

# **Most Dangerous Study Guide**

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## Summary

The Vietnam war was raging with no end in sight. Daniel Ellsberg who was a brilliant young man and Harvard graduate who considered himself a patriot. He had joined the Marines after graduating from college and served a tour of duty as an officer. He was employed by the Rand Corporation, a public policy think-tank and research organization where he was deployed to serve in the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. Although he may not have been as hawkish as some of those around him, he was a supporter of the war and wanted to do his part in helping the U.S. emerge victorious from the Vietnam War.

In his position as the Pentagon he was cleared to read the majority of the cables sent to the Pentagon from the warfront. He began to see a difference between the story that was emerging from the on-the-ground commanders in Vietnam and the PR that the White House and Pentagon peddled to the American people. There was no sign of victory or even progress in the cables he read yet the press releases from the White House boasted of great progress and the successful curtailing of the spread of communism in Indochina. He was bright enough to understand the “spin” that the Johnson Administration was putting on the war but it bothered him. However, initially it did not change his advocacy for the war and eventual victory.

But as time passed, Ellsberg became more and more dismayed by what he saw and heard. An incident referred to as the Gulf of Tonkin incident sparked the escalation of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Ellsberg was privy to the back and forth transmissions between the warfront and the Pentagon. There was a strong indication that the claim of attack on U.S. ships by the North Vietnamese that was reported was actually a big mistake. Upon a tour of the area by U.S. Navy pilots, there was no sign of enemy ships and that U.S. ships had not been torpedoed which was originally reported. However, Johnson ordered the bombing of the region in retaliation of the incident which probably never happened. Although this became apparent to everyone in the Pentagon and the White House, they kept the truth from the American people.

Ellsberg wanted to do his part to end the war. He even spent two years on the ground in Vietnam fighting alongside U.S. soldiers. He began to realize that there was no win option and believed that the war should end no matter if it was considered a loss. But neither Presidents Johnson nor Nixon wanted to be the first U.S. president to lose a war. Their bloated egos took priority over the death and destruction that was going on a world away.

Ellsberg tried to convince those in power that there was no win and that the U.S. should pull out and stop the carnage. However, the war would not end until it was politically advantageous to the administration. Ellsberg had read a thorough report on the history of Vietnam and the wars that had been waged in the nation over many decades. The report had been ordered by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. Ellsberg believed that the American people had the right to know the truth. He smuggled a copy of the 7,000 page report out that came to be known as the Pentagon Papers and gave a copy of it to the New York Times. The truth was out and Daniel Ellsberg would have to

withstand accusations of treason and prove that he did not betray his country and that he was a true patriot.



# Part I: Insider, Pages 7 - 45

## Summary

Henry Kissinger said that Daniel Ellsberg was the most dangerous man in America and should be stopped at any cost. But Ellsberg's story started long before Kissinger uttered those words. After graduating from Harvard, Daniel Ellsberg joined the Marines and served as lieutenant. After his tour of duty, he obtained his PhD in Economics and worked for the Rand Corporation. He was attached to the Pentagon where he was attached to Assistant Secretary of Defense John McNaughton's staff to do research on the growing problems in Vietnam.

One afternoon while McNaughton was meeting with Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, an urgent message was handed over to Ellsberg. The message from Captain Herrick, commander of the U.S. destroyers in the Tonkin Bay, reported that the U.S. was under torpedo attack. McNamara received the same cables and reported the incident to President Johnson who ordered that the destroyers be given air support. Later there was serious doubt that the U.S. had actually been under attack but the incident, known as the Gulf of Tonkin incident, served to escalate the war on probably false pretenses.

France had been in control of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos since the late nineteenth century. In 1945, American soldiers parachuted into North Vietnam to help Ho Chi Minh, a communist activist, in the Vietnam's fight against Japan. After Japan was defeated by the U.S., Ho Chi Minh took control of his country and declared its independence from France. President Truman refused to acknowledge Vietnam as a sovereign state because its leader was a communist. Truman had been confronted with a dilemma: was it more important for a country to have its independence or stop the spread of communism? He chose to support France and stop the spread of communism.

A war broke out in Vietnam between the French and the Viet Minh, Ho Chi Minh's forces, who were supported by the Soviets. Fighting ended with the Geneva Accords which temporarily effectively separated the country into North and South Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh grabbed control of the north and began what became a brutal dictatorship. Ngo Dinh Diem took control of the south. Diem was not a communist but he was also a brutal dictator who ran corrupt elections and punished those who didn't vote for him.

President Eisenhower warned that allowing one country to become communist would create the Domino Theory causing other nations to fall to communism. Ho Chi Minh wanted to unite all of Vietnam under his control. He worked with a communist guerrilla force called the Viet Cong to help him take control. Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson all subsequently escalated support of South Vietnam.

Ellsberg was going through a rough period. In addition to the stress of his demanding job, he was going through a divorce and was separated from his children. He was



reading top secret cables some of which he placed in the burn bag to be destroyed. McNaughton allowed him to read everything even documents marked for only the eyes of the Secretary of Defense. When a State Department official learned that Ellsberg was privy to top secret documents that he didn't have clearance for, McNaughton was told to fire him. McNaughton refused to fire him but told him to be careful.

President Johnson did not want to go to war. However, Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Cong were aggressively attacking the south. Johnson's advisors told him that the south could not withstand escalated assaults. Barry Goldwater, the Republican candidate for president, called Johnson "soft on communism." Goldwater declared that he would drop an atomic bomb on the Ho Chi Minh trail, the path used to move arms and resources from the north to the south. Privately, Johnson met with advisors knowing that U.S. intervention would be necessary to stop the north. But Johnson publicly promised the public that there would be no war. He won the election in a landslide over Goldwater. After Johnson's inauguration, his advisors urged Johnson to start bombing.

Ellsberg was told to catalogue the grisly details of assaults by the Viet Cong in order to convince Johnson to order sustained bombing of the north. Ellsberg began to feel doubts thinking that the increased level of bombardment would include women and children as victims.

## Analysis

This section provides some background on who Daniel Ellsberg is. Although he ultimately is the person who released the Pentagon Papers to the world, his background included a tour of duty in the Marines and working as an analyst for the Rand Corporation a think tank and public policy research organization. He was assigned to a long-term research position at the Pentagon which was where he ultimately had access to the McNamara report on Vietnam which came to commonly be known as the Pentagon Papers.

Ellsberg is presented as a very patriotic individual. Having served in the Marines as an officer, he came to his position as an analyst at the Pentagon with a background in the military. He began as a passionate advocate for winning the Vietnam War. However, in his position he was able to see the duplicitous nature of the war that was really being fought and the image that was presented to the American public. He was aware that the Tonkin Gulf incident in which the U.S. retaliated against an attack was probably a big mistake because the U.S. was not actually under attack. Incidents like these were kept from the public at large.

These chapters also show President Johnson as the reluctant war president. He literally walked the halls of the White House at night because he was so disturbed by the escalation of the war. His advisors, including Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and military commanders, kept urging him to increase bombing and provide more support in order to stop the spread of communism.



Ellsberg is described as a bright man who was going through personal problems including a divorce and separation from his children. His job was demanding and he found the secret cables he was privy to about how the war was really going as opposed to the information that was supplied to the American people. The thought of the innocent women and children and village people who were being killed in U.S. bombings weighed heavily on Ellsberg.

## **Vocabulary**

studious, riveted, communism, commodore, reconnaissance, provocation, catapult, strafing, resolution, inviolable, perspective, ludicrous



# Part I: Insider, Pages 46 - 86

## Summary

Ellsberg contacted a U.S. officer in Vietnam to get the bloody evidence that McNamara wanted. Subsequently, Johnson ordered the launching of Operation Rolling Thunder a few days later. Despite the fact that the American public was told that the war would not widen, over the next three and a half years, America dropped 800 tons a day on North and South Vietnam. But soldiers and resources continued to flow down the Ho Chi Minh Trail from the north.

The choices were to either send American ground troops or bomb the supplies and arms sent in by the Soviets and Chinese which would start WWII. Johnson reluctantly approved the deployment of 3,500 Marines into Da Nang, South Vietnam, at the request of General William Westmoreland. Ellsberg became reacquainted with journalist Patricia Marx at an anti-war protest in Washington, D.C. Ellsberg tried to stay out of camera range. It would be a little difficult to explain to his Pentagon bosses why he was at a protest. Ellsberg and Patricia began seeing each other.

Ellsberg read cables indicating that little progress was being made on the war front. Johnson offered financial aid to Ho Chi Minh to end the conflict but he rejected the offer. Ellsberg discovered that McNaughton had an entire cache of sensitive cables that he had not been allowed to read. He was tempted to read the cables but he resisted for a while. Ellsberg finally decided to look at the restricted cables one night. The next night he found that the combination had been changed. McNaughton called him in and offered him a better job and a transfer. He knew he had been caught. Later, he learned that the "secret" cables were reports that the bombings were not having much impact on stopping the North.

Johnson met with his advisors. If he approved Westmoreland's request, they could turn the tide. Johnson was told that sending the troops that Westmoreland asked for would transfer the responsibility for victory or defeat to the U.S. Johnson worried that they'd get in and wouldn't be able to get out. Ho Chi Minh let it be known that he was prepared to fight for twenty years. Advisors urged Johnson to bomb North Vietnam harbors.

Ellsberg spent most of the fall of 1965 in the rural area surround Saigon. He was a member of the State Department and accompanied Col. John Paul Vann, (Ret'd.) They were part of a team trying to find a non-military solution for ending the war. Ellsberg's job was to convince the people of South Vietnam to side with the Americans. Ellsberg toured around the area interacting with children, watching for land mines on the road and checking out recently bombed areas. They avoided going out at night which was when the Viet Cong were on patrol. Commander James Stockdale was shot down and parachuted to the ground where he was pummeled by locals. He had shattered his leg. He was captured by the Viet Cong. His leg was set in a cast and he was incarcerated in the Hao Lo prison in Hanoi – also known as the Hanoi Hilton.





Patricia was furious that Ellsberg went to Vietnam but they stayed in touch. She visited him in Vietnam where he proposed. She said yes but there was still some doubt in her mind. They argued about the war. He thought it was worthwhile; she was totally against it.

In December, McNamara was advised that the U.S. was taking large numbers of casualties and that North Vietnam and the Viet Cong were growing stronger. Westmoreland wanted another 200,000 troops. If Johnson approved the additional forces, they could expect a death rate of U.S. soldiers at 1,000 a month – 175,000 of the total force would die. Results would not vary much from current ones. McNamara had come to believe that there was no military solution and that they should seek a diplomatic one. North Vietnam could call up a force of 2.5 million. The war of attrition was not working. McNamara did not share this information with Johnson.

Johnson had at first rejected the additional 200,000 troop request. But in the end he didn't want to be the first American president to lose a war and finally agreed. From 1966 through 1968, 25,000 men were drafted each month. The war came home.

## Analysis

Despite growing his growing doubts about U.S. escalation in the Vietnam War, Ellsberg was an analyst and had to do the bidding of his superiors. One of his jobs was to gather information about the suffering of American soldiers at the hands of the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong so that McNamara could convince Johnson to increase military intervention.

Johnson faced an impossible dilemma according to what he was told by his military advisors. He had to either send in troops or bomb Chinese and Russian suppliers which, he was told, could lead to World War III. He reluctantly chose the former, sending in 3,500 Marines to South Vietnam. Ellsberg became involved with Patricia Marx who was journalist and was vehemently against the war. She had a huge influence on Ellsberg who was already vulnerable from the struggles with his personal problems and the reality he was seeing about the war.

Ellsberg knew there was a secret cache of cables that he didn't have the clearance level to read. Because of his growing doubts about the war and his discomfort with the false image that was being presented to the public, he began to experience a strong temptation to open the safe where the secret cables were kept but he resisted – for a while. Although he finally got in to the safe once, when he tried to access it a second time, the combination had been changed telling him that he'd been caught. He was immediately transferred to another position but was not terminated. This episode demonstrates his growing desire to expose the lies the administration was peddling to the American people and foreshadows the later actions he would take that would expose a top secret report to the world. He also decided to see the war up close and traveled to Vietnam as a State Department official to grasp a more complete picture of the war.

## Vocabulary

rivulet, battalion, smitten, canopy, tormented, cordial, acetate, province, piaster, ingenious



# Part I: Insider, Pages 87 - 116

## Summary

That spring, Ellsberg flew over the war-torn nation, taking photos of the terrain below. He saw the results of the forest that had been sprayed with deadly Agent Orange. The pilot told him that only Viet Cong were in this area called the Plain of Reeds. Ellsberg later learned that there were 2,000 villagers who lived there, too. Ellsberg thought it was the villagers that the U.S. had come to save yet they're being killed in the bombing raids.

By 1966, McNamara knew that the U.S. could not win the war. He never shared his conclusion with Johnson and publicly continued to support the war. The CIA issued a report that the U.S. effort was not weakening the enemy enough to defeat them. Johnson ordered that the report be kept secret. Patricia came for a visit and to do a story on the war. She was dismayed by the destruction and the killing. Patricia confronted Ellsberg, asking how he could be part of the war. He was trying to help but she wasn't convinced. They were on uncertain terms when she went home.

McNamara asked Ellsberg for his opinion about the war's progress. Ellsberg's assessment was that things had stayed about the same over the year he'd been there. McNamara agreed but when he got off the plane, he told a group of reporters that great progress was being made in Vietnam. When McNamara appeared at Harvard to give a commencement speech he was surrounded and harassed by anti-war protestors. It was the same at any college he was invited to. McNamara, decided it was time to express his true feelings about the war.

After a brief visit back home, Ellsberg returned Vietnam and felt himself slipping into a deep depression. The Vietnamese villagers wanted the war to be over; they didn't really care who won. Their lives wouldn't be appreciably different either way. He had broken up with Patricia. He was thirty-six and nothing made him happy. He decided to see combat up close. He decided to travel to the Mekong Delta where there was a big Viet Cong presence and where American troops had just started to engage them.

Ellsberg's copter landed in Rach Kien. He met the American commander of the battalion there. They had chased out the Viet Cong who had been living there and had made the village their headquarters. Ellsberg accompanied the soldiers and took photos of them as they waded through rice paddies. Although civilians were prohibited from engaging in a firefight, Ellsberg fired at the enemy because he didn't want the soldiers to feel they had to protect him. He lived like an infantryman for weeks. The men engaged in firefights several times with stray Viet Cong.

Ellsberg was scheduled to return to Saigon but he decided to go on one last march to a spot that was particularly worrisome. Every patrol that had come near the spot fell under heavy fire. They traveled through the night and as soon as they came to the targeted



spot, they were under fire. The Americans fired back and sent coordinates of the enemy fire over the radio. The area was soon shelled by American bombers. The patrol was able to proceed and came upon a village. They shot up all the huts in case any Viet Cong were inside. If there were families – women and children – it was just too bad. The Marines set the village on fire when they moved on.

Ellsberg was laid up with hepatitis in a hospital in Bangkok for all of January 1967. He spent another month recovering in Saigon. It reminded him of when he was 15 and wound up in the hospital after his family was in a serious car accident. He had a long hospital stay and recovery then, too. His mother and younger sister, Gloria, had died in the accident. His father who fell asleep at the wheel struggled with enormous guilt.

## Analysis

Ellsberg gained a bird's eye view of the war when flying over the terrain and seeing how the lethal Agent Orange left a trail of death behind it. When the pilot who he flew with told him that the area that was bombed beneath them had been inhabited only by Viet Cong. On a tour on the ground later, he saw evidence that innocent villagers had lived there as well.

McNamara had tried for years to make a case for the war and an eventual U.S. victory. However, facts were stubborn and got in the way of his goals. He finally saw that there was no win option scenario for the war. But in the long-held tradition of the administrations that had been overseers of the Vietnam problem, McNamara publicly remained a cheerleader for the war and America's ultimate victory there. All the while, Ellsberg was observing what was going physically on the ground in Vietnam and contrasting it with what was coming out of the White House PR machine.

Ellsberg and McNamara were both depressed by the war but reacted quite differently. Ellsberg went deeper into the field in Vietnam and actually fought side-by-side with the soldiers. He was frustrated and dismayed by the endless war and wanted nothing more than to end it. McNamara was having his own personal battle thousands of miles away in Washington finally facing the reality that Ellsberg was living.

## Vocabulary

phosphorous, discernible, squalid, debilitating, appraisals, intolerable, firepower, commencement, pacified, artillery, mortared, demolition, paddy, hepatitis

## Part II: Secrets and Lies, Pages 119 - 157

### Summary

Four-hundred thousand soldiers had been deployed to Vietnam. The president kept saying that the U.S. was winning the war but the news that Americans watched every night told a different story. The largest anti-war protest occurred on April 15th in Central Park in New York. There were 300,000 protestors. Animosity toward President Johnson and Congress was growing. Johnson largely stayed out of sight and felt like a prisoner in the White House. Westmoreland wanted more troops – up to 200,000 more – to break the stalemate and win the war. McNamara privately urged Johnson to reject the request. Johnson approved the deployment of an additional 55,000.

In March 1967 Daniel Ellsberg returned to Washington and resigned from the State Department. He shared what he'd learned in Vietnam with Walt Rostow, the President's national security advisor who insisted that the U.S. was on its way to victory. He emphatically responded that the U.S. was definitely not on the way to victory. He got the same reaction from officials at State and at the Pentagon. One official hinted that there would be no changes until after the next election which was over a year away.

McNamara finally recognized that the U.S. could not win the war. He ordered his staff to prepare an honest and comprehensive report on Vietnam which became known as the Pentagon Papers. Mort Halperin who led the effort offered Ellsberg a position on his staff. Johnson removed McNamara, who was near collapse, as Secretary of Defense and named him President of the World Bank.

On January 31, 1968, the Tet offensive was launched during which American lives were lost. By now there had been 20,000 Americans killed in the war and 500,000 currently deployed. The Tet Offensive was a symbol that all was not well in Vietnam and that the US government was lying to the people. Ellsberg was assigned to be part of the staff of the new Secretary of Defense, Clark Clifford. Westmoreland asked for an additional 206,000 troops. Ellsberg knew that the request was unknown to Congress. He began to have strong feelings that the people had a right to know what was going on.

Westmoreland's request for more troops was leaked to the New York Times and so weakened Johnson that he announced that he would not seek reelection. Tom Hayden, a high-profile anti-war protestor, proclaimed at a conference that Ellsberg attended that the activists had toppled a president. Ellsberg was deeply impacted by the assassinations of Martin Luther and Robert F. Kennedy adding to his depression over the war.

Nixon, the Republican nominee for president, vowed to end the war. Hubert Humphrey was the Democratic nominee. Privately he was against the war but would not speak out against Johnson. Violence broke out between anti-war protestors and the police at the Democratic convention in Chicago. Ellsberg was severely depressed and began seeing



a psychiatrist four days a week. The peace talks resumed and Humphrey vowed that he'd end the war. Nixon wasn't about to lose the election. He had a secret message sent to Nguyen Van Thieu, president of South Vietnam, to reject the peace talks and hold out for a Nixon victory.

Ellsberg met with Henry Kissinger, his former professor and Nixon's national security advisor in hopes of influencing Kissinger about the war. He told them that there was no "win" option. Priority one in the new Nixon administration was to end the war. There were 525,000 U.S. soldiers still in Vietnam. More than 30,000 U.S. soldiers had been killed. Nixon secretly ordered that bombing be expanded into Cambodia because the north was using the territory to stage attacks against U.S. soldiers. Congress was given phony reports as part of the secrecy campaign.

When completed, the Pentagon Papers it was seven thousand pages long. Only fifteen copies were made. Ellsberg convinced Mort Halperin who was working for Kissinger to loan him a copy. He wanted to read it and promised to be discreet. Halperin told Ellsberg that Nixon wasn't getting out of Vietnam. Ellsberg tried to convince his bosses at Rand that Nixon was escalating the war instead of winding it down. No one was interested.

Ellsberg couldn't reconcile U.S. strategy that supported the escalation of a war. The Vietnamese people didn't care who won the war – they just wanted it over. Ellsberg wasn't shocked by the contents of the Pentagon Papers but was amazed at its thoroughness and dismayed by how deceitful the government had been. He locked the papers – evidence of the lies of four presidents over 23 years – in his safe every evening.

## Analysis

Anti-war protests were on the rise and President Johnson's approval ratings were taking a nosedive. Despite the sell job that the White House was spinning for the public, the American people were seeing the reality of the war. Johnson, who hated the war probably more than the protestors, tried to stay out of sight -- he was described as a prisoner of the White House. Despite this uproar against the war, General Westmoreland was asking that more soldiers be deployed to the warfront.

Ellsberg hit a brick wall when he returned to Washington and shared what he had experienced on the battlefield in Vietnam. The national security advisor to the President still put on a happy face that the war would be won. Ellsberg was aware that the upcoming election would play a huge role in what happened in Vietnam. The lid had to be kept on Vietnam so that Johnson could be reelected – the chances for his returning for a second term were growing dimmer and dimmer with each report of the dead and wounded.

McNamara had a breakdown and couldn't continue in his position as Secretary of Defense. There is evidence that other government insiders wanted the war to end.



There were leaks about the large number of soldiers that Westmoreland asked for. Ellsberg continued to see the lies that the White House was peddling to the public and growing more and more dismayed. Things got so hot for Johnson that he realized that he could not be re-elected and announced that he would not run for re-election. A future president becomes part of the story. Nixon wanted to assure his election and made contact with the South Vietnamese asking that they put off agreeing to a peace settlement until after he became president. The lies and deceit were set to continue on in the next American presidency.

## Vocabulary

warmonger, intensified, attrition, stalemate, afoul, inherently, treacherous, vulnerability, inaugural, legitimacy

## Part II: Secrets and Lies, Pages 158 - 189

### Summary

The report proved that the U.S. had never tried to win the war. Presidents would escalate military action in Vietnam but never to a level to realize victory. This was most egregiously true in the Johnson administration. The war perpetuated because no president wanted to be the first to lose a war. U.S. soldiers could die in battle and thousands of civilians could perish in Viet Nam because of bloated egos. Nixon began withdrawing troops hoping to prod Ho Chi Minh into some concessions that would allow the U.S. to withdraw with honor. Kissinger warned the north that if they didn't agree to a settlement by November, that the U.S. would unleash a savage blow.

Ellsberg was in Philadelphia at War Resisters' International Conference. Though he had come to lecture and participate in discussion panels, he felt swept away by the protestors and joined them. He passed out anti-war literature to passers-by. Ellsberg had told former Rand colleague Anthony Russo about the Pentagon Papers. Russo had encouraged him to leak them to the press. Ellsberg smuggled the report out of the building and made copies at the small business that Russo's girlfriend owned. Ellsberg worked all night and returned the original copy back into the safe the next morning. There would be more days of smuggling the report back and forth. There were 7,000 pages to copy twice on a slow machine.

Ellsberg knew he might be headed to jail for life. He worried about his children and what they would hear and think about him. He hinted to his son Robert, 14 at the time, that he was involved in something important that could land him in trouble. Robert helped Ellsberg make copies of the papers and told his mother about it.

Carol Cummings, Ellsberg's ex-wife, called him panicked about what Robert told her that Ellsberg was making copies of top-secret documents. She was enraged that he had involved Robert. On October 15th Nixon was watching football on TV in the White House as anti-war activists protested outside. Protests had been growing but he was ignoring them. Over 40,000 soldiers had been killed. The copying work continued into October. Ellsberg had Robert help again although he'd promised his ex-wife he'd leave the kids out of his nefarious work. He had his 10-year-old daughter Mary help him cut off the words, "Top Secret" from the copies while Robert made them.

On November 2nd, Patricia arrived in California to reunite with Ellsberg. He got a call from a high-profile anti-war activist who asked him to come to DC for a strategy meeting. He agreed to come because he had other reasons. He planned to offer a copy of the Pentagon Papers to Senator William Fulbright. He and Patricia flew to Washington; Ellsberg had the first thousand pages of the report in his suitcase. Nixon addressed the nation that night, defending the continuance of the war and blaming the North Vietnamese for not negotiating a peace.





Fulbright was intrigued by what Ellsberg told him. He would have his aide, Norvil Jones, read what Ellsberg brought. Fulbright would hold a public hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to expose the report.

In February, Kissinger was meeting with North Vietnamese officials in an effort to negotiate a peace. On April 7th, Carol called Ellsberg to tell him that the FBI had come by asking if she knew about the classified report her ex-husband may have made copies of. Carol had told her stepmother that she was angry at Ellsberg because he'd involved her son in copying some classified documents. Her stepmother called the FBI. Ellsberg hid copies of the report at friends' houses and quit his job. He figured the sheriff would soon show up to arrest him. He took a job with MIT at half his Rand salary.

Nixon made another unpopular announcement when he told the American people that the U.S. military would be invading Cambodia because the North Vietnamese was. The largest and angriest protests yet followed. The National Guard was called in to calm the protestors at Kent State in Ohio, where four students were killed.

## Analysis

Through his experiences and the research he conducted, Ellsberg finally concluded that the U.S. Administration had never tried to win the war. It would take too many resources and result in too many casualties. Why not pull out then? Neither Johnson and later Nixon were willing to be the first U.S. president to lose a war.

Ellsberg became more involved in the anti-war protests that were growing in size and number. He recalled being swept away by the spirit of those who wanted the war to be over. Perhaps Ellsberg's deep, true feelings about the war became more sharply defined through his interest and participation in anti-war discussions and protests. Ellsberg saw the tragic irony that America's best were either being killed in a senseless war or going to jail in protest of it.

Ellsberg had been going through a pivotal time in his opinions and feelings about the war but that was all over. He had come over to the anti-war side and decided that the people had to learn the truth about the war. If the truth were out, those who were supporting the war would soon join the protestors. Ellsberg made the difficult decision that he would be willing to go to jail. He had gone to war for his country and supported its outcome all for naught. Now he could expose the deceit and lies of the U.S. government and military and go to jail for something worthwhile. He decided to leak the Pentagon Papers to the New York Times.

## Vocabulary

calamity, preposterous, tedious, psychotic, lull, concession, under-estimate, mayhem



## Part II: Secrets & Lies, Pages 190 - 214

### Summary

Ellsberg and Patricia finally got married at her brother's home in New York City on August 8, 1970. Ellsberg arranged a meeting with Kissinger to learn if he had read the McNamara study. He had heard of it but had not read it. Remarkably, Kissinger wasn't sure there could be that much to learn from it. Ellsberg and Patricia settled into an apartment near MIT. They were both poised for a visit from the FBI. Senator Fulbright still hadn't decided what to do with the papers. He gave a copy to Senator George McGovern a vocal opponent of the war but he couldn't release it because he was running for president – releasing classified documents wouldn't be a presidential move. Patricia read segments of the study and supported what Ellsberg was trying to do.

Kissinger came to MIT to give a lecture. Ellsberg was in the audience and during Q&A, Ellsberg stood and confronted him for an estimate on how many Indochinese would be killed; how many human beings would die under present policy. The room grew silent; Kissinger was stunned. He didn't provide an answer.

Ellsberg told New York Times reporter Neil Sheehan about the Pentagon Papers. Sheehan told his boss, Robert Phelps, who met with James Weston, the paper's top editor. Reston told Sheehan to proceed with the story. Ellsberg and Patricia organized the report, made more copies and stashed them with friends. Sheehan came to Boston and read the report which was being kept at Patricia's brother's apartment while he was out of town. Sheehan shared his notes with the Washington, D.C. Times editor who thought it was gold.

Unknown to Ellsberg, Sheehan returned to Boston, took the study and had copies made of it. The New York Times was dragging its feet, trying to determine if they should run with the story although James Reston called it the greatest story of the century. Reston asked for a legal opinion from their in-house lawyer about any criminal culpability they might have for releasing the study. The lawyer advised them that the administration could come after them under the Espionage Act of 1917 which made it a felony to intentionally release information that could help the enemy. The editors responded that it wasn't their intention to help the enemy; they wanted to release something that the American people had a right to know.

A team of 16 people were installed in a suite at the New York Hilton to read the Pentagon Papers. Sheehan and his co-writing partner, New York Times reporter Hedrick Smith, wrote stories for publication. Discarded papers were bundled up and taken to the Times offices and shredded. Times publisher, Arthur Sulzberger, was advised by the law firm Lord, Day & Lord not to run the report.

Tony Austin, an editor at the Times who Ellsberg new casually, called to notify him that the Times had a copy of the entire McNamara study and that they were going to run it.



The Times were on a kind of lock-down, fearing that they would soon be visited by the FBI. Ellsberg and Patricia hid the only complete copy of the report at the home of a professor friend. Abe Rosenthal, NY Times editor, paced the floor waiting for 4:30 pm, the time when no more changes could be made to the paper. If no one stepped in to stop the presses, the story of the Pentagon Papers would run.

Nixon was at the White House preoccupied with his daughter's wedding that was to take place that afternoon. It was raining in the Rose Garden where his daughter wanted to be married. Nixon got hold of an Air Force meteorologist and learned that the rain would let up around 4:30 that afternoon. The wedding went off without a hitch. Later, during the indoor reception, Ron Ziegler, Press Secretary, got a message from a reporter at the New York Daily News who told him that the Times was set to run an article about the war the next day. Ziegler didn't think it sounded like a big deal.

When Sheehan saw the first copy of the paper, he tried to call Ellsberg but there was no answer. The Ellsbergs were enjoying dinner and a movie with friends. They took a subway home about midnight and spotted the New York Times that ran the first article about the Pentagon Papers.

## Analysis

Ellsberg had decided to leak the Pentagon Papers but he had to be careful who he approached about the report. He would be placing himself in great jeopardy and but putting the person he approached in a tough spot. He approached several senators who frankly seemed to be afraid of it. One senator was running for president. How would it look if a person who wants to be president takes possession of a leaked top secret report?

At the same time Ellsberg was growing more frustrated with leaking the report to the right person he was becoming more bold in speaking out. When Kissinger gave a lecture at MIT, Ellsberg was in the audience. When he stood and asked Kissinger how the Administration would justify all the lives being lost in Indochina, the room was thrown into stunned silence. Ellsberg had to speak out, had to get the truth to the people yet he was frustrated by who he could give it to and beyond that who would take it!

Finally, he approached the entity that would most likely take it which he knew all along. He obviously wanted an elected official to take the report and take some kind of official action – hold a hearing, call a press conference, confront the administration. But those he approached were more concerned with their own careers. Even when the New York Times got hold of the report, they were cautious about running stories about the papers even though they were anxious to do so. Although their lawyers told them not to run the stories, in the editor probably knew that a rival newspaper would eventually run the story and they wanted the scoop.

## Vocabulary

impeccable, kiosk, transcript, tenacity, fretful abridged, relevant, espionage, felony, byline

## Part III: Outsider, Pages 217 - 256

### Summary

Nixon and White House staff had read the article in the Times but were unconcerned; it was not the top subject of their discussions. Nixon hated leaks but he didn't think this one was particularly damaging. He wanted the White House to stay out of it. Times attorney James Goodale didn't hear any noise about the article and thought it was a bust. Things changed quickly. The buzz started about the article and who leaked it. Former State Department official William Bundy thought it was Ellsberg – so did Rand Company personnel.

Kissinger called the act unconscionable. He assured Nixon that the report was damaging to Johnson and prior administrations but not necessarily to him. But Nixon was furious – it was an act of treason. Attorney General John Mitchell was contacted for a legal opinion on taking action against the newspaper and the leaker.

Subsequent articles ran in the Times that described how Johnson ordered bombings while he lied to the public. Kissinger was adamant that the articles had to be stopped at once. Nixon ordered White House staff to cut all relations with the Times. Ellsberg was besieged by phone calls from reporters who had heard he was the suspected leaker.

The Justice Department contacted the Times demanding that they stop publication of the stories threatening them with prosecution under the Espionage Act. In a telegram Mitchell demanded all copies of the report that the Times had in their possession. Goodale advised the editors that they didn't have to obey a "telegram;" a court order would have to be issued. He told Arthur Sulzberg that stopping publication would be a mistake. Sulzberg ordered that the stories keep running.

Nixon ordered the Justice Department to seek an injunction against the Times to stop the publication of articles based on the Pentagon Papers. Constitutional attorneys Alexander Bickel and Floyd Abrams agreed to represent the Times. In court, Bickel argued that the Times was protected by the First Amendment. This was the first time in American history that the government tried to silence a newspaper. The Times refused to halt publication while the court studied the matter so the court issued a restraining order that prohibited the Times from publishing more stories.

Ellsberg got a copy to Ben Bagdikian, assistant managing editor for the Washington Post. Lawyers for the Washington Post advised Ben Bradlee, managing editor, not to run stories based on the Espionage Act. Publisher Katherine Graham heard both sides and told Bradlee to run with the story. Nixon met with Kissinger and other advisors. They were sure the leaker was Ellsberg who Kissinger characterized as "nuts." Nixon ordered that Ellsberg be exposed for being a traitor.



The Washington Post published a story on the papers and immediately got a call from the Justice Department telling them to cease publication of the stories. Ben Bradlee declined and went ahead with the second story. Upon Ellsberg's request, Bagdikian passed a copy of the papers to Senator Mike Gravel of Alaska, a vocal opponent of the war. Federal Judge Murray Gurfein rendered his judgment in favor of the New York Times citing freedom of speech. The Justice Department immediately filed an appeal which temporarily prevented the Times from publishing any more stories on the Pentagon Papers.

Ellsberg and Patricia were literally on the lam; phones of friends were being tapped. A portion of the Pentagon Papers was smuggled to a contact at the Boston Globe. On June 22nd, the Globe published a story on the papers. The court blocked the Globe from publishing further articles. Tony Russo was subpoenaed to appear in court. He refused to provide any and was found in contempt of court and jailed. Linda Sinay was also subpoenaed and placed under surveillance. The press was chasing Carol and her kids.

Ellsberg arranged to get a copy to CBS anchor Walter Cronkite who set up an interview with Ellsberg which would be televised to the nation. The world was stunned when the interview aired. Papers around the country began running stories on the papers. The floodgates had broken. In Los Angeles, Ellsberg was indicted on three felonies including violation of the Espionage Act. He became the first person to be prosecuted for leaking government secrets. He arranged with his lawyer to turn himself in after he distributed the papers to a few more newspapers. The New York Times was appealing their case to the U.S. Supreme Court. Ellsberg told reporters that he believed the American people had a right to know what had gone on during the Vietnam War.

## Analysis

At first Nixon and his close circle of advisors didn't think the release of the Pentagon Papers was anything to worry about. That was the case mostly because the majority of the criticism was directed at the Johnson administration when the war was greatly escalated. But a few days later, things changed. Kissinger felt it was an unconscionable act. Nixon soon became enraged that someone working for the government had the unmitigated gall to release a top secret report. The Pentagon soon put two and two together and strongly suspected that Ellsberg had been behind the leak.

The Justice Department tried to intimidate the New York Times and then later other newspapers into stopping the publication of articles based on the report. But the newspapers cited the First Amendment and refused to stop running the articles until temporary injunctions were issued through the courts. Many of the lawyers for the newspapers warned them against running the reports because they could be prosecuted under the Espionage Act of 1917.

When the nation's top news anchor, Walter Cronkite, interviewed Ellsberg on his nightly national broadcast, the cat was really out of the bag. An indictment was issued against



Ellsberg. After distributing copies of the Pentagon Papers to a few more newspapers, he turned himself in. He of course didn't want to go to jail but he felt he had done the right thing.

## Vocabulary

overact, media, earthshaking, unconscionable, incriminating, disloyalty, injunction, guerrilla, cantankerous, inquisitor, cloak-and-dagger, circuitous, whistle-blower



## Part III: Outsider, Pages 257 - 288

### Summary

Senator Gravel held a meeting of the Sub-committee on Buildings and Grounds. He announced that he had a copy of the Pentagon Papers. He believed that not making them available to the American public would be a dereliction of his duty. He read the report aloud and cried when he read graphic accounts of wounded soldiers. The committee approved the insertion of the Pentagon Papers into the public record. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the New York Times and the Washington Post. Kissinger said that Ellsberg was the most dangerous man in America and had to be stopped.

The Nixon administration wanted to destroy Ellsberg. Nixon ordered his staff to dig up dirt on him. After being arrested and booked, Ellsberg was released on \$50,000 bond. He was declared a hero by some and a traitor by others. When he attended a Broadway show, the people stood up and applauded him. On the other end of the spectrum, he received hate mail and death threats. Former Rand colleagues expressed the hope that they'd hang him. Former President Johnson called his actions treasonous; Barry Goldwater said he was the second Benedict Arnold.

White House aide Egil Krogh was selected to head the Special Investigations Unit to do a smear job on Ellsberg. Krogh hired G. Gordon Liddy who bragged that he could kill a man with a pencil in a matter of minutes. Howard Hunt, a former CIA agent, was made part of the unit. They named themselves the "Plumbers" because their job was to find and fix leaks. They learned that Ellsberg had been in therapy and decided to surreptitiously make a copy of the doctor's file on Ellsberg. John Ehrlichman, one of Nixon's top aides, approved the covert break-in of the psychiatrist's office.

Ellsberg pleaded not guilty in federal court in Los Angeles. Liddy and Hunt flew to California, disguised themselves in wigs and carried false IDs for a dry-run of the break-in. After hours, they convinced a cleaning lady to give them access to Dr. Fielding's office. They photographed Ellsberg's file but most of the photos were blurry. They hired a Cuban operative to head a team to conduct the actual operation. They had to climb into a window to access the building. Once in the office they looked for Ellsberg's file but couldn't locate it. They ransacked the office to make it look like a robbery. Hunt and Liddy wanted to break into Fielding's apartment and look for Ellsberg's file but Ehrlichman nixed the plan. The break-in yielded nothing and hurt no one but the incident would later haunt a president who was out of control.

The burglars rented a banquet room that adjoined the office building where the Democratic National Committee (DNC) was located. They planned to photograph documents and plant listening devices there. They hit some head winds and had to come back on subsequent nights. On their last night there, guards became suspicious and called the police. Hunt and Liddy were watching the situation and became worried.





One of the burglars whispered, “They got us.” Liddy told his wife that he’d probably be going to jail.

Nixon read about the break-in of the DNC office the next day. He dismissed it as preposterous. But the matter quickly became serious when one of the operatives turned out to be James McCord, former CIA officer who was attached to Nixon’s reelection committee. Howard Hunt’s name had been found in a notebook of the one of the operatives. Hunt was then a staff member of Charles Colson, White House counsel. Nixon had always claimed he had nothing to do with the planning of the break-in which the evidence supports.

Nixon met with his top aides to plot damage control. Nixon learned that Liddy was working for John Mitchell which complicated matters further. The hundred dollar bills found on the burglars were all traced to a withdrawal from the Committee to Reelect the President. Once the FBI questioned Liddy and Hunt - which was inevitable - other operations conducted by the burglars including the efforts to break into Dr. Fielding’s office would all come out. All signs were ultimately pointing to Nixon and his close circle. Nixon ordered that the FBI drop the investigation. The cover-up was in motion and the plan for it had been recorded.

The lawyers in the Ellsberg case were scrambling to find precedent but there were none for the crimes that he had been accused of. The prosecutors would have to prove that Ellsberg damaged the country in order for him to be found guilty of violation of the Espionage Act.

## Analysis

The decision to destroy Ellsberg in the press was the action that would ultimately lead to Nixon’s forced resignation. Nixon was furious that the White House was taking an inordinate amount of incoming on the contents of the Pentagon Papers while many were hailing Daniel Ellsberg as a hero. He ordered his close circle of advisors to do whatever it took to bring Ellsberg down.

As a result, the White House Special Investigations Unit was established. It would later be called “The Plumbers” by insiders because their mission was to find and stop leaks. It was a no-holds barred operation that was expected to get the job done. The plumbers decided to break into the office of Dr. Fielding who was Ellsberg’s psychiatrist. Their mission was to photograph Ellsberg’s file so they could portray him as a nutcase. They broke in his office but there was no file.

Later the plumbers broke into the Democratic National Committee office at the Watergate Hotel. They were caught red-handed breaking into the office by the police.



## Vocabulary

dapper, self-righteous, covert, incomparably, paranoid, feasibility, ransacked, befuddle, ruckus, surveillance

## Part III: Outsider, Pages 289 - 319

### Summary

Nixon repeatedly told the press that he would get to the bottom of the Watergate break-in. The public believed him. Kissinger negotiated a deal with North Vietnam for ending the War although the government in the south had not agreed to it. Nixon declared that he had achieved “peace with honor” in his campaign speeches. He won his bid for reelection in a landslide. Inexplicably, Nixon could not shake a sense of foreboding that loomed over him.

The Watergate burglars including Liddy, Hunt and McCord were all facing felony charges. A final agreement between the North and South leaders of Vietnam could not be reached. The South wanted the bombing to continue the North did not. Nixon felt he had no choice but to continue the bombing. Kissinger told the press that the bombing was North Vietnam’s fault and that civilian casualties were minimal; the deaths of American soldiers largely went unmentioned.

In January 1973, Ellsberg was given a standing ovation at an anti-war rally in Los Angeles. Kissinger successfully renegotiated the peace deal with the North while telling the South that the U.S. would continue to support them. A week later the Ellsberg trial began with Judge Matthew Byrne presiding. In their opening remarks, the prosecution made the case that Ellsberg had damaged the security of the nation.

On January 22nd, President Johnson died of a heart attack. That night Nixon announced the end of the Vietnam War and paid tribute to Johnson. Nixon and Kissinger knew the fighting and loss of lives would continue. There was no mention of the thousands who had already died. Hunt and the Cuban operatives had pled guilty to the charges against them. Liddy and McCord opted to stand trial and were found guilty on all eight felony charges. They all faced long prison terms.

On the stand, Ellsberg chronicled his journey from Pentagon analyst to war advocate and finally to anti-war activist. During the trial Judge Byrne was offered the position of FBI Director. Whether he recognized it as a blatant move to influence him is not known.

To avoid prosecution, White House counsel John Dean told the FBI about the spying and sabotage conducted by the White House and Nixon’s re-election committee. He told them about the attempt to break into Dr. Fielding’s office. He admitted to providing hush money and destroying evidence. Nixon attempted to get the investigation shut down but to no avail. Judge Byrne was informed by the Justice Department that operatives directed by the White House had broken into Dr. Fielding’s office.

The offer to Judge Byrne to head the FBI was leaked to the press. Ehrlichman told the FBI that the Ellsberg break-in was part of an investigation ordered by Nixon. Information reached the judge that the administration was responsible for planting bugs that had



picked up some of Ellsberg's conversations. The judge was livid and agreed to hear defense's case for dismissal. the judge ruled for dismissal of all charges against Ellsberg and co-defendant, Anthony Russo.

Ellsberg and Russo told reporters they were going to make their goal the impeachment of Nixon. The trial, Ellsberg told the reporters, was important because it was about telling the truth. Nixon welcomed returning POWs at a ceremony at the White House. The men cheered when Nixon said it was time to stop making heroes out of those who steal government secrets and newspapers that publish them.

Peace with honor never happened. The communists began gaining ground. Had Nixon not been distracted by the "cancer" in his administration, he may have escalated military action in Vietnam. But Watergate was consuming the presidency and the country. Ellsberg felt he had a hand in ending the Vietnam War and in taking down a corrupt leader. Kissinger later said as much – if it weren't for their domestic problems there would have been more bombing.

In August 1974, the Supreme Court ruled that the White House tapes must be turned over. They would prove that Nixon masterminded the cover-up. The House was gearing up to impeach him. He resigned the presidency on August 8, 1974. A total of 58,193 Americans died in Vietnam and another 300,000 were wounded. Since 1964, it is estimated that over 2 million Vietnamese military and civilians lost their lives. America dropped 8 million tons of bombs on Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Years later, unexploded bombs in the area still kill and wound the unsuspecting. Both Johnson and Nixon expressed their determination to not be the first American president to lose a war. They both got their wishes. Johnson was dead and Nixon had resigned in disgrace. President Gerald Ford had to tell the people that America had lost its first war.

## Analysis

The plumbers were charged with felonies. Some pled guilty, others stood trial -- but were all found guilty. Nixon ordered the FBI to halt any further investigation but based on the separation of powers, they were under the Justice Department and did not adhere to his demand. Nixon vowed to the American people that he would get to the bottom of the Watergate break in but it soon became obvious that the plumber operation was uncomfortably and undeniably linked to the inner circle of the White House. Nixon always claimed that he was not involved in the planning which is supported by evidence. His crime was orchestrating the cover-up of the crime.

When the details of the Watergate break-in and the plumber operation became fully known, the break-in of Dr. Fielding's office by the plumbers also surfaced. At this same time, Ellsberg was on trial in federal court for leaking the Pentagon Papers. When the judge learned that a unit connected to the White House perpetrated a break-in of Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office and also bugged the phones of friends and associates of Ellsberg, he dismissed all charges against Ellsberg.



Nixon was forced to resign because he faced impeachment and perhaps even criminal conspiracy charges. A peace agreement had finally been achieved in Vietnam. Kissinger commented that if all the domestic issues hadn't distracted the Administration, the war would have probably continued. Ellsberg won his freedom and felt gratified that he had gotten the truth to the American people, helped to end the war and brought down a corrupt president.

## **Vocabulary**

landslide, tarnished, bizarre, devastation, irretrievably, transgression, impeachment



# Important People

## Daniel Ellsberg

After it was confirmed that Daniel Ellsberg leaked the Pentagon Papers to the New York Times, Henry Kissinger, President Nixon's national security advisor referred to him as the most dangerous man in America and a man who should be stopped. Ellsberg's story that led to Kissinger's conclusion began 26 years before.

It was between the end of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War when Ellsberg began ninth grade. He was nerdy and scrawny and not a bit threatening. As a high school student interested in world events, Ellsberg focused on Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin, who was taking over territory and installing puppet dictatorships in Eastern European nations. After graduating third in his Harvard class, he joined the Marines and served as a lieutenant. After his tour of duty, he returned to Harvard and earned a PhD in Economics.

Ellsberg worked as an analyst for the Rand Corporation, a military and international affairs think tank, at the age of 33. He was attached on an assigned in the Pentagon. Assistant Secretary of Defense John McNaughton was interested in learning more about growing problem in Vietnam and requested that Ellsberg be attached to his staff. China and the Soviet Union were allies of communist North Vietnam; the U.S. had allied with South Vietnam. The U.S. government was most concerned about stopping the spread of Communism in Indochina.

In his position, Ellsberg was privy to classified material that told him that the war was going nowhere even though spokesmen for the Administration and the Pentagon were proclaiming great progress in stopping the spread of communism. He saw the duplicitous nature surrounding the war and grew increasingly concerned.

Ellsberg spent two years in Vietnam and saw the war up close. He tried to convince those in power that there was no "win" scenario for the U.S. in its involvement in the Vietnam War. As time went on, he adamantly believed that the American people had a right to know the truth about the War in which their sons and daughters were dying and sustaining life-changing injuries. He had access to a 7,000-page top-secret report that told the truth about Vietnam. He gave a copy to the New York Times which began running daily articles on the report which became known as the Pentagon Papers. He was called the most dangerous man in America and a traitor by some – to others her was a hero and a patriot.

## Richard Nixon

Richard Nixon was the Republican candidate for president who ran against Hubert Humphrey after President Johnson announced that he would not seek reelection. Before the election, he attempted to get a secret message to the president of South



Vietnam to hold off on a peace settlement with the North so that he could get credit for ending the war after he was elected. The plot was thwarted when President Johnson found out about it. When confronted about his nefarious plans, Nixon back-pedaled and vowed his support of Johnson's peacemaking efforts.

Nixon was president when Daniel Ellsberg leaked the Pentagon Papers to the New York Times. At first Nixon was not overly concerned with the incident because the criticism in the report was mainly directed at Johnson. But the White House began getting heat from the public and press about the report and Nixon became furious. When it was determined that Ellsberg was the leaker, he ordered that Ellsberg be destroyed in the press no matter what it took. He did not want Ellsberg to look like a hero because he was a traitor.

The Special Investigations Unit was formed in the White House with a mission to tear Ellsberg apart. The unit was referred to as "the plumbers" because they were tasked with finding and fixing leaks. The plumbers broke into the Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office looking for a file on Ellsberg and broke into the Democratic National Committee's office in the Watergate Hotel looking for material that they could use against Nixon's opponent in his reelection. The plumbers were caught breaking into the Watergate office leading to Nixon's resignation from office.

## **Captain John Herrick**

Captain John Herrick was the commodore of the USS Maddox that was deployed in the Gulf of Tonkin off the coast of Vietnam. He sent an urgent message to the Pentagon reporting that U.S. Navy ships were being torpedoed by the North Vietnamese. Johnson ordered the bombers retaliated for the attack. However, in later cables Herrick began to hint at the possibility that he had been mistaken about being under attack which was never shared publicly. This incident was one example of what really happened and what the public was told.

## **Robert McNamara**

Robert McNamara was the Secretary of Defense during the early part of the Johnson Administration. McNamara was a hawk and a strong advocate of escalating military action in Vietnam. As the war wore on, however, McNamara began to recognize that winning was not in the cards. He became very distraught and depressed over his role in the escalation of the war.

President Johnson referred to McNamara as a "basket case" because of his concern about the war and his changing opinions of it. It was taking a toll on McNamara who Johnson thought was having a nervous breakdown. He'd bury his head in his office curtains so no one could see him cry. Johnson gave McNamara a new assignment – President of the World Bank – to save him from having a complete breakdown.



## President Lyndon Johnson

President Lyndon Johnson had sky-high approval ratings with the public at the very beginning of military intervention in Vietnam. He was not a war hawk and he found it personally distressing to order the bombings of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Although he found no joy in escalating military action in Southeast Asia, he was adamant that he would not be the first U.S. president to lose a war. The decisions he made distressed him to the point of sleeplessness. The image of the president walking the halls of the White House alone at night humanizes the man who was blamed for the death of so many American soldiers and Vietnamese civilians. He learned that Richard Nixon who was running for president was trying to put off a peace deal until he took office but did not expose him because it would turn the country upside down.

## Lieutenant Philip Caputo

On the war front in Vietnam, Lieutenant Philip Caputo was placed in charge of body counts – U.S. and the enemy. The body count of the enemy was the gage for U.S. success. U.S. strategy was to kill the enemy faster than they could replace them. He had the gruesome job of verifying U.S. deaths by matching the faces of dead soldiers with photos. Sometimes he relied on dental records. He counted enemy bodies and then sent them on for burial. In June 1975, Phil Caputo returned to Saigon, Vietnam as a journalist covering the actual end of the war although it concluded in a rash of bombing by the north.

## Barry Goldwater

Senator Barry Goldwater was the Republican candidate for president when President Johnson was poised to run for re-election to president. He put more pressure on Johnson who was already in agony about his role in escalating the war. Goldwater who was a war hawk blasted Johnson for being soft on communism, a charge that struck to the very heart of the man who believed that his efforts were stopping the spread of communism. Goldwater stated that he would consider using the atomic bomb on the Ho Chi Minh Trail for the U.S. to emerge victoriously from the war and put an end to it. Johnson defeated Goldwater in a landslide.

## James Stockdale

When Captain Herrick sent an urgent message to the Pentagon that U.S. Navy ships were under attack by the North Vietnamese, Navy pilot commander James Stockdale was dispatched to patrol the area but could find no evidence of North Vietnamese boats. Stockdale was later captured by the North and held captive in what became known as the Hanoi Hilton. Stockdale went onto become the running mate of Ross Perot's failed bid for the presidency.





## **Anna Chennault**

Anna Chennault was the president of Republican Women for the Election of Richard Nixon. She was born in China and was strongly anti-communist. She was the chair of Republic Women for Nixon. At Nixon's behest, she was contacted by John Mitchell, one of Nixon's top advisors, to use her connections to get a secret message to Nguyen Van Thieu, president of South Vietnam, asking him to hold off on a peace agreement with the North until after Nixon was elected president so he could get credit for ending the war.

## **Henry Kissinger**

Henry Kissinger was a former professor of Daniel Ellsberg's and became the national security advisor for President Nixon. The appointment surprised Ellsberg because he overheard Kissinger say that Nixon wasn't fit to be president. A few weeks after that, he became his national security advisor. Kissinger was furious over Ellsberg's action and called him the most dangerous man in America and that it was crucial that he be stopped.

## **Anthony Russo**

Anthony Russo was a former Rand Corporation colleague of Daniel Ellsberg. He had been an anti-war advocate even early on and when Ellsberg told Russo about the Pentagon Papers he urged him to release them. Since Russo was a close associate of Ellsberg and had helped him make copies of the Pentagon Papers and secreted them, he was also indicted on federal charges.

## **Randy Kehler**

Ellsberg visited anti-war activist Randy Kehler at the La Tuna Federal Correctional Institution where he was serving a two-year sentence. Ellsberg asked him about prison life and offered to give him a subscription to the New York Times. Ellsberg's visit and his offer of a subscription to the New York Times made sense to Kehler a few weeks later when the New York Times began printing articles on the Pentagon Papers which Ellsberg leaked to the newspaper.

## **John Kerry**

On April 22nd, John Kerry became the first American soldier to testify in Congress against the war. He believed that the government had betrayed the troops. Kerry charged that American soldiers were dying every day so that Nixon wouldn't be the first American president to lose a war.

## The Plumbers

Nixon ordered that Daniel Ellsberg be destroyed in the press by whatever means necessary. He was determined that he not be seen as a hero but rather as the traitor that he was. As a result, the Special Investigations Unit was formed in the White House. Egil Krogh, a White House aide, was chosen to lead the group. Other members of the group were G. Gordon Liddy, Howard Hunt, and James McCord among others. They called themselves “plumbers” because they were tasked with finding and fixing leaks. They broke into Daniel Ellsberg’s psychiatrist’s office looking for a file on him that they could smear him with. Later they broke into the Democratic National Committee office in the Watergate Hotel which destroyed Nixon and his presidency.



# Objects/Places

## Viet Cong

Thousands of fighters formerly called the Viet Minh gathered in the South to form a new guerrilla force that they called the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam. Although the name sounded patriotic and connoted the concept of freedom, they were actual communist fighters. The Americans had a more apt name for them. They called them the Viet Cong which in Vietnamese was short for Vietnamese Communists. The Viet Cong were some of the most vicious fighters the South and the U.S. would face.

## The Geneva Accords

The French were involved in an eight-year war in Vietnam which had been one of their colonies since the late nineteenth century. The war was ended in a truce agreement called the Geneva Accords which created North and South Vietnam. The plan was for the division to be temporary but Ho Chi Minh grabbed power in the North and would not cede it. He became an aggressive and blood dictator who ignored the provisions of the Geneva Accords including an election that was to take place in 1956.

## The Domino Theory

Adherence to the Domino Theory was an important part of American foreign policy during the Cold War when the spread of communism was considered a real threat to democracy. The theory held that countries were like dominos standing on end and when one fell to communism it would fall into the domino in front of it and make it fall and so on. The fear of the domino theory taking effect in Vietnam, it was felt, put other Indochinese countries like Laos and Cambodia at risk of becoming communist if Vietnam fell.

## Kill Ratio

The Pentagon analysts recorded many statistics about the Vietnam War. Body count was the number of enemy fighters killed. The "kill ratio" was the number of enemy troops killed in relation to the number of American soldiers killed. Military leaders like General Westmoreland believed that if the kill ratio was high enough in favor of the loss of enemy lives, that the enemy would be destroyed.

## Agent Orange

A chemical commonly known as Agent Orange was sprayed in the thick jungles of Vietnam where enemy guerrillas secreted themselves so they could ambush U.S. and



South Vietnamese soldiers with sniper fire. The strategy for dispersing the chemical was to expose the guerillas who took potshots at American troops by killing all the vegetation. The chemical proved to have long-lasting debilitating effects on those who were exposed to it including U.S. soldiers.

## **Hanoi Hilton**

U.S. soldiers captured by the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong were taken to a prison in Hanoi which “affectionately” became known as the Hanoi Hilton. The POWs were severely tortured at the prison. By 1967, there were 100 Americans POWs, including James Stockdale and John McCain, at the Hanoi Hilton. They devised a “tap code” that allowed the PWOs to communicate with one another through their cell walls which helped to keep them sane.

## **Tet Offensive**

During the celebration of Tet, the Vietnamese New Year, the U.S. Embassy in Saigon was rocked with an explosion as part of what became known as the Tet Offensive. That night 70,000 communist Vietnamese soldiers launched attacks on a hundred towns and villages in South Vietnam. American lives were lost in the attacks. General Westmoreland was steadfast the next day when he toured the destruction claiming that everything was going well. In the end American and South Vietnamese lives were lost during the offensive but the North and Viet Cong suffered many more losses. After the Tet Offensive, Johnson couldn't sleep and roamed the halls of the White House at night because way dismayed by the Pentagon's request for the deployment of more U.S. soldiers.

## **Phosphorous Bombs**

On an aerial tour of Vietnam, Ellsberg observed a phosphorous being dropped on a house. He was amazed by the resultant explosion that spread gently in the air like the “petals of an enormous flower.” He was mesmerized – he found it to be a gorgeous sight. However, the impact on human beings wasn't lovely and gentle. The pilot explained to him that the when the white phosphorus touched skin it immediately burns down to the bone. Later, Ellsberg saw the burns on children in Vietnamese hospitals.

## **The Espionage Act of 1917**

Federal prosecutors in the Ellsberg trial cited his violation of the Espionage Act of 1917 as one of the felony charges against him. The prosecutors had to prove that Ellsberg was guilty of acts that were intentionally perpetrated to damage the security of the United States.

## The Watergate Hotel

Members of the White House's Special Investigations Unit, also known as the plumbers, broke into the Democratic National Committee offices located in the Watergate Hotel. The plumbers were seeking material that could be used against President Nixon's opponent in his upcoming re-election. The plumbers were caught red-handed by the police. They were later all found guilty of multiple felonies and served time. The plumbers were eventually linked to the inner circle of the White House. The incident led to the discovery of the plumber's break-in of Dr. Fielding's office. Fielding was Ellsberg's psychiatrist; the plumbers hoped to find a file on Ellsberg that they could use to smear him in the press. The Watergate break-in led to the demise of the Nixon Administration.

# Themes

## Deception

One of the main drivers that led to the Pentagon Papers was the deception that Daniel Ellsberg observed while he worked as a research analyst at the Pentagon. Ellsberg was described as very bright with a somewhat fragile nature. He had a military background having served as a lieutenant in the Marines after graduating from Harvard. He supported the Vietnam war and was a vocal cheerleader for a U.S. victory. But things changed for him when he was able to contrast reality with perception.

In his position at the Pentagon, Ellsberg was privy to the majority of cables that were received at the Pentagon from the war front in Vietnam. Time and again, he would read the cables from commanders who describes the lack of progress in the war with the press releases and public statements from the Pentagon and the White House that the war was progressing well. In reality, there was no progress and no glimmer of hope for a U.S. victory. Johnson was not a hawk and abhorred that he had to make tough decisions about prolonging a war that couldn't be won. However, Johnson was adamant that he would not be the first U.S. president to lose a war.

Ellsberg knew that the public and even the U.S. Congress were not aware of the real war that was raging in Southeast Asia and what the public was told about it. He began to imagine the civilian victims in Vietnam – women, children and innocents – who were being bombed by the U.S. military in sorties that were having absolutely no impact on the enemy. Also on his mind were the thousands of U.S. soldiers who'd lost life and limb in a war that the U.S. wasn't really trying to win. The images of the death and destruction that the war was leaving in its wake haunted him.

Ellsberg's discomfort with the level of deception that the Johnson Administration was engaged in led him to question the entire war. He wanted to change the trajectory of the war but what could one person do? He finally decided there was something he could do. He could release the real story of Vietnam and the unpopular war that was being waged there. He could release the Pentagon Papers to the nation and to the world.

## Sacrifice

There are choices in life that everyone faces. Priorities must be decided upon based on the values and ideals that drive each individual and that are the lynchpins of the actions we take. Daniel Ellsberg was a brilliant analyst at the Rand Corporation and was deployed to the Pentagon to help in the U.S. government's intervention in Vietnam. He had graduated third in his Harvard class and served a tour of duty as a Marine officer. In his position at the Pentagon he wanted to do everything possible to help the U.S. stem the spread of communism in Indochina and be victorious in their intervention. He was a patriot by most anyone's measure.



Ellsberg was divorced and was separated from his two children who lived in California. He had sacrificed his personal life by accepting the position at the Pentagon because he felt it was important and a way for him to contribute to the war effort. As time went on and he began to see that the war wasn't going well despite the press releases from the Pentagon and Administration touting great progress.

Ellsberg sacrificed his desk job at the Pentagon by getting himself attached to an on-the-ground assignment in Vietnam as an official of the State Department. He wanted to see the war up front with the hope that he could somehow help to achieve its end. He was in great danger during his years there, fighting side-by-side with U.S. soldiers and being the target of the enemy. When he returned, Ellsberg was frustrated that no one would listen to what he had experienced and his belief that there was no win in sight.

Daniel Ellsberg then decided that the American people had a right to know what was really going on in Vietnam. He sacrificed his very freedom and reputation by leaking the Pentagon Papers to the New York Times. These papers contained the truth about Vietnam and the war that had a stranglehold on the United States.

## **Patriotism**

Just like beauty, patriotism is in the eye of the beholder. Daniel Ellsberg considered himself a patriot. After he graduated from Harvard, Ellsberg believed that he should serve his country; a country which he felt had offered him many opportunities. While he could have headed right for Wall Street and gotten a cushy job making six figures, he decided to join the Marines where he served a tour of duty as an officer. It was his strong sense of duty and patriotism that made the choice for him.

After he returned to the U.S. after his tour of duty, Ellsberg returned to Harvard where he earned his PhD in economics. He was obviously a very bright and erudite young man who then chose to work with the Rand Corporation, a public-policy think tank that assigned him to the Pentagon. He was never a war hawk but his military background and his sense of patriotism made him root for victory and determined to do his part in seeing the war end in an American victory and a successful thwarting of the spread of communism in Indochina.

However, Ellsberg was exposed to thousands of dispatches from the war front that presented military aggression as ineffective. At the same time, he saw the press releases from the White House and the Pentagon that boasted to the public that the military action was going well, that the enemy was being turned back and that the spread of communism was being halted. He was stunned that the American people were being fed lies about the war – a war in which thousands of U.S. soldiers were being slaughtered.

It was Ellsberg's patriotism that led him to leak the Pentagon Papers to the New York Times. He believed that the American people should know the truth about the awful war. He believed that his act was one of patriotism.



## The Fog of War

The Gulf of Tonkin incident caused the stepped-up U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. Sadly, it was probably predicated on false information. A cable from an officer on the war front was received at the Pentagon claiming that U.S. naval ships had been torpedoed by the North Vietnamese in the Tonkin Bay. President Johnson met with key members of the cabinet about the incident. Johnson approved the bombing of key targets pointed out to him on a reconnaissance photos.

Later there was discussion among Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and cabinet members whether an attack on U.S. destroyers actually took place. The act of retaliation was ordered before the attack had been confirmed. Skyhawk fighter planes headed for North Vietnam targets. President Johnson went on TV to tell the nation that U.S. ships had been attacked by North Vietnam and that the U.S. was retaliating. Daniel Ellsberg along with other staffers stayed late into the night monitoring the incidents going on a world away. U.S. planes attacked North Vietnam ships. Navy pilot Lieutenant Everett Alvarez was hit and parachuted into the water where he was ultimately taken prison. Sixty-four American planes attacked four North Vietnamese patrol boats. Navy pilot James Stockdale scouted the entire bay area and saw no evidence of an attack by North Vietnamese ships.

A resolution that gave President Johnson the power to escalate military action without a declaration of war was to be voted on in Congress. Senator Morse of Oregon received an anonymous tip that the attack on the North Vietnamese was unprovoked. Morse told other senators about his call but they summarily dismissed it. It was flag-waving time. McNamara appeared before the Foreign Relations Committee in a closed hearing. He argued for immediate passage of the resolution. Morse, a member of the committee, spoke out against its passage; McNamara did not admit that there was doubt that the U.S. was attacked first. It passed the committee 31-1, followed by its overwhelming approval in the House and Senate.

Johnson's popularity among the public was at an all time high. Ellsberg had seen things from a different perspective than the general public. He had serious doubts that the U.S. had been attacked first. Reading classified cables in the Pentagon confirmed his suspicions. He learned that the attacks by South Vietnam had been U.S. operations headed by the CIA. And it had been South Vietnam that attacked first. Ellsberg was in a quandary about what to do with what he learned. He stayed in his position because he considered himself a Cold War warrior and his job was to help win that war.

The Gulf of Tonkin incident led to further escalations. Top commanders met with Johnson to recommend that the U.S. bomb North Vietnam harbors to block supplies from the Soviet Union and China. Once they were weakened, the U.S. could launch a massive airstrike. Johnson was furious accusing the military men of urging him to start World War III.





But Johnson went along with most requests because he was faced with being called weak on communism if he didn't act. But by escalating the war he knew that thousands would die and it would be something he would have to live with the rest of his life.

## Arrogance and Egoism

Although President Lyndon Johnson and his successor, President Richard Nixon, were political enemies and fundamentally detested one another, they had one thing in common when it came to the Vietnam War. Neither president was willing to pull out of the Vietnam War and become known as the first president to lose a war.

The major escalation of the war occurred under the Johnson Administration. Johnson was not a war hawk and was greatly agonized by the heavy burden of sending young men and women to war. He couldn't sleep over the daunting decisions he was forced to make and would literally walk the halls of the White House alone at night probably thinking of the increasing body count and reports of the wounded that he would have to share with the public. But despite the angst that Johnson suffered from this struggle, he would not withdraw because his ego wouldn't allow it.

It was the same with Nixon who was determined to leave Vietnam in "peace with honor." Before he was elected he got a secret message to the South Vietnamese, the U.S. ally, to delay agreeing to a peace settlement until after he was elected. He wanted to get credit for ending the war. Johnson found out and confronted him about it. He backed off and offered his full support to Johnson. John Kerry who was a young soldier during the war testified before Congress that Nixon allowed men to die each day so that he could enjoy a victory.

When Nixon learned that the Pentagon Papers was leaked to the New York Times and that Daniel Ellsberg was responsible for it, he wanted Ellsberg destroyed at any cost. Nixon's ego would not allow for a former low level Pentagon employee to become a hero. He was a traitor and would pay for his actions. Nixon's obsession with getting Ellsberg led to the establishment of the Special Investigations Unit that broke into the office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist to find dirt on him. Later, they broke into the Democratic National Committee office in the Watergate Hotel, because Nixon wanted to ensure his reelection, but they were caught and arrested by the police. Nixon was reelected but had to resign from office when the break-in and the subsequent cover-up was linked to the White House. His ego had led him down a very dark pathway.

# Styles

## Structure

Most Dangerous Man in America is separated into three main parts: Part I: Insider; Part II: Secrets and Lies; and Part III: Outsider. The main parts separate the story as the titles suggest. In Part I, Daniel Ellsberg is described as an “insider” because of his position as an analyst at the Pentagon. He was a Rand Corporation employee who was attached on special assignment to the Pentagon. After graduation from Harvard, he joined the Marines and served a tour of duty as a lieutenant. He is shown as an upstanding citizen, a patriot and a Cold War Warrior. He wasn’t a war hawk but he wanted the U.S. to emerge victorious in their fight to stop the spread of communism in Indochina.

In Part II he begins to see the contrast between how the Vietnam War is really going and the press releases about it from the Pentagon and the White House. There was no progress in the war. The bombings were doing nothing to turn the tide. The communist Viet Cong and North Vietnam forces were still traveling south marching toward Saigon on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. However, the White House claimed steady progress in defeating the North and stopping the spread of communism.

Over time, Ellsberg became more and more dismayed over the lies that the American people were being told about the war. He wanted to do something to help end the war. He was on the ground in Vietnam as a State Department official for two years during which time he engaged in combat alongside the soldiers. When he returned, no one would listen to him about his experiences in Vietnam and his opinion that there was no “win” option.

In Part III Ellsberg made the decision to leak the Pentagon Papers to the New York Times. He wanted the people to know the truth about Vietnam. The title “Outsider” is fitting for this section since he became the consummate outsider who the Nixon Administration wanted to destroy by all means necessary.

There is a Cast of Characters section and a Prologue which describes the break-ins by the White House “plumbers” in detail as well as an epilogue entitled, “History Repeats” which focuses on the recent actions taken by Edward Snowden.

## Perspective

Author Steve Sheinkin is a noted writer of non-fiction for young adults. He has written such works as *The Port Chicago Disaster* and *The Fight for Civil Rights*. He has received a number of awards for his work including the Boston Globe Horn Book award. By providing an account of the complexities of the Vietnam War juxtaposed against the leaking of the Pentagon Papers and the Watergate scandal provides some perspective for his youthful readers.



Sheinkin provides a brief description of Daniel Ellsberg's early life to demonstrate that he was not an early anti-war activist. He had served in the Marines and when he worked as a research analyst at the Pentagon he supported the war and hoped for a U.S. victory. The author contrasts Ellsberg's earlier beliefs with his growing recognition that the administration was lying about the reality of the Vietnam War.

The book is written in the third-person perspective and the narrative includes the chronology of the events leading up to Daniel Ellsberg's decision that it was worth his personal risk and freedom to let the American public know how the war was really going. While Sheinkin presents Ellsberg's motivation for leaking the top secret document to the news media, he humanizes President Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara the two men who made the decisions that escalated and prolonged the war. He describes an agonized Johnson as literally walking the halls of the White House at night over the decisions he made and had to make. McNamara's position changed on the war and he nearly had a nervous breakdown over his role in the escalation of the war.

## Tone

This book is about a complicated piece of history that occurred decades ago. It is written for the young adult and for that reason it is presented with clarity and the lack of too many details that would get in the way of the core story. Most people, even young students, have heard of the Vietnam War. Not as many of these people have heard of the Pentagon Papers and if they did, they may not understand their importance.

When the story of Edward Snowden and his leaking of information about NSA spying on the email and conversations of unsuspected Americans, many recalled the story of Daniel Ellsberg and his leaking of the Pentagon Papers to the New York Times and subsequently to many other media organizations. Ellsberg was adamant that his action was vastly different from Snowden's in that the leaking of the Pentagon Papers did not harm America it provided the truth about the Vietnam War to Americans. In Snowden's case, intelligence experts and analysts believe that his actions placed America at risk and damaged its national security and intelligence capabilities. There is brief mention of the Snowden incident in an epilogue that follows the book.

Author Sheinkin provided a narrative that relies on facts as he found them and not on emotions or biases. His account of Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers will enlighten youthful readers about a dark time in America's history and the man who tried to end a war. The author allows the readers to decide whether Ellsberg is traitor or patriot.



## Quotes

Ellsberg admired Harry Truman's response -- a commitment to supporting democracies and containing Soviet influence from spreading further."

-- Author (Cold Warrior paragraph 11)

**Importance:** As a high school student, Ellsberg was interested in political events. He admired Truman for standing up to Soviet aggression.

How should one act when consequences are uncertain?"

-- Author (Cold Warrior paragraph 15)

**Importance:** This question was one that became a major theme in Ellsberg's life and the decisions he made.

Review of action makes many reported contacts and torpedoes fired appear doubtful. Freak weather effects on radar and overeager sonar men may have accounted for many reports. No actual visual sightings by Maddox. Suggest complete evaluation before any further action taken."

-- Captain Herrick (Day One paragraph 36)

**Importance:** Herrick first reported that U.S. destroyers were under attack in the Tonkin Bay but further messages from him downplayed the possibility.

Ellsberg learned the truth about the South Vietnamese attacks on North Vietnam. McNamara had told Congress the United States had 'played absolutely no part in' these raids. In fact, they had been top secret operations planned by the CIA. The U.S. Navy provided the Swift boats, machine guns, and training.

-- Author (Hostile Action paragraph 47)

**Importance:** Ellsberg learned that the President and his top cabinet secretaries including Robert McNamara were lying to the American people.

Once large numbers of U.S. troops are committed to direct combat they will begin to take heavy casualties in a war they are ill-equipped to fight in a non-cooperative if not downright hostile countryside. Once we suffer large casualties we will have started a well-nigh irreversible process. Our involvement will be so great that we cannot— without national humiliation— stop short of achieving our complete objectives. Of the two possibilities I think humiliation would be more likely than the achievement of our objectives— even after we had paid terrible costs."

-- Sec of State George Ball (Limited Operations paragraph 32)

**Importance:** The Secretary was addressing the escalation of the war and how the U.S. would be getting into a morass that they could not easily escape from and which would result in tragedy and death.



You will write apology to peace-loving people of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam,' the prison guard demanded. 'Confess your crimes. Promise never to bomb Vietnam again.' Everett Alvarez said, 'Heck, no.' This is how the torture sessions always began. 'You have bad attitude!' the guard raged. 'Do not forget you are air pirate and capitalist warmonger! You are criminal aggressor who has bombed and killed peaceful Vietnamese!'"

-- Everett Alvarez and author (Credibility Gap paragraph 1)

**Importance:** This quote demonstrates how the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong tortured captured American soldiers and how some, like Everett Alvarez, stood up to it.

You know,' McNamara said, referring to the growing pile of papers, 'they could hang people for what's in there.'"

-- Robert McNamara (The Power of Leaks paragraph 54)

**Importance:** McNamara was referring to the Pentagon Papers which was a study that represented the truth about the Vietnam War. It was a secret document never meant for public consumption.

As I observed the effect of this leak, it was as if clouds had suddenly opened,' Ellsberg later said of this turning point in his life. 'In the past, I had instinctively accepted the ethos of my profession, the idea that leaking was always inherently bad, treacherous ... I had been wrong. Obviously, leaking could be a patriotic and constructive act.'"

-- Daniel Ellsberg (Low Point paragraph 39)

**Importance:** Ellsberg's opinion of leaking changed when someone else leaked Westmoreland's request for over 200,000 more troops to the New York Times. He began to think it was more patriotic to let the people know how the government was using their young men and their tax dollars.

The Harvard professor was known for his vast knowledge of international affairs— and his habit of insulting whoever was not in the room."

-- Author (Madman Theory paragraph 29)

**Importance:** This was one assessment of Henry Kissinger who was an ally of newly-elected President Nixon and would have an important role in his administration.

A very odd man, an unpleasant man,' Henry Kissinger would later say of his new boss, Richard Nixon. 'He didn't enjoy people. What I never understood is why he went into politics.' But if Kissinger did not exactly relish the president's company, he did come to admire Nixon's intelligence, and his willingness to make bold moves. Both were hard-core cold warriors. Both liked to work in secret. Together, over the next five years, they would remake American foreign policy."

-- Author (Pentagon Papers paragraph 1)

**Importance:** This quote captures the strength and impact that Henry Kissinger was to have during his tenure as President Nixon's national security adviser. Kissinger was



able to stay above the fray and did not become linked to the White House plumbers and the break-ins that the perpetrated which eventually forced Nixon to resign.

In a month or so I might be behind bars probably for the rest of my life."

-- Daniel Ellsberg (Night Work paragraph 44)

**Importance:** After Ellsberg made the decision to leak the Pentagon Papers to the media and made copies of them, he went to the beach and body surfed in the ocean knowing that there may not be many free days ahead for him.

If I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country."

-- E. M. Forster (Behind the Mask paragraph 30)

**Importance:** Ellsberg liked to cite this quotation from novelist E. M. Foster in defense of the action he took by releasing the Pentagon Papers.

They belonged to the people of America and of Indochina, who had paid for them with their blood."

-- Neil Sheehan (War Room paragraph 34)

**Importance:** This quote shows the state of mind of the New York Times reporter who exposed the report. He did not feel he had betrayed Ellsberg by making copies of the Pentagon Papers and releasing it for public consumption.

Each day,' Kerry charged, 'someone has to die so that President Nixon won't be, and these are his words, the first president to lose a war. We are asking Americans to think about that, because how do you ask a man to be the last man to die in Vietnam? How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?'"

-- John Kerry (A Matter of Patriotism paragraph 12)

**Importance:** John Kerry was the first U.S. soldier to speak out openly against the Vietnam War. He attributed the reason for the prolonged de-escalation of the war to Nixon's ego problem.

Well, let's face it, Dan' said the lawyer. 'Copying seven thousand pages of top secret documents and giving them to the New York Times has a bad ring to it.'"

-- Ellsberg's Lawyer (Preposterous paragraph 58)

**Importance:** Although it appeared difficult for the prosecutors to prove that Ellsberg had damaged the country under the Espionage Act, one of his lawyers pointed out that the optics weren't in his favor.

We have the rocky situation where the sonofabitching thief is made a national hero and is going to get off on a mistrial,' he told an aide. 'And the New York Times gets a Pulitzer Prize for stealing documents.... They're trying to get at us with thieves. What in the name of God have we come to?'"



-- Richard Nixon (Bizarre Events paragraph 62)

**Importance:** Although Nixon had broken laws by this point, he felt that the criminals who stole the Pentagon Papers and published it would be heroes.



# Topics for Discussion

## 1

How does Daniel Ellsberg's background contrast with the later action he took in leaking the Pentagon Papers to the New York Times? What did he see and learn while working as an analyst for the Pentagon and being physically on the ground in Vietnam that changed his mind about the war?

## 2

What choices did President Johnson face about the Vietnam War? How did the war and the decisions he made impact him on a personal level? How did the public view him and his administration versus the reality that Ellsberg observed?

## 3

Describe Robert McNamara's role in the war. What was the evolution of his view of the war and how did it impact him? Why was he made President of the World Bank?

## 4

What was the Gulf of Tonkin incident and what impact did it have on U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War?

## 5

Why did the U.S. government decide to bomb Cambodia? What was the importance of the Ho Chi Minh trail and why was it important for the South Vietnamese and its U.S. ally to block the trail?

## 6

What is Agent Orange? Why and how was it used in Vietnam and what impact did it have on the Vietnam people and on members of the U.S. military? What are phosphorous bombs?





## 7

Why did President Johnson decide not to run for reelection? What were the ramifications for Hubert Humphrey who became the Democratic candidate in the presidential election?

## 8

What agreement did Richard Nixon seek to secure with the South Vietnamese government? How did Johnson react and why did he choose not to expose Nixon's plans?

## 9

What advice did lawyers give newspapers like the New York Times and the Washington Post about running articles based on the leaked top secret report? What was Ellsberg charged with and what law did the federal prosecutors base their case on?

## 10

Who were the "plumbers" and what role did they play in the White House? How were they instrumental in bringing down the Nixon Administration and causing him to resign from office?