



SCHOOL VIOLENCE PREVENTION DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM

## HANDOUT 1

### HENRY DAVID THOREAU

#### 1817–1862



#### Printable Biography

<http://www.encyclopedia.com/printable.aspx?id=1E1:Thoreau&topicid=35057>

#### Quote

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.

—Henry David Thoreau, *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience*, 1849

#### Action

Thoreau's famous essay, *Civil Disobedience*, was written as a result of his experience as a conscientious objector to war and slavery. Thoreau spent the night in jail because he refused to pay a poll tax. At the time, the poll tax supported the Mexican-American War, which Thoreau regarded as an unjustifiable attempt by the United States government to extend slavery through territorial conquest. Thoreau was released from prison after someone else paid his tax.

#### Additional Links

<http://thoreau.eserver.org/civil.html>

<http://thoreau.eserver.org/theory.html>

<http://www.thoreausociety.org/>

<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/71>

<http://www.thoreau-online.org/>

<http://www.biography.com/articles/Henry-David-Thoreau-9506784>