

“THOREAU AND HIS HEIRS” Student Study Guide

1 Was Thoreau justified in breaking the law in 1846?

2 What were the consequences for Thoreau of his lawbreaking? What impact did his civil disobedience have?

3 Must consequences and impact always be considered before committing civil disobedience?

4 Is the use of nonviolence and/or openness essential elements of civil disobedience?

5 Are there people today who refuse to pay their taxes because they object to paying for war? Are they justified? Have any gone to jail for their beliefs?

6 Have there been other historical instances where breaking the law was justified? Conscientious objection to wars? Women’s suffrage? The right of laborers to unionize? Equality for all people, no matter race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity?

7 Do you believe there are any unjust or immoral government policies in force today in the United States? If yes, identify the policy or policies you oppose.

8 Are there any circumstances under which disobeying a “bad” law would ever be justified? What about a “neutral” law?

9 Are there situations where you would be willing to risk going to jail to oppose a government action or law?

10 Other than breaking the law (for example, by refusing to pay a tax or by participating in a demonstration that blocks traffic), what can you do to eliminate or replace an unjust or immoral government policy?

11 Rank the following strategies for correcting an injustice, and explain your preferences:

- Directly intervening against an injustice?*
- Telling your parents and friends?
- Casting a vote in the next election?
- Writing a letter to the local paper?
- Contacting your congressperson?
- Producing and handing out flyers?
- Organizing a picket, rally, or march?

**e.g., boycotting a product, disobeying an order, resigning from the offending company, not paying taxes, refusal to be drafted, or quitting the military*

12 Is there a role that nonviolent civil disobedience and noncooperation can play in providing national security? Must defense always fall back on military solutions?



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