

Don't Tread

The message “Don't Tread” communicates in two words what the entire political philosophy of classical liberalism is about – desiring to be free from oppression from whatever quarter. In other words, “don't fuck with me.” This message is used by those advocating a less-invasive State because governments, through taxation, legislation, regulation, surveillance, etc., are the main aggressors upon individual rights.

Why we believe the idea “Don't Tread” is kickass:

“Don't Tread” is a concise yet powerful statement. In the U.S., the “Don't Tread” viewpoint is often symbolized by the Gadsden Flag, which pictures the Western Rattlesnake about to strike – a fitting image because the Western Rattler keeps to itself and is not aggressive, but when it is provoked, it will defend itself. Organizations such as the Free State Project and the Drexel's Student Liberty Front have used the porcupine as their symbol for much the same reasons. Elsewhere, the “Don't Tread” mantra is captured by the phrase “laissez faire”. Because “Don't Tread” is such a short statement and the associated images are provocative, they can easily be disseminated, for instance as a desktop wallpaper, chalked on campus sidewalks, bumper sticker, clothing, tattoos, to introduce others to the ideas of freedom or start a conversation. Most importantly, “Don't Tread” helps to remind each passing bureaucrat that we won't sit idly by as they try to control our lives.

“Don't Tread” necessitates no action from others. It does not communicate a positive right or imply a duty. Rather, it clearly states that you want to live your life in peace without interference from others, even if they believe you are making unwise decisions. It is particularly directed against bureaucrats and politicians who supposedly operate “for your own good,” yet do so at the point of a gun.

“Don't Tread” leads to the most prosperity. As people are free to act without interference from others, they are able to dispose of their property as they see fit. That means they can exchange it with others, save it, use it or destroy it. And only through a system that respects property rights can wealth be generated on such a massive scale that it lifts entire societies from poverty because the innovation needed to create better and cheaper products requires the incentive of owning what one has created and profiting from it. Consensual transactions between individuals entail that both parties gain from the exchange. When government gets in the way of these exchanges it violates each individual's rights and curtails the engine of wealth creation, or what David Friedman called “The machinery of freedom.”

“Don't Tread” reminds those in government who really retains the power. Slick politicians claim that they work for you. In reality, they believe they are smarter than you, and they use the force of government to restrict your choices and control your life according to their views. Fortunately, more and more individuals are figuring out that just because some legislators pass legislation, that does not make it just. They recognize the difference between man-made laws, which are produced by governments, and natural rights, which individuals possess by virtue of being human beings regardless of whether government recognizes and protects those rights or not. And individuals, being sovereign with their own personal values and self-interests, are ready to defend themselves and others from aggression, whether the aggressor happens to be a common criminal or an agent of the State.

