such as it can make a man with its black arts — a mere shadow and reminiscence of humanity, a man laid out alive and standing, and already, as one may say, buried under arms with funeral accompaniments, though it may be

“Not a drum was heard, not a funeral note, As his corse to the rampart we hurried; Not a soldier discharged his farewell shot O'er the grave where our hero we buried.”

The mass of men serve the state thus, not as men mainly, but as machines, with their bodies. They are the standing army, and the militia, jailers, constables, posse comitatus, etc. In most cases there is no free exercise whatever of the judgment or of the moral sense; but they put themselves on a level with wood and earth and stones; and wooden men can perhaps be manufactured that will serve the purpose as well. Such command no more respect than men of straw or a lump of dirt. They have the same sort of worth only as horses and dogs. Yet such as these even are commonly esteemed good citizens. Others, as most legislators, politicians, lawyers, ministers, and office-holders, serve the state chiefly with their heads; and, as they rarely make any moral distinctions, they are as likely to serve the devil, without knowing it, as God. A very few, as heroes, patriots, martyrs, reformers in the great sense, and men, serve the state with their consciences also, and so necessarily resist for the most part; and they are commonly treated as enemies by it —

Unjust laws exist: shall we be content to obey them, or shall we endeavor to amend them, and obey them until we have succeeded, or shall we transgress them at once? Men generally, under such a government as this, think that they ought to wait until they have persuaded the majority to alter them. They think that, if they should resist, the remedy would be worse than the evil. But it is the fault of the government itself that the remedy is worse than the evil. It makes it worse. Why is it not more apt to anticipate and provide for reform? Why does it not cherish its wise minority? Why does it cry and resist

before it is hurt? Why does it not encourage its citizens to be on the alert to point out its faults, and do better than it would have them? Why does it always crucify Christ, and excommunicate Copernicus and Luther, and pronounce Washington and Fanny rebels? ...

If the injustice is part of the necessary friction of the machine of government, let it go, let it go: let more government be — certainly the machine will wear out. If the injustice has a spring, or a pulley, or a crank, exclusively for itself, then perhaps you may consider whether the remedy will not be worse than the evil; but if it is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine. What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn —

I meet this American government, or its representative, the State government, directly, and face to face, once a year — no more — in the person of its tax-gatherer; this is the only mode in which a man situated as I am necessarily meets it, and it then says distinctly, Recognize me, and the simplest, the most effectual, and, in the present posture of affairs, the indisputable mode of treating with it on this head, of expressing your little satisfaction with and love for it, is to deny it. My civil neighbor, the tax-gatherer, in the very man I have to deal with — for it is, after all, with men and not with parchment that I quarrel — and he has voluntarily chosen to be an agent of the government. How shall he ever know what he is and does as an officer of the government, or as a man, until he is obliged to consider whether he shall treat me, his neighbor, for whom he has respect, as a neighbor and well-disposed man, or as a nuisance and disturber of the peace, and see if he can get over this objection to his neighborliness without a ruder and more impetuous thought or speech corresponding with his action? I know this well, that if one thousand, if one hundred, if ten men whom I could name — if ten honest men only — ay, if one HONEST man, in this State of Massachusetts, contrary to *hoid-law*, were actually to withdraw from this partnership, and be locked up in the county jail therefore, it would be the abolition of slavery in America. For it matters not how small the beginning may seem to be: what is once well done is done forever. But let love better to talk about it: that we say is our mission. Reform keeps many scores of newspapers in its service, but not one man —

Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison. The proper place to-day, the only place which Massachusetts has provided for her free and low depending spirits, is in her prisons, to be put out and locked out of the State by her own act, as they have

already put themselves out by their principles. It is there that the fugitive slave, and the Mexican prisoner on parole, and the Indian come to plend the wrongs of his race, should find them, that on separate, but more free and honorable ground, where the State places those who are not with her, but against her — the only house in a slave State in which a free man can abide with honor. If any think that their influence would be lost there, and their voices no longer affect the ear of the State, that they would not be an enemy within its walls, they do not know by how much truth is stronger than error, nor how much more eloquently and effectively he can combat injustice who has experienced a little in his own person. Cast your whole vote, not a step of paper merely, but your whole influence. A minority is powerless while it conforms to the majority; it is not even a minority then, but it is irresistible when it clings to its whole weight. If the alternative is to keep all just men in prison, or give up war and slavery, the State will not hesitate which to choose. If a thousand men were not to pay their tax-bills this year, that would not be a violent and bloody measure, as it would be to pay them, and enable the State to commit violence and shed innocent blood. This is, in fact, the definition of a peaceable revolution, if any such is possible. If the tax-gatherer, or any other public officer, asks me, as one has done, “But what shall I do?” my answer is, “If you really wish to do anything, resign your office.” When the subject has refused allegiance, and the officer has resigned his office, then the revolution is accomplished. But even suppose blood should flow. Is there not a sort of blood shed when the conscience is wounded? Through this wound a man's real manhood and immortality flow out, and he bleeds to an everlasting death. I see this blood flowing now —

I have paid no poll-tax for six years. I was put into a jail once on this account, for one night; and, as I stood considering the walls of solid stone, two or three feet thick, the door of wood and iron, a foot thick, and the iron grating which strained the light, I could not help being struck with the foolishness of that institution which treated me as if I were mere flesh and blood and bones, and heeded not whether I was a soul or a mind, and had never thought of all that I was capable of in my services in some way. I saw that, if there was a wall of stone between me and my townsmen, there was a still more difficult one to climb or break through, before they could get to be as free as I was. I did not for a moment feel confined, and the walls seemed a great waste of stone and mortar. I felt as if I alone of all my townsmen had paid my tax. They plainly did not know how to treat me, but behaved like persons who are underfed. In every three and in every complement there was a hinderer, for they thought that my chief fault was depending on the other side of that stone wall. I could not but smile to see how industriously they locked the door on my meditations,

famously replied, “Ralph, what are you doing out there?” — a moment that epitomized his civil disobedience approach as a conscience-driven resistance against the state (Buell, 2006; Lysaker and Rossi, 2010).

He was released early by his aunt's intervention, and his incarceration was largely symbolic. He later transformed his reflections on the experience into an essay in 1849, initially titled “Resistance to Civil Government” and later posthumously reprinted as “Civil Disobedience” (On the Duty of Civil Disobedience, 1849; Resistance to Civil Government, 1849; Walls, 2017). The essay represented his *joie de guerre* against tyranny. It was a call for resistance unlike any before, urging resistance through conscience and non-violent disobedience. The words, “How does it become a man to behave toward this American government today?” remain relevant today (The New York Times, 1930; Walls, 2017; Thoreau and Meltzer, 1963; Richardson and Moser, 1988). Filled with candid dissent, the essay was intellectual yet accessible, though it did not gain immediate impact. It remained a minor ripple in New England's history until 1907 when Mahatma Gandhi discovered it and integrated its principles into his struggle against colonialism (Gandhi, 1983). From then on, it cemented its place as a significant turning point in history that laid the foundation of global movements against injustice.

Civil disobedience and Gandhi's Satyagraha movement

Thoreau's singular essay on Civil Disobedience provided the intellectual backbone for the iconic nonviolent resistance movements that shaped the world in the last century and a half. Gandhi discovered Thoreau's essay in 1907 as he was building his nascent methods of

protest against the British colonial government in South Africa (Gandhi, 1983; Plato et al., 2012). He first experimented and corresponded with Leo Tolstoy during his struggle in South Africa. While in India, he molded and perfected Thoreau's principles of civil disobedience into a mass movement called “Satyagraha” to fight against British colonial rule (Sinha and Mitra, 2011; Gandhi, 1983). The world outside India saw and heard firsthand about the power of Thoreau's essay when it was applied on a mass scale during the Dandi Salt in April 1930 (see Figure 1; Mahatma Gandhi Walking to Shoreline during Salt Protest, 2024; Plato et al., 2012). The multiple arrests and jail times that Gandhi courted through his decades-long struggle against British colonial rule in India mirrored Thoreau's protest in Concord in 1848. Gandhi used a variation of the direct quote from Thoreau's essay as he was imprisoned following the Dandi March: “For a government which imprisons any unjustly the true place for a just man is also a prison” (Gandhi, 1983).

Gandhi famously remarked, “The only tyrant I accept in this world is the still voice within,” which clearly echoes Thoreau's emphasis on individual conscience (Gandhi, 1983). Perhaps nowhere is it more explicitly stated than in his own words when Gandhi acknowledged, “I am indebted to Thoreau's essay on civil disobedience for the formation of my own thoughts on the subject” (Gandhi, 1983).

Gandhi's legacy of civil disobedience on King and Mandela

Years later, in the 1960s, across the globe, at home in the U.S., Martin Luther King Jr. adopted a Thoreau-inspired, Gandhian strategy

of civil disobedience to combat racial segregation (Walls, 2017). King's nonviolent civil disobedience protests, such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Birmingham Campaign in 1963, reflect the principles espoused in Thoreau's essay, "A State would prepare the way for a still more perfect and glorious State, which also I have imagined, but not yet anywhere seen" (*The New York Times*, 1930). It is vividly demonstrated in King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" that it is a moral imperative to resist unjust laws. King's own words, "Noncooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good," in fighting racial segregation is congruent with Thoreau's emphasis on conscience to fight against unjust laws of slavery in 1849 (Walls, 2017; King, 2024).

Nelson Mandela is an iconic leader and a global inspiration for his battle against apartheid. Initially, Mandela embraced non-violent methods before shifting to violent resistance (Mandela et al., 2010). However, it was his return to non-violent tactics that ultimately changed the apartheid-torn South African society. Like Gandhi, Mandela's struggle against a racist regime was girded by personal conscience and moral integrity. Both were lawyers and spent time in the same Johannesburg's Old Fort prison—Gandhi in 1906 and Mandela in 1962. However, unlike Gandhi, Mandela abandoned his initial non-violent approach to resistance against the apartheid regime and joined the armed wing of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1961. "Nonviolent passive resistance is effective as long as your opposition adheres to the same rules as you do," Mandela stated as a reason for the pivot in resisting apartheid (Mandela et al., 2010). This move toward armed struggle led to his involvement in the Rivonia Trial and subsequent imprisonment in 1964. Mandela's 27-year incarceration, initially at Robben Island prison, captured the world's imagination. During his Robben Island incarceration, he read the works of Gandhi, Thoreau, and other classics and recommitted to the power of non-violent disobedience (Mandela et al., 2010). This philosophical shift not only marked his post-incarceration approach and presidency but also influenced the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee. Mandela's embrace of the principles of morality, conscience, and non-violence in combating apartheid and its aftermath is a critical aspect of his legacy. He acknowledged the profound impact of these ideals in his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, highlighting the philosophical foundations that guided his leadership.

Impact of civil disobedience in the late twentieth century

In 1989, Václav Havel successfully led the non-violent Sametová revoluce (Velvet Revolution) against a despotic regime of Communist rulers in Czechoslovakia (see Figure 3; Mitchell, 2012; Prague, 1989). It was based on nonviolence and individual conscience and was inspired by Gandhi's movement and, ultimately, Thoreau. The Communist rulers repeatedly imprisoned him for decades until he engineered the fall of the regime. The influence of Thoreau's essay and the principle of individual conscience in civil resistance was articulated in one of Havel's famous essays, "Politics and Conscience," from 1984 (Havel and Wilson, 2018). Havel's quote, "... While the state is a human creation, human rights are the creation of God," is a direct variation of Thoreau's essay when he says, "State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power" (Havel and Wilson, 2018). He made a compelling case for conscience-driven

change that comes from the dignified human "I" (Mitchell, 2012; Havel and Wilson, 2018). Havel's Velvet Revolution was the first of the "Color revolutions," a series of non-violent government changes that took place in post-Soviet states like Georgia, Ukraine, and Yugoslavia during the early 21st century (Blaisdell, 2016; May, 2015). Thus, the principles for these Color revolutions echo Thoreau's civil disobedience.

Discussion

The reverberations of Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience" extend beyond these iconic figures and into the twentieth-century and the current-century struggles against the iron grip of communism and dictatorships. The movements led by leaders like Lech Walesa in Poland, Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar, and the Dalai Lama in Tibet all bear the hallmarks of Thoreau's civil disobedience (Havel and Wilson, 2018; May, 2015; Chenoweth, 2021). They showed that cooperative action initiated by conscience-driven individuals is a formidable force of change that turns history.

Nonetheless, significant questions remain and are oft debated whether the principle of Thoreau-inspired civil disobedience will work against regimes that are willing to be violent, genocidal, and do not respect fundamental human rights, in other words, like the Nazi regime or brutal dictatorships. Will it be effective in today's complex, interconnected world with abundant, unverifiable information and short attention spans? Over the past two decades, scholar and social scientist Erica Chenoweth has meticulously researched and analyzed these questions (Chenoweth and Stephan, 2012). She reaches a compelling conclusion: non-violent civil resistance outperforms violent uprisings in the long term, preserving human lives and achieving success. Chenoweth emphasizes that, although Thoreau champions civil disobedience as an individual stance against unjust government, its maximum potential to drive change requires collective, cooperative, coordinated, and sustained effort (Chenoweth and Stephan, 2012).

Furthermore, while Nazi Germany was an extreme situation, Thoreau's principles succeeded against colonialism, communism, apartheid, and dictatorships. It should be noted that these, too, were brutal regimes and were not some enlightened but misguided governments. In the case of Nazi Germany, the internal resistance attempts against Hitler were small, ill-coordinated, fractured, and primarily involved armed approaches (Hoffmann, 1996). Germany had no large-scale, coherent, and sustained non-violent resistance movements (Chenoweth, 2021; Hoffmann, 1996). However, such non-violent resistance was applied against Nazism successfully, outside of Germany, in Denmark, and Norway, which resulted in the prevention of what might have been mass slaughters (Levine, 2000). Civil disobedience also appears to have failed against the Communist government of China. This was most iconically symbolized by the 1989 June Fourth incident, also known as the Tiananmen Square protests (see Figure 4; Tiananmen Square Agitation, 2024). A similar lack of effectiveness was also seen in the protest against the regime that the Hong Kong Federation of Students led in 2014–2015. The reasons for the failure, Chenoweth contends, are the lack of cohesion, organization, sustenance, and the eventual petering out of the protests in the wake of violent suppression tactics by the regime. She suggests that for a non-violent disobedience movement to succeed, it will require organized and charismatic leadership that is sustained over the years and does not cower in the wake of brutal



FIGURE 3

The balcony from which the persecuted civil rights activist and later president Václav Havel spoke to hundreds of thousands on Wenceslas Square in Prague in the autumn of 1989.



FIGURE 4

The iconic image of a solitary student protestor standing up against the military might of the Communist dictatorship in China from the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests.

suppression. Thus, short-term non-violent disobedience may fail even if it is intense and iconic. Her work provides historical evidence that over the long arc of struggles against tyranny, the sustained, coordinated, and large-scale implementation of Thoreau's principles is more likely to succeed than violent uprisings.

Similarly, can Thoreau's non-violent civil resistance solve one of the most intractable political issues: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and a war that is raging currently? Historical evidence suggests that Thoreau's principles may offer the best chance even in the confines and the context of the specific conflict. Historical evidence points to significant progress and optimism following non-violent Palestinian protests (the first intifada) in response to the killing of 17-year-old

Mohammed Abu Sisi in 1987, which directly contributed to the Oslo Accord between Rabin and Arafat (Kober, 2014). While the future cannot be known with certainty, the Thoreau-inspired turning point in history might yet offer the best solution if applied sustainably and cooperatively.

Thoreau's influence extends beyond governmental protest to environmental movements, labor rights, resistance against gun culture, education, and LGBTQ rights, demonstrated by figures such as Greta Thunberg, Cesar Chavez, Sandy Hook parents, Malala Yousafzai, and Harvey Milk, respectively (Chenoweth, 2021). The space constraints limit a detailed discussion of Thoreau's influence on these movements, but his legacy is undeniably profound.

While political writings often become dated, confined to their specific time and context, Thoreau's essay transcends these limitations, fostering a timeless dialogue that continues to inspire and adapt to the challenges of new injustices. Thoreau's essay, which began as a small ripple in 1849, has created lasting reverberations. It represents a significant historical turning point, introducing a revolutionary method to combat the injustice that challenges our evolutionary primal instinct for violence to settle differences. The world emerged as a much better place for that.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

SR: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Resources, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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