# New Edited Collection Examines Thoreau's Timeless Relevance

"In every book I've written, Thoreau's somewhere to be found," said Dr. Kathryn Dolan, professor and chair of the English and Technical Communication Department at Missouri S&T. Her long-standing admiration for the 19th-century naturalist and philosopher finds its fullest expression in her newest publication, Henry David Thoreau and the Nick of Time: Temporality and Agency in Thoreau's Era and Ours, released in July 2025.

Co-edited with John J. Kuchich and Henrick Otterberg, the volume brings together fifteen essays that explore Thoreau's work through the lenses of time and human agency. Contributors from both sides of the Atlantic offer diverse perspectives on what it means to live "in the nick of time," a phrase Thoreau himself used to describe his sense of being born at just the right historical moment.

***This restored daguerreotype shows Henry David Thoreau, author of Walden (1854) and "Civil Disobedience" (1849), with his distinctive chin-curtain beard. A new scholarly volume, In the Nick of Time (July 2025), co-edited by Dr. Kathryn Dolan, explores Thoreau's lifelong effort to live "between two eternities," attending both to the injustices of his own moment and to the deeper, older rhythms of human and non-human time.***

## From Iceland to Publication

The idea for the collection began in 2022, when Dolan was invited to a Thoreau conference in Iceland. "It was about thirty people giving papers—really, really good papers," Dolan recalled. "Some of the scholars were people I had read and admired for years, and others were younger academics bringing new energy to Thoreau studies. It was this wonderful mix of perspectives."

A few months after the conference, co-editor John Kuchich reached out with an idea: to build a book inspired by the themes that had emerged there. "He asked if I wanted to be involved," Dolan said, "and I couldn't say no."

## Contextualizing Thoreau's Sense of Time

While not every essay in the collection originated from the Iceland conference, its central theme of temporality grew directly from it. "Thoreau talks about how he feels grateful to have been born in his time, and he even feels bad for those who weren't," Dolan explained. "That sense of being 'in the nick of time' became a way for all of us to explore how Thoreau and his readers experience history, change, and urgency."

As co-editors, Dolan and her collaborators faced the challenge of weaving together distinct essays into a unified whole. "Each author approached Thoreau differently—philosophically, scientifically, historically," she said. "The trick was to frame those voices so they spoke to one another. That's what makes the book work: the differences are the point."

## Collaboration and Challenge

This project marked Dolan's first experience co-editing a book, and it brought new lessons in teamwork

***Dr. Kathryn Dolan, professor and chair of English and Technical Communication, co-edited Henry David Thoreau and the Nick of Time, published in July 2025 The volume brings together fifteen international essays examining Thoreau's enduring relevance and his reflections on living "in the nick of time," a phrase he used to describe his sense of having been born at just the right historical moment.***

and trust. "The idea of it not just being my call, but someone else's call too, was very different," she admitted. "Sometimes I thought, 'You're wrong!' But it was good. We caught each other's mistakes, and the book is stronger for it."

The collaborative process, she said, expanded her perspective on scholarship itself. "Editing isn't just about polishing other people's work. It's about building a conversation. That was a learning experience in the best possible way."

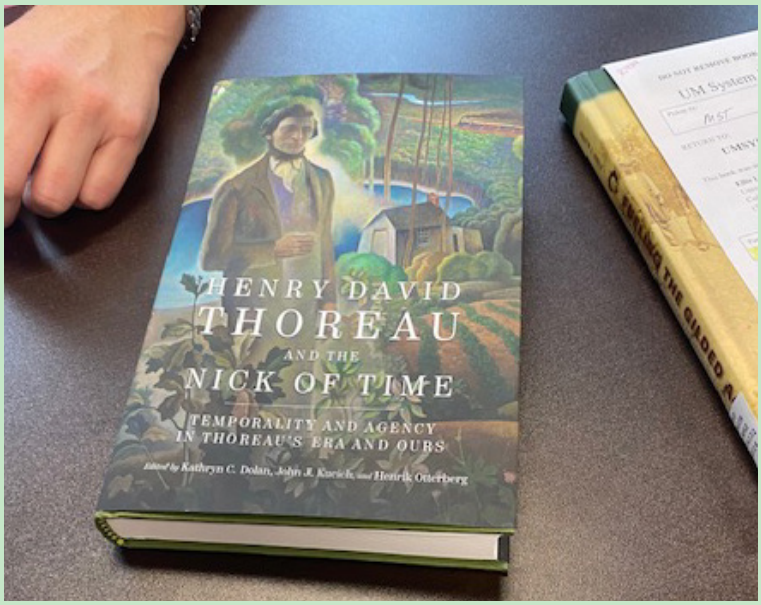
## Teaching Thoreau in a Technical World

In addition to serving as an editor, Dolan also contributed the book's final chapter, "The Remediated World of Thoreau: A Joyful Active Learning Project." The essay draws directly from her teaching at Missouri S&T, where she encourages students to reinterpret Thoreau's texts through digital and creative media.

"I have students take a Thoreau text and translate it into another form—a video, a website, an artwork—and then explain what that process taught them," Dolan said. "Their work really influenced my chapter. Honestly, the students here are wonderful. It's always a treat to work with them."

Dolan credits Missouri S&T's STEM-focused environment with shaping her own interdisciplinary approach. "S&T is, of course, a science and tech school," she said. "So the conversations around me are often about digital tools, communication, and innovation. That influence naturally seeps into my writing and research."

## A Scholar in Her Own Nick of Time

Reflecting on the work that led from Iceland to publication, Dolan sees Henry David Thoreau and the Nick of Time as both a professional milestone and a continuation of her lifelong dialogue with Thoreau. "One of the best things about being a professor," she said, "is that you're supposed to try new, weird things you've never done before. That's kind of the point."

For Dolan, editing this book wasn't just about revisiting an author she has always loved. It was about discovering new ways to think about time, teaching, and collaboration. And in true Thoreauvian spirit, she seems perfectly content to have done it all in her own "nick of time."