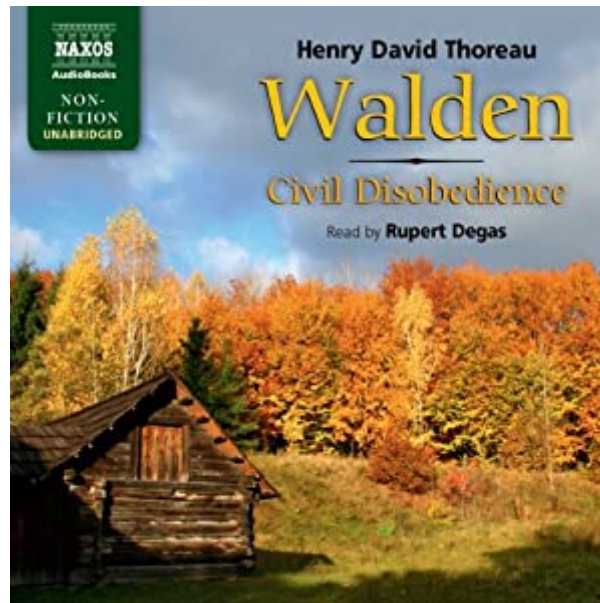




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# Thoreau: Walden / Civil Disobedience



## Synopsis

In 1845 Henry David Thoreau, one of the principal New England Transcendentalists, left the small town of Concord for the country. Beside the lake of Walden he built himself a log cabin and returned to nature, to observe and reflect - while surviving on eight dollars a year. From this experience emerged *Walden*, one of the great classics of American literature, and a deeply personal reaction against the commercialism and materialism that Thoreau saw as the main impulses of mid-19th-century America. Here also is *Civil Disobedience*, Thoreau's essay on just resistance to government, which not only challenged the establishment of his day but has been used as a flag for later campaigners from Mahatma Ghandi to Dr Martin Luther King.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

How could I not love Henry David Thoreau? I found him remarkable. As I got deeper and further into the book *Walden*, I found his musings and enlightning and uplifting. He was a father of environmentalism, a naturalist, A minimalist,an abolitionist, and a Transcendentalist experiencing nature as God and God in nature. What a surprising treat!

*Civil Disobedience* written during saber rattling with Mexico and the country's concern over the abolition of slavery in 1848 it is as relevant today as it has ever been, as it transcends space and time. Thoreau's main point is that the best - and many times, the only - method for fighting injustice is through passive disobedience. By refusing to cooperate with the

machinery of injustice, the individual can become the friction that stops the machine. Active resistance is bound for failure, as the machine (the State, society, etc.) is too formidable for the individual to fight. But, by refusing to cooperate, justice can be achieved and injustice toppled. "Any man more right than his neighbors constitutes a majority of one ". Other gems: I heartily accept the motto "That government is best which governs least or not at all". Man has a conscience (not government) we should be Men first and subjects second. Current political thought could use the purity, consistency and clarity that were second nature to thinkers near the American Revolution. The government never started any enterprise; it does not keep the country free. It did not settle the West. It does not educate. The chapter of the American people accomplished it all. I would have done more if the government got out of the way. Today we are faced with some of the same issues about control. The Government takes our labor (money) and decides who and what wars to fight and how to spend the rest with or without our consent. It is a book about conceptions of a man's right and wrong (not government) and the fight for injustice.

I'm only writing something in this case because it's required in order to rate the work. My friend is a Walden expert. To my shame, I put off reading it for years. I finally did so, from cover to cover. It's a great reading experience. Thoreau was very wise, extremely original, and highly educated too. He was also a very resourceful surveyor. Thoreau was no primitive. Many of the paragraphs in "Walden" are famous out of context. If you haven't read it, give yourself a treat.

while at times I found the book a little difficult to read because of the writing style, I found the insight to be well worth the challenge. It touches upon the true role of the individual within a society and the manner in which a government should view the individual which, Hayek references in his Road to Serfdom another book worth the time of anyone who has read Civil Disobedience. The one shock for me though was upon reaching the final page of the book with the recommendations for further reading to find Marx who in truth stands on the opposite footing of Thoreau with his collectivism were as Thoreau was a true believer and support of the individual's ability to choose how they relate to the state. I believe we as citizens should be given the choice of which taxes to support and which to not have to pay. Case in point I pay property taxes through the money that I give to my landlord for the schools in my area but yet I have no children those in a community should be given the option to say no to a portion of their property taxes if they do not have children in school and also those that chose to send their children to private school should be given the same option. The state needs to

realize that the money they use is our money and as the governed if we chose to revoke our mandate they will receive nothing.

I can't believe I got to be this old and had never read this philosophical treatise on the role of the individual and government in society. In this day where the political right has shifted the political center for all parties, Thoreau would be considered a revolutionary. Writing in the time of slavery and the Mexican American war, you would think that the essay, being over 150 years old would be dated, but oppression and wars of aggression are the same issues we face today. Civil Disobedience leaves a lot to think about - the role of government, the individual, the difference between society and government, and what would be the consequence if everyone embraced Thoreau's ideas; a better society or anarchy? The English is sometimes a bit hard to digest (a lot of double negatives) but I found Spark Notes a helpful companion.

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