

Billy Budd: Essay Assignment

Decide whether or not the principles of civil disobedience, as outlined by Henry David Thoreau, could have been applied during the trial in order to save Billy's life. You need to consider whether any one man may have been able to argue that the law was the problem rather than the action taken by Billy in self-defense.

In order to prepare for this essay, consider the following:

- In a democratic society, an individual has no right to break a law with which he or she disagrees. A citizen's duty is to work to change those laws with which the individual disagrees while obeying duly enacted laws.
- Society has no right to require an individual to take an action which is against the conscience of that individual.
- The principles of civil disobedience cannot be applied in the military. In Billy's case, since merely striking a superior officer was a capital offense, the court martial jury had no option except to hang him.
- Captain Vere and the court martial jury should have applied the principles of civil disobedience to the Articles of War in Billy's case and let him go.

Essay Assignment

Complete any of the following essay assignments:

- A formal persuasive essay seeking to convince the reader of any of the propositions or of the opposite of any proposition suggested for use in the class activities;
- A formal analytical essay illustrating the dominant theme of *Billy Budd*;
- A letter of appeal addressed to the officers on the court martial jury arguing that Billy's action was excused in some way; and
- An opinion piece on whether war, such as the War on Terror now being waged by the U.S. government, justifies loss of the rights of individuals.