

## **Henry David Thoreau — “Civil Disobedience”**

**On refusing to pay a poll tax that to some extent supported slavery:**

**“ 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.”**

**On spending time in jail for nonpayment of taxes:**

**“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.”**

**Ghandi, in referencing Thoreau while imprisoned in South Africa, noted:**

**“Placed in a similar position for refusing his poll tax, the American citizen Thoreau expressed similar thought in 1849. Seeing the wall of the cell in which he was confined, made of solid stone 2 or 3 feet thick, and the door of wood and iron a foot thick, he said to himself, ‘If there were a wall of stone between me and my townsmen, there was still a more difficult one to climb or break through before they could get to be as free as I was.’ ”**