

Rip Van Winkle: A Classic Tale of Passive Resistance

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In this classic tale Rip Van Winkle is portrayed as one who is a victim of circumstances beyond his control. A further reading may perhaps reveal a different Rip Van Winkle, one who pursues an avenue of passive resistance in response to a life which he feels is beyond his control.

Passive Resistance is usually connected with such famous people as Henry David Thoreau who developed the principal of civil disobedience. For Thoreau, the idea was to choose not to support governmental taxes and policies that he felt were wrong. This theme was later used by Mahatma Gandhi in his fight for Indian independence. In the 1960's this method was used by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to bring racial injustice to the public's attention. In all of these cases, the men who followed the ideal of [passive](#) resistance were prepared to suffer the consequences of their actions in order to draw attention to their causes.

One can find similarities between Rip Van [Winkle](#)'s actions and the actions of those who pursue passive resistance. In Rip's case, the "[governing](#)" authority that he was struggling with is represented by the responsibilities in his life. This is very clear when one compares his own farm to those of others at that time. He did not care for his farm as was expected

of him. Rather, he pursued a life that one at the time would have considered slothful, discussing current events with his friends, befriending local children and animals and doing various favors for neighbors while his own property suffered. When confronted by his wife, his response was neither to argue nor to change his behavior. A simple silent shrug of the shoulders was all the response he offered.

In all of this, Dame Van Winkle has been portrayed as the villain. H...

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...urns 20 years later after his wife is dead, he does not take responsibility for his departure. Instead he concocts a story showing how this situation was totally out of his control. Rather than admit that he was not able to fulfill his responsibilities or that his wife was a shrew and he could no longer tolerate it, he makes up a story about being asleep in the woods. He then returns to his previous life.

Curiously, the community and even his own daughter do not appear to seriously question his explanation. Whether this is due to their collective superstition or whether they inwardly understood his need to remove himself from a difficult marriage, it is not clear. What is clear, is that Rip Van Winkle failed to support his family and then abandoned them. He chose a path of flawed passive resistance which did not accept the consequences of his actions.

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