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What Would Thoreau Do Essay

Justifying Martin Luther King Jr.

Ever since of the start of the nation, racial equality has been fought for both peacefully and violently. Martin Luther King Jr., a Black, highly educated Baptist minister, led the Civil Rights movement in the 1950’s and 1960’s. He successfully rallied millions go his cause to end racial inequality and discrimination. He led dozens of peaceful protests all over the nation, won the Nobel Peace Prize, and was viewed as a hero of civil rights by people everywhere. Almost immediately after his death, “Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1968, which prohibited racial discrimination in the sale and rental of most housing in the nation” (Garrow). According to Thoreau, King’s actions would have been justified because he led peaceful protests and he hated war and violence.

The peaceful protesting King promoted would have been justified by Thoreau. In one of King’s speeches concerning boycotting the city buses, he told his associates, “We are not here advocating violence. … The only weapon we have is the weapon of protest. … The great glory of American democracy is the right to protest for right” (Garrow). In Thoreau’s essay on Civil Disobedience, he writes, “What is the price of an honest man and patriot today? They hesitate, and they regret, and sometimes they petition; but they do nothing in earnest with effect” (Thoreau). Thoreau was in favor of doing what’s right peacefully. King was peacefully/civilly asking for the government to fulfill the promises they made after the Civil War. Thoreau asks for an honest man who stands up for what he believes in, and King is doing just that. He is peacefully protesting against the corrupt government and the laws that promoted racial segregation, and Thoreau’s whole essay is based on doing what you feel is right, and he would justify King’s peaceful protests.

King’s demand for peace and equality between blacks and whites would also be justified by Thoreau. Thoreau states that, “There are thousands who are in opinion opposed to slavery and to the war, who yet in effect do nothing to put an end to them” (Thoreau). King has a similar view of wars. He wrote that, “War is devastating and we know that if we continue to use these weapons of destruction, our civilization will be plunged across the abyss of destruction” (King). By analyzing these two quotes, one could assume that King and Thoreau thought alike and had very similar views on war and racial inequality. King’s actions would have been justified by Thoreau because of that.

Thoreau and King had similar beliefs. Both wanted to end war and violence, and both wanted an end to racial inequalities. I learned that while the government does, in some cases, govern too much, in some cases (like segregation), it does not govern enough. We needed the government to end all laws that promoted racial inequality and segregation and we need the government to take care of us during times of war like the Mexican War in the 1800’s. Thoreau would have definitely agreed with all of King’s beliefs and teachings on war and racial inequality, because he viewed them similarly.

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