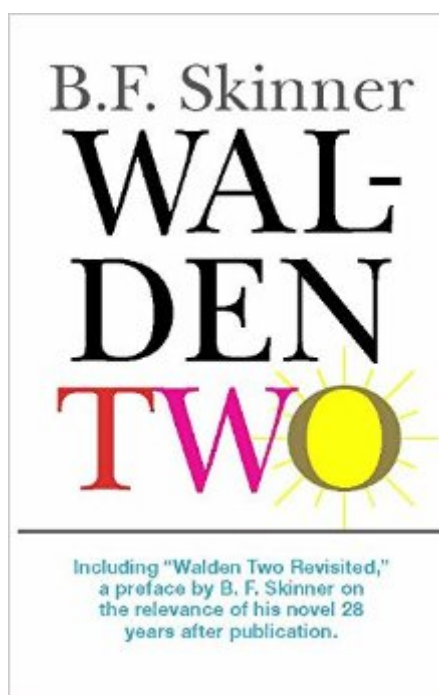


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Walden Two (Hackett Classics)



Synopsis

A reprint of the 1976 Macmillan edition. This fictional outline of a modern utopia has been a center of controversy ever since its publication in 1948. Set in the United States, it pictures a society in which human problems are solved by a scientific technology of human conduct.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Walden Two" is a bizarre utopian novel by the notorious behaviourist B.F. Skinner. The novel (first published in 1948) is quite seriously intended, but nevertheless comes across as an unintentional parody of social engineering. Had it been a work of considerable antiquity, I'm sure Leo Strauss and Alan Bloom would have assumed that it *is* a parody! As classical utopian novels, "Walden Two" has no real plot. Most of the "novel" is a description of an imaginary utopian community, named Walden Two after the forest where Thoreau wrote his famous work "Walden". The similarity between Thoreau and Skinner isn't very striking, however. Walden Two may be surrounded by farmland, but it's really a large public housing complex with about 1,000 inhabitants, and obviously based on high technology. It has plans to expand and eventually take over all of the United States.

Thoreau, as far as I know, mostly wanted to be left alone! The main character of the story is Frazier, the founder of Walden Two, who guides six visitors (and the reader) through the community and explains its ideology. Another character is named Burris. Apparently this is supposed to be B.F. Skinner himself, although Frazier is probably Skinner's real alter ego. Yet another character is an unsympathetic, useless and abstract philosophy professor named Castle, who is Frazier's main protagonist and constantly questions both him and the utopian society. The four remaining characters are named Roger, Barbara, Mary and Steve. Walden Two turns out to be a benevolent dictatorship ruled by anonymous Planners and Managers. They are not elected but appoint their own successors. The law of the community is called the Code and can be changed only by the Planners and Managers.

This influential book created quite a stir when it was first published in 1948, so much so, that many people actually started forming intentional, egalitarian communes and existing ones embraced many of the ideas of social structure presented in "Walden Two". Further, Aldus Huxley, author of "Brave New World", was so impressed with the ideas presented in "Walden Two", that he incorporated and expanded on them in his last novel, "Island". And many people feel this was his best work. I concur. The book is not a monument to fine novel writing and was not intended to be, yet it is fascinating and eye-opening as a fictional dissertation on utopian social structure can be. Huxley's "Island", on the other hand was beautifully written and requires no awareness of the psychology of social construction going on at the same time- neither book does, really. They are both interesting and thought provoking. Skinner's basic premise was that with gentle behavioral modifications using positive re-enforcement and academics, coupled with leveling the social playing field with no class structure our hyper-competitive, private enterprise, we could then concentrate all of our energies on education and entertainment, thereby removing most all of the ills and stress that conventional society suffers from- sounds enticing, on paper anyway. B.F. Skinner was a famous research psychologist who had a life-time of noted insights into the human psyche and his constant experimentation with behavioral studies led him to map-out, in a fictional utopian setting, a demonstration of what the supposed benefits of behavioral modification would do for a large group of people.

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