

Teaching Guide

The Most Dangerous Man in America Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers



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The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers

This teaching guide was prepared for high school and college classrooms to enhance student understanding of the issues raised in the film. The lessons are appropriate for U.S. history, government and language arts classrooms. The guide was developed by the Zinn Education Project in collaboration with Judith Ehrlich and Rick Goldsmith.

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About the Film

The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers

The Most Dangerous Man in America catapults us to 1971 where we find America in the grip of a dirty war based on lies. And Dr. Daniel Ellsberg, one of the nation's leading war planners, has the documents to prove it. Armed with 7000 pages of top secret documents; he leaks the truth about the Vietnam War to the *New York Times* and risks life in prison to end the war he helped plan. It is a story that held the world in its grip, with daily headlines, the top story on the nightly news for weeks on end.

Ellsberg's leak of the top-secret Pentagon Papers sets into motion an extraordinary series of events. The Nixon Administration first goes after the nation's press, resulting in a First Amendment battle that, within two weeks, ends up in the Supreme Court. Ellsberg goes underground to avoid a nationwide FBI manhunt. When he emerges, he is hailed as a hero, accused of being a traitor, ostracized by friends, and finds himself on trial for his life.

Our tale is told by Ellsberg — as narrator, in current interviews and riveting archival footage — and a cast of supporting characters who "lived" the Pentagon Papers episode including Ellsberg's wife and son, "co-conspirator" Tony Russo, historian/activist Howard Zinn, journalists Hedrick Smith and Max Frankel, attorneys Lenny Weinglass and James Goodale, Watergate principals Egil "Bud" Krogh and John Dean, and — in a rarely seen interview and his own secret White house tapes — President Nixon himself.

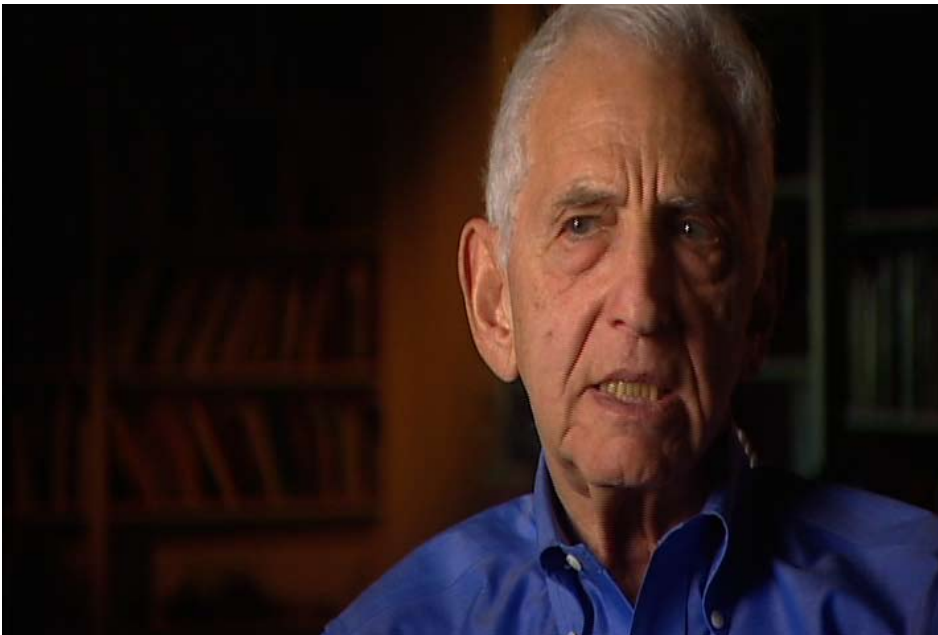
The film speaks directly to the world today, as national security and the people's right-to-know are in constant tension. It raises questions about civil courage, following conscience, taking risks, and speaking truth to power. It challenges people everywhere who are looking to better understand the world of power and who search their own hearts for ways to take a stand and make a difference.

Produced and directed by Judith Ehrlich and Rick Goldsmith.

Available for educational purchase from New Day Films and for home video from First Run Features. For full details, visit <http://www.mostdangerousman.org>, and click "Own It".

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Introduction

**“Wouldn’t you go to jail to help end the war?”
—Daniel Ellsberg**

ASK YOUNG PEOPLE SIMPLE questions about America’s war in Vietnam. Why was the U.S. in Vietnam? For how long? Who was the enemy? Who won? Most, if not all, will struggle to find answers. They don’t know. The information wasn’t covered in their classes and is not in their textbooks. “We barely made it to World War II,” they will report with a shrug.

The same young people often hear comparisons of current wars with the war in Vietnam. Like many Americans, they lack a frame of reference for making meaningful connections between contemporary wars and the lessons of Vietnam.

It’s not surprising. Many Americans who lived through the war in Vietnam found they also lacked basic information necessary for a solid understanding of a war that demanded young men submit to a military draft, that resulted in the deaths of millions, that caused

long-term ecological damage to Southeast Asia, and that led to deep social divisions.

Daniel Ellsberg was a leading Vietnam War strategist. While studying 7,000 pages of top secret documents he concluded that America’s involvement in Vietnam was based on decades of lies. In a daring act of conscience, on October 1, 1969 Ellsberg began making copies of those documents—what became known as the Pentagon Papers—and eventually leaked them to members of Congress and to the *New York Times*. His action led directly to Watergate, President Richard M. Nixon’s resignation, and the end of the Vietnam War.

The pivotal story of the Vietnam War Era, of individual courage within a burgeoning social justice movement, is told in the film *The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers*, nominated for the 2009

Oscar® for Best Documentary.

In the words of Daniel Ellsberg from his book *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, the Vietnam War era was a time of “crimes: war crimes, crimes against the peace, mass murder. Twenty years of crime under four presidents.”

A large scale anti-war movement drew millions to America’s streets in protest. The movement inspired courageous individual acts of conscience and, in turn, individual acts of conscience inspired the growth of an anti-war movement.

And how was the war remembered by our leaders?

Soon after the end of the war, President Ronald Reagan promised in a speech to veterans “that young Americans must never again be sent to fight and die unless we are prepared to let them win.”

Decades later, another president sent U.S. forces to invade Iraq in search of weapons of mass destruction that did not exist. Hundreds of thousands of people were killed, countless others dislocated from ancestral homes, long-term ecological damage occurred to a beleaguered region, and the public depended upon leaked documents in order to gain access to the truth. That president, George W. Bush, drawing on what he called the “lessons of Vietnam” concluded that “we’ll succeed unless we quit.”

Bush’s successor, President Barack Obama, while accepting the Nobel Peace Prize claimed that “America has never fought a war against a democracy.”

All three men make painfully clear how U.S. leaders continue to abuse history to justify war.

Judith Ehrlich and Rick Goldsmith's film offers poignant lessons from Vietnam through the words, actions, and life experience of an American hero, Daniel Ellsberg. *The Most Dangerous Man in America* chronicles Ellsberg's journey from his early days as a Marine officer and then war strategist, to emergence as an activist trying to come to terms with a war he originally supported and helped shape. Ellsberg's experience parallels a journey that many others embarked upon during the 1960s and 1970s. The difference: Ellsberg was an insider, a man with access to top-secret information who decided to risk the many privileges he enjoyed in order to do what he knew in his heart to be the right thing.

The Most Dangerous Man in America Teaching Guide provides eight lesson plans intended to enhance student understanding of the issues raised in this acclaimed documentary film. Using a variety of teaching strategies, including role play, critical reading, discussion, mock trial, small group imaginative writing, and personal narrative, the curriculum provides students with an opportunity to consider some of Vietnam's lessons. One key lesson of *The Most Dangerous Man in America* is that we all have the potential to be "truth-tellers." Where some students may never have the opportunity to affect the course of history like Daniel Ellsberg, all will be in positions to make important decisions in the name of justice.

The Teaching Guide attempts to provide context to what *New York Times* writer Neil Sheehan called "the event" of late 20th century history. We want students to appreciate the enormity of what Daniel

Ellsberg saw and to help them grasp why someone would become a "whistleblower" and would risk prison to stop it. Ellsberg's history-making defiance may have been the event, but the activities in the guide invite students to see that all of us are constantly confronted with opportunities to act for justice. We hope students come to see all the potential "events" that they can be a part of.

History is not the lifeless narration found in most standard textbooks, but a series of choices made on a daily basis by people from all walks of life. We offer *The Most Dangerous Man in America Teaching Guide* as a curriculum of empowerment for young people trying to come to terms with a world that often feels out of their control. Daniel Ellsberg's life story offers a poignant example of profound change and hopeful action in the face of a seemingly immovable power.

The Teaching Guide offers students opportunities to connect with key historical choice points that shaped the Vietnam War era, explore connections with contemporary equivalents and develop critical thinking skills necessary for informed citizens to make decisions about U.S. foreign policy, whistleblowing, "national security," government transparency, freedom of the press and the public's right to know.

Why was the United States in Vietnam? Why did the United States decide to abandon its World War II Asian ally in favor of the French colonialists? How did the United States get itself into the predicament of Vietnam? After directing years of armed conflict in SE Asia, former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara finally asked that long overdue question when he com-

missioned the RAND Corporation to create what would become the Pentagon Papers. He wanted to know how the United States had managed to get into a war that seemed to offer no exit. Ironically, the answer to McNamara's query eventually led to the end of the war.

Why did five United States presidents find it necessary to lie to their citizenry? Why was it so easy to do? Why is the war not examined in depth by every U.S. History teacher?

Daniel Ellsberg believed that if Americans knew the truth about the Vietnam War, they wouldn't support it. He became depressed when he found that the truth had no immediate bearing on the number of bombs rained upon Vietnamese civilians. But he pressed on until truth prevailed. His actions led others to demand evidence from government officials. His actions grounded his words. As he faced a future behind bars, the truths he learned along his journey led him to respond to a news reporter's question with a question of his own: "Wouldn't you go to jail to end the war?"

As teachers, our aim should be to involve young people in the democratic practice of seeking truth, of demanding evidence, of digging deep for knowledge that is often hidden, in order to make informed, just choices. Daniel Ellsberg's actions along with the actions of so many others have kept a tradition of truth-telling alive. We want to ensure that this tradition gets passed on to our students.

Lesson One

What Do We Know About the Vietnam War? *Forming Essential Questions*

THE VIETNAM WAR SEEMS murky for many students. Not only are students unclear about basic facts—How long was the U.S. in Vietnam? Who was the enemy? Who won?—young people also report that they are unclear about the very nature of the conflict.

Was Vietnam actually a war? Was it a civil war? Was it at all similar to the wars of today? In order to provide students with a clear context for understanding the actions of Daniel Ellsberg and the role of the Pentagon Papers, we need to address students' confusion.

Teachers can enhance students' historical understanding by providing an opportunity for them to clarify what they think they know, what they've heard (what seems to exist in popular culture), and by identifying essential questions to direct further learning.



Daniel Ellsberg in Vietnam
Courtesy Daniel and Patricia Ellsberg

Suggested Procedure

1 Organize students into small groups of four to five people per group.

2 Provide each small group with a large piece of butcher paper and a black magic marker.

3 Instruct students that they are to do the following in their small groups:

a. Write down all they know, think they know, or have heard about the war in Vietnam. To guide their brainstorm, tell students to focus on a few basic questions:

- How long was the U.S. in Vietnam?
- Why was the U.S. in Vietnam?
- Who was the enemy that the U.S. was fighting?
- How did U.S. citizens feel about the war?
- Who won?

b. After students complete 'step a', using three different color markers, ask students to highlight the information that they feel certain about, the information that they have doubts about, and information that they don't know.

c. Final step: ask students to articulate three questions they need to have answered in order for them to feel that they know basic information about the Vietnam War.

d. To better facilitate the small group work, assign students the following roles: facilitator/discussion leader; recorder; word finder (student who identifies words or terms that might be new, e.g., VC; Communists; guerillas); reporter (person who will share with large group).

4 Tape completed small group work, the butcher paper, on the classroom walls.

5 Have students, in their small groups, walk around the room and read each piece of butcher paper—a variation of what is commonly referred to as a “gallery walk.” Assign each group a color of marker that hasn’t yet been used. For instance, group one will have red markers, group two will have green, etc. Students can then write comments, answers to questions, reactions or additional questions on their classmates’ hanging work. Individual students should also have a piece of notebook paper and writing utensil so that they can write down comments and reflections. Ask students to look for: points of commonality; new information; statements they don’t understand; new questions.

6 Students return to their seats. The teacher leads large group discussion, a survey of student comments: What patterns do we see? What helpful comments, reactions, or questions did you receive from other groups? What can we say we know about the Vietnam War? What can we say we don’t know? What do we need to know? What conclusions can we reach?

7 Have students consider the questions that they and their classmates have written, ask students to think out loud together in response to the following: Given the questions that we came up with, what are the three most essential questions that we can create to help guide our learning about the Vietnam War?

In the past, we’ve found student questions will vary from, “So how long was the U.S. in Vietnam?” to “Why is there so little common understanding of the war?” to “Who really was our enemy?” to “I’ve heard that no one really won the war and that we could have won, but politicians held the military back. Did anyone win? How did they win?” The more specific questions are, the better they can guide subsequent learning.

8 Ask students to write concluding remarks using “3-2-1 protocol”: three things they learned; two things that surprised them; one brief personal reaction that tries to capture where they are in terms of their study of the Vietnam War.

This article or lesson is offered for use in educational settings as part of the Zinn Education Project (a collaboration of Rethinking Schools and Teaching for Change) and Judith Ehrlich and Rick Goldsmith. It was developed to accompany the film, The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers.

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Robert McNamara and Lyndon Johnson
Courtesy the LBJ Library

Lesson Two

Rethinking the Teaching of the Vietnam War

A version of this article appears in Bill Bigelow, *A People's History for the Classroom*. Milwaukee: Rethinking Schools. 2008.

In *The Most Dangerous Man in America*, Daniel Ellsberg describes when, in 1969, he first read the earliest parts of what came to be called the Pentagon Papers:

Seeing the war from its beginning affected me more than I thought possible. It changed my whole sense of the legitimacy of the war. What I learned was that it was an American war from the start. President Truman financed the French to retake its former colony even though he knew the French were fighting a national movement that had the support of the people.

Despite the fact that the Pentagon Papers was released to the world in 1971, today's high school textbooks continue to ignore this early—and essential—history of the Vietnam War. Sadly, when it comes to probing the root causes of the Vietnam War, not a single major U.S. history text glances back beyond the 1950s. Why was the U.S. involved in Vietnam? As James Loewen points out in *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, his critique of 12 best-selling high school history texts, “Most textbooks simply dodge the issue. Here is a representative analysis, from *American Adventures*: ‘Later in the 1950s, war broke out in South Vietnam. This time the United States gave aid to the South Vietnamese government.’ ‘War broke out’—what could be simpler!”

Textbooks mirror the amnesia of U.S. policy makers. There is a startling encounter in the 1974 Vietnam War documentary *Hearts and Minds* between director Peter Davis and Walt Rostow, former adviser to President Johnson. Davis wants Rostow to talk about why the United States got involved in Vietnam. Rostow is incredulous: “Are you really asking me this god-damn silly question?” That’s “pretty pedestrian stuff,” he complains. But Rostow finally answers: “The problem began in its present phase after the Sputnik, the launching of Sputnik, in 1957, October.”

Sputnik? 1957? In one blow, the former adviser erases years of history to imply that somehow the Soviet Union was behind it all.

The “present phase” caveat notwithstanding, Rostow ignores the World War II cooperation between the United States and the Viet Minh; Ho Chi Minh’s repeated requests that the U.S. acknowledge Vietnamese sovereignty; the U.S. refusal to recognize the 1945 Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam; \$2 billion in U.S. military support for the restoration of French domination, including the near-use of nuclear weapons during the decisive battle of Dien Bien Phu; and the well-documented U.S. subversion of the 1954 Geneva peace accords. All occurred before the launching of Sputnik, and all are documented in the Pentagon Papers.

When teachers pattern our curricula after these kinds of non-explanatory explanations, we mystify the origins not just of the war in Vietnam, but of everything

we teach. Students need to learn to distinguish explanations from descriptions, like “war broke out” or “chaos erupted.” Thinking about social events as having concrete causes, constantly asking “Why?” and “In whose interests?” need to become critical habits of the mind for us and for our students. It’s only through developing the tools of deep questioning that students can attempt to make sense of today’s global conflicts. However, especially when teaching complicated events like the war in Vietnam, bypassing explanation in favor of description can be seductive. After all, there’s so much stuff about the war in Vietnam: so many films, so many novels, short stories, and poetry, so many veterans who can come in and speak to the class. These are all vital resources, but unless built on a foundation of causes for the war, using these can be more voyeuristic than educational.

Roots of a War

A video I’ve found useful in prompting students to explore a bit of the history of Vietnam and the sources of U.S. involvement is the first episode of the PBS presentation *Vietnam: A Television History* [available in many libraries]. Called “Roots of a War,” it offers an overview of Vietnamese resistance to French colonialism (which began in the mid-19th century) and to the Japanese occupation during World War II. My students find the video a bit dry, so in order for students not to feel overwhelmed by information, I pause it often to talk about key incidents and issues. Some of the images are powerful: Vietnamese men carrying white-clad Frenchmen on their backs, and French picture-postcards of the

severed heads of Vietnamese resisters—cards that troops sent home to sweethearts in Paris, as the narrator tells us, inscribed, “With kisses from Hanoi.” The goal of French colonialism is presented truthfully and starkly: “To transform Vietnam into a source of profit.” The narrator explains, “Exports of rice stayed high even if it meant the peasants starved.” Significantly, many of those who tell the story of colonialism and the struggle against it are Vietnamese. Instead of the nameless generic peasants of so many Hollywood Vietnam War movies, here, at least in part, Vietnamese get to tell their own stories.

Toward the end of the film’s segment, Dr. Tran Duy Hung recounts the Vietnamese independence celebration in Hanoi’s Ba Dinh Square following the Japanese defeat—and occurring on the very day of the formal Japanese surrender aboard the USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay, September 2, 1945: “I can say that the most moving moment was when President Ho Chi Minh climbed the steps, and the national anthem was sung. It was the first time that the national anthem of Vietnam was sung in an official ceremony. Uncle Ho then read the Declaration of Independence, which was a short document. As he was reading, Uncle Ho stopped and asked, ‘Compatriots, can you hear me?’ This simple question went into the hearts of everyone there. After a moment of silence, they all shouted, ‘Yes, we hear you.’ And I can say that we did not just shout with our mouths, but with all our hearts. The hearts of over 400,000 people standing in the square then.”

Dr. Hung recalls moments later, when a small plane began circling

overhead and swooped down over the crowd. People recognized the stars and stripes of the U.S. flag, and they cheered enthusiastically, believing its presence to be a kind of independence ratification. The image of the 1945 crowd in northern Vietnam applauding a U.S. military aircraft offers a poignant reminder of a historical could-have-been. [See lesson on “choice points” in the *Most Dangerous Man in America Teaching Guide*].

Although this is not the episode’s conclusion, I stop the video at this point. How will the U.S. government respond? Will it recognize an independent Vietnam or stand by as France attempts to reconquer its lost colony? Will the United States even aid France in this effort? This is a choice-point that would influence the course of human history, and through role play I want to bring it to life in the classroom. Of course, I could simply tell them what happened, or give them materials to read. But a role play that brings to life the perspectives of key social groups, allows students to experience, rather than just hear about aspects of this historical crossroads. As prelude, we read the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence, available in the fine collection, *Vietnam and America: A Documented History*, edited by Marvin Gettleman, Jane Franklin, Marilyn Young, and H. Bruce Franklin [New York: Grove Press, 1985], as well as in *Vietnam: A History in Documents*, edited by Gareth Porter [New York: New American Library, 1981].

Role-Playing a Historic Choice

I include here the two core roles of the role play: members of the Viet

Minh, and French government/business leaders. In teaching this period, I sometimes include other roles: U.S. corporate executives, labor activists, farmers, and British government officials deeply worried about their own colonial interests, as well as Vietnamese landlords allied with the French—this last, to reflect the class as well as anti-colonial dimension of the Vietnamese independence movement.

Each group has been invited to a meeting with President Harry S. Truman—which, as students learn later, never took place—to present its position on the question of Vietnamese independence. I portray President Truman and chair the meeting. Members of each group must explain:

- How they were affected by World War II;
- Why the United States should care what happens in Vietnam, along with any responsibilities the U.S. might have (and in the case of the French, why the United States should care what happens in France);
- Whether the United States should feel threatened by communism in Vietnam or in France;
- What they want President Truman to do about the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence—support it, ignore it, oppose it;
- And whether the United States government should grant loans to the French, and if it supports loans, what strings should be attached.

Obviously, the more knowledge students have about pre-1945 Vietnam, France, and World War II in general, as well as the principles of communism, the more sophisticated treatment they'll be able to give to their roles. [An excellent film on U.S. Communism is *Seeing Red*, produced by Jim Klein and Julia Reichert, available from New Day Films, and can be helpful.] However, even without a thorough grounding, the lesson works well to introduce the main issues in this important historical choice-point.

As in other role plays, to work students into their roles, I may ask them to create an individual persona by writing an interior monologue—one's inner thoughts—on



Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon
Courtesy Air Force Magazine

their post-war hopes and fears. Students can read these to a partner, or share them in a small group.

In the meeting/debate, students-as-Viet Minh argue on behalf of national independence. They may

remind Truman of the help that the Viet Minh gave to the Allies during World War II, denounce French colonialism, and recall the United States' own history in throwing off European colonialism.

The students-as-French counter that the would-be Vietnamese rulers are Communists and therefore a threat to world peace. Like the Vietnamese, the French remind Truman that they too were World War II allies and are now in need of a helping hand. In order to revive a prosperous and capitalist France, they need access to the resources of Vietnam. Because the United States has an interest in a stable Europe, one that is non-Communist and open for investment, they should support French efforts to regain control of Vietnam.

I play a cranky Truman, and poke at inconsistencies in students' arguments. I especially prod each side to question and criticize the other directly. [For suggestions on conducting a role play, see "Role Plays: Show, Don't Tell," in the Rethinking Schools publication *Rethinking Our Classrooms: Teaching for Equity and Justice*, Vol. 1, pp. 130-132.]

The structure of the meeting itself alerts students to the enormous power wielded by the United States government at the end of World War II, and that the government was maneuvering on a global playing field. As students come to see, U.S. policy makers did not decide the Vietnam question solely, if at all, on issues of morality, or even on issues related directly to Vietnam. As historian Gabriel Kolko writes in *The Roots of American*

Foreign Policy, “even in 1945 the United States regarded Indo-China almost exclusively as the object of Great Power diplomacy and conflict... [A]t no time did the desires of the Vietnamese themselves assume a role in the shaping of United States policy.”

Following the whole-group debate, we shed our roles to debrief. I ask: What were some of the points brought out in discussion that you agreed with? Do you think Truman ever met with Vietnamese representatives? What would a U.S. president take into account in making a decision like this? What did Truman decide? Which powerful groups might seek to influence Vietnam policy? How should an important foreign policy question like this one be decided?

To discover what Truman did and why, we study a timeline drawn from a number of books on Vietnam, including the one by Kolko mentioned above, his *Anatomy of a War* [Pantheon, 1985], *The Pentagon Papers* [Bantam, 1971], *Marilyn Young’s The Vietnam Wars: 1945-1990* [HarperCollins, 1991], as well as excerpts from Chapter 18 of Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History of the United States* [HarperCollins, 2003]. It’s a complicated history that involved not only the French and Vietnamese, but also Chiang Kai-shek’s nationalist Chinese forces, the British, and the Japanese. What becomes clear is that at the close of World War II, the United States was in a position to end almost 100 years of French domination in Vietnam. The French government was desperate for U.S. aid and would not have defied an American decision to support Vietnamese independence. Nevertheless, U.S. leaders

chose a different route, ultimately contributing about \$2 billion to the French effort to reconquer Vietnam.

While a separate set of decisions led to the commitment of U.S. troops in Vietnam, the trajectory was set in the period just after World War II.

The insights students glean from this role play inform our study of Vietnam throughout the unit. Along with the timeline, just mentioned, which traces U.S. economic and military aid to

France, we follow up with: a point-by-point study of the 1954 Geneva Agreement ending the war between the French and Vietnamese; and from the perspective of peasants and plantation laborers in southern Vietnam, students evaluate the 1960 revolutionary platform of the National Liberation Front. Students later read a number of quotations from scholars and politicians offering opinions on why we fought in Vietnam. Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon assert in almost identical language that the United States was safeguarding freedom and democracy in South Vietnam. President Kennedy: “For the last decade we have been helping the South Vietnamese to maintain their independence.” Johnson: “We want nothing for ourselves — only that the people of South Vietnam be allowed to guide their own country in their own way.” Students ponder these platitudes: If it were truly interested in Vietnam’s “independence,” why did the U.S. government support French colonialism?

Students need to learn to distinguish explanations from descriptions, like “war broke out,” or “chaos erupted.”

On April 7, 1965, President Johnson gave a major policy speech on Vietnam at Johns Hopkins University. Here, Johnson offered a detailed explanation for why the United States was fighting in Vietnam [included in *The Viet-Nam Reader*, edited by Marcus Raskin and Bernard Fall, pp. 343-350].

Embedded in the speech was his version of the origins of the war. As Johnson, I deliver large portions of the speech, and students-as-truth-seeking-reporters pepper me with

critical questions and arguments drawn from the role play and other readings and activities. Following this session, they write a critique of LBJ’s speech. Afterwards, we evaluate how several newspapers and journals—*The New York Times*, *The Oregonian*, *I.F. Stone’s Weekly*—actually covered President Johnson’s address.

None of the above is meant to suggest the outlines of a comprehensive curriculum on the Vietnam War. Here, I’ve concentrated on the need for engaging students in making explanations for the origins of U.S. government policy toward Vietnam. Policy choices had intimate implications for many people’s lives, and through novels, short stories, poetry, interviews, and their own imaginations, students need also to explore the personal dimensions of diplomacy and political economy. And no study of the war would be complete without examining the dynamics of the massive movement to end that war. [The best film for this is *Sir! No Sir!*, available from [© 2010 Zinn Education Project, Judith Ehrlich, and Rick Goldsmith](http://www.sirno-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

sir.com, which looks at the antiwar movement within the U.S. military.] Especially when confronted with the horrifying images of slaughtered children the film *Remember My Lai*, the chilling sobs of a young Vietnamese boy whose father has been killed in *Hearts and Minds*, or the anguish of American and Vietnamese women in *Regret to Inform*, our students need to know that millions of people tried to put a stop to the suffering—including U.S. soldiers themselves. Of course, that’s why *The Most Dangerous Man in America* is an essential resource: it shows the impact of courageously speaking truth to power, and highlights the vulnerability of the high and mighty. And students should be encouraged to reflect deeply on which strategies for peace were most effective. Howard Zinn movingly describes this widespread opposition to the war in Chapter 18 of *A People’s History of the United States*.

Indeed there is an entire history of resistance to which students have been denied access. For example, let them read the brilliant critique of the war that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave at Riverside Church, on April 4, 1967, exactly a year before his death:

What do the [Vietnamese] peasants think as we ally ourselves with the landlords and as we refuse to put any action into our many words concerning land reform? What do they think as we test out our latest weapons on them, just as the Germans tested out new medicine and new tortures in the concentration camps of Europe? Where are the roots of the independent Vietnam we claim to be building? Is it among these voiceless ones?

Or let students listen to similar thoughts expressed more caustically

in Bob Dylan’s “Masters of War,” or more satirically in Country Joe and the Fish’s “Feel Like I’m Fixin’ to Die Rag.”

If we take the advice of the Walt Rostows and the textbook writers, and begin our study of the Vietnam War in the late 1950s, it’s impossible to think intelligently about the U.S. role. The presidents said we were protecting the independence of “South Vietnam.” As Daniel Ellsberg discovered when he first read the Pentagon Papers, we need to travel back at least as far as 1945 to think critically about the invention of the country of South Vietnam that was intended to justify its “protection.” The tens of thousands of U.S. deaths and the millions of Vietnamese deaths, along with the social and ecological devastation of Indochina require the harsh light of history to be viewed clearly.

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Student Handout

French Business/Government Leader

Time: Fall/Winter, 1945-46

You are a French business executive and high-ranking government leader. Times are very difficult in France. During World War II, thousands of your people were killed, many factories were destroyed, crops burned, and animals killed. This has left your economy in ruins.

Because of hard times, many workers and poor people have turned to the Communists. The Communist Party is now the largest political party in France. An important reason the Communists are so popular is because they played a leading role in the resistance to the Nazis. You believe that, ultimately, the Communists want to take over the property of the wealthy and have all factories run by the government. The French Communist Party denies this, but you don't believe them.

As you see it, unless the economy quickly gets better, the Communists will be elected to control the government. But how to rebuild the economy?

Before World War II, France had a number of colonies around the world, the most important in Indochina, which includes the country of Vietnam. France got most of its rubber from Vietnam—also much coal, tin, and tungsten.

French businesses owned plantations and made great profits selling rice to other countries in Asia. Your government also forced the Vietnamese to buy certain French products, such as Bordeaux wine, so French companies made profits that way as well.

But here's your problem. During the war, the Japanese took control of Vietnam. The Vietnamese Communist leader, Ho Chi Minh, organized an army, the Viet Minh, to fight against the Japanese occupation. With Japan now defeated, the Viet Minh have declared Vietnam an independent country. However, as far as you are concerned, Vietnam is still French.

You are angry. The Viet Minh have already given some of the French-owned land to Vietnamese poor people—peasants. They have said that the wealth of Vietnam will now belong only to the Vietnamese.

If you can't take back your colony in Vietnam, French businesses will suffer tremendously. However, you don't have enough money to pay for a war against Ho Chi Minh. You need the support of a more powerful country to win back Vietnam from the Communists. The most powerful country in the world is the United States.

You also need the help of a stronger country to rebuild the cities, towns, and industries of France. You need loans and grants to buy American machinery and farm products like wheat and corn so you can get back on your feet. Remember, too, that if your economy doesn't begin to get stronger, the French Communists will probably win elections by offering the poor and workers some of the wealth of the rich.

But the United States needs you, too. They want to sell their extra products to you and to invest their extra money in French businesses. You might point out to the American president that, if the Communists come to power, they won't allow U.S. corporations to invest freely and take their profits back home.

Student Handout

Viet Minh Member

Time: Fall/Winter, 1945-46

You are a member of the Viet Minh and a supporter of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. This is the first all-Vietnamese government in almost a hundred years—since the French first took over your country.

You are from a peasant family in Vietnam. You grew up hating the French colonialists who controlled your country. The French say they brought “civilization” to Vietnam, but in your eyes they brought nothing but misery.

In order to force the Vietnamese to work for them, the French put taxes on all “huts,” as they called them, and on salt—an important ingredient in the Vietnamese diet. The only way you could get money to pay the hated taxes was to go to work for the French—on their railroads, in their mines, on their plantations. Conditions were hard. Many people died of injuries or diseases.

The French drafted your people to fight in their wars against other countries. Of course, you had no vote. The French provided few services; in Vietnam, they built more jails than schools and hospitals combined.

The French made fun of your music, your art, your religion. They even outlawed your village’s homemade rice wine and forced you to buy their stronger French wine. The French also required each village to purchase a certain amount of opium.

Angered by all these injustices, you joined Ho Chi Minh’s Viet Minh, an organization fighting for the independence of Vietnam. Like Ho Chi Minh, you became a Communist, believing that everyone should share the wealth of Vietnam, not just a few foreigners and the rich Vietnamese landlords who do their dirty work.

In 1940, the Japanese invaded Vietnam and you switched from fighting the French to fighting the Japanese. During the war you helped the United States, providing them valuable information and rescuing pilots who had been shot down.

When the Japanese were defeated, the Viet Minh took control of the country and proclaimed independence. This independence has begun to make a real difference in many people’s lives. For the first time in Vietnam’s history, national elections were held. People could choose their own leaders, Communist or non-communist.

A literacy program was launched that some say taught as many as two and a half million people to read and write. The Viet Minh took over much of the land that the French had stolen and gave it back to the peasants. The new government passed a law legalizing labor unions and strikes and proclaiming an eight-hour day.

Your goal is freedom and independence for your country. But the French appear to want to take back Vietnam. They complain about Communists like Ho Chi Minh. You will fight to the death before your country is made a colony again. You hope the United States government will support you in this freedom struggle.

Lesson Three

Questioning the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution

In the opening pages of his autobiography, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, Daniel Ellsberg describes the dramatic events leading up to the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in early August 1964. According to the public announcements of President Lyndon Johnson and Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, twice in two days the North Vietnamese had attacked U.S. warships “on routine patrol in international waters,” and engaged in a “deliberate” pattern of “naked aggression;” evidence of both attacks was “unequivocal,” and these had been “unprovoked.” According to Johnson and McNamara, the United States would respond in order to deter future attacks but was planning no wider war.

Each of these claims was a lie. Ellsberg had just begun his new job in the Pentagon. As he writes in *Secrets*, “By midnight on the fourth [of August], or within a day or two, I knew that each one of these assurances was false.”

And yet, the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution passed Congress without a single dissent in the House of Representatives, and only two “no” votes in the Senate. It gave the president carte blanche to “take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.” As they say, the rest is history.

One of the essential aims of the school curriculum should be to nurture skepticism—to prompt students to question and demand evidence. This lesson invites students to travel back to August 1964 and to imagine that they were members of Congress when the Johnson administration proposed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. It asks them to practice critical thinking.

Materials Needed

Copies of the “Gulf of Tonkin Resolution” for each student in the class.

Suggested Procedure

1 The more students know about events in Vietnam prior to August of 1964, the better. If they have not studied anything about Vietnam, you might review with them some of the basics—the colonization of Vietnam by France, the Japanese control during World War II, French attempts to reconquer Vietnam following the war, U.S. assistance to France, the 1954 division of Vietnam into two parts—a U.S.-supported South and a North under Communist leadership—pending elections that were never held. In order to not give away the “punchline,” it’s important that students do this activity before they have watched *The Most Dangerous Man in America* or have studied the Tonkin Gulf events.

2 Distribute a copy of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution to each student.

3 Divide students into pairs and ask them to imagine that they are members of Congress when this resolution was introduced in 1964. Their assignment is to come up with at least five critical questions that they would have wanted fully answered before they voted on the resolution. They needn’t have opinions on the resolution, simply questions. (When we’ve done this activity, we explain the structure of the resolution as an upside-down essay, with each “whereas” intended as a piece of evidence supporting the thesis, i.e., the resolution.)

4 Our students have shown themselves to be much more critical and inquisitive than the compliant members of Congress who handed LBJ vast war-making powers in 1964. For example, students have asked: “How do we know that the attacks were part of a ‘deliberate and systematic campaign of aggression?’” “What damage did the alleged attacks cause?” “What is the history of U.S. involvement in Vietnam?”

There are many choice points in the history of the Vietnam War, and August 1964 is a crucial one. Ask students to imagine how this history might have played out had more Congresspeople been as curious and critical as they were

in questioning the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. Why did virtually the entire Congress go along with Johnson? Why didn't more of the American people question or protest the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution?

5 As a follow-up, watch the excerpt from early in the film, *The Most Dangerous Man in America*, where the filmmakers juxtapose President Johnson's statements with Ellsberg's critique:

President Johnson: We still seek no wider war.

Daniel Ellsberg: No wider war? As I found out day by day in the Pentagon, that was our highest priority: preparing a wider war which we expected to take place immediately after the [1964] election [between Republican Barry Goldwater and Democrat President Lyndon Johnson].

Johnson: It's a war that I think ought to be fought by the boys of Asia to help protect their own land. And for that reason, I haven't chosen to enlarge the war.

Ellsberg: And that was a conscious lie. We all knew that inside the government, and not one of us told the press or the public or the electorate during that election. It was a well-kept

secret by thousands and thousands of people, including me.

Ellsberg offers more detail about the supposed North Vietnamese attacks on U.S. warships in his autobiography, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, on pp. 7-20. This is excellent teacher background, and excerpts of this could also be shared with students. Students might then return to the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and choose a statement to "talkback to" as Ellsberg does with Johnson's claims above.

6 Ellsberg is a "dangerous man" because he refuses to remain silent about the government secrets that he knows. The heart of these secrets is that each administration from Truman through Nixon lied to the American people. In an interview included in the film, *Hearts and Minds*, Ellsberg says, "The American public was lied to month by month by each of these five administrations. As I say, it's a tribute to the American public that their leaders perceived that they had to be lied to, it's no tribute to us that it was so easy to fool the public."

Ask students: Why did U.S. leaders feel that they needed to lie to the public about U.S. involvement in Vietnam? Why was it "so easy to fool the public"? In what way

might people's schooling have made it easier for their government to lie to them? Do you think that it would be easier or harder for a government today to lie to the public about U.S. involvement in other countries?

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Student Handout

Tonkin Gulf Resolution (1964)

Eighty-eighth Congress of the United States of America

Joint Resolution

To promote the maintenance of international peace and security in Southeast Asia.

Whereas naval units of the Communist regime in Vietnam, in violation of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law, have deliberately and repeatedly attacked United States naval vessels lawfully present in international waters, and have thereby created a serious threat to international peace; and

Whereas these attackers are part of deliberate and systematic campaign of aggression that the Communist regime in North Vietnam has been waging against its neighbors and the nations joined with them in the collective defense of their freedom; and

Whereas the United States is assisting the peoples of southeast Asia to protest their freedom and has no territorial, military or political ambitions in that area, but desires only that these people should be left in peace to work out their destinies in their own way: Now, therefore be it

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the Congress approves and supports the determination of the President, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.

Section 2. The United States regards as vital to its national interest and to world peace the maintenance of international peace and security in Southeast Asia. Consonant with the Constitution of the United States and the Charter of the United Nations and in accordance with its obligations under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, the United States is, therefore, prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom.

Section 3. This resolution shall expire when the President shall determine that the peace and security of the area is reasonably assured by international conditions created by action of the United Nations or otherwise, except that it may be terminated earlier by concurrent resolution of the Congress.



On March 25, 1967, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. led 5,000 people down State Street in Chicago to protest the war in Vietnam. This was the first anti-war march that Dr. King had joined. Photo: Jo Freeman © 1967.

Lesson Four

The Most Dangerous Man in America Reception

The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers introduces its audience to over 30 different characters from the Vietnam War era. The “Reception” activity provides an opportunity for students to meet many of the personalities they will encounter in the movie. Students also meet individuals not included in *The Most Dangerous Man in America* who embody themes and issues addressed in the film. The reception provides a foundation of knowledge for viewers that will enhance understanding of the film’s content by exposing them to terminology, personalities, historical events, and analysis.

Materials Needed

Individual reception roles for every student in the class

Blank nametags; enough for every student in the class

Copies of the *The Most Dangerous Man in America: Reception Questions* for every student

Time Required

One class period for the reception.
Time for follow-up discussion.

Suggested Procedure

1 Explain to students that they are going to participate in an activity about the Vietnam War, Daniel Ellsberg, and the Pentagon

Papers. Provide a brief historical context to best frame the activity, something like: “Imagine that it is the early 1970s in the United States. The U.S. has been involved in an extended war in Vietnam. Protest and dissent are growing at home as the war continues to escalate. Daniel Ellsberg, a war insider, decides to make public about 7,000 pages of documents about America’s war that show a consistent pattern of government lies told to the American public. These documents were classified top secret. He decides to let the country know what he knows. Let’s visit that era today in class with the following activity. You will play the role of someone connected to the Vietnam War who is invited to a reception involving other historical figures.”

Distribute one reception role to each student in the class (see Handout for Students). There are 27 roles in the activity. If you have more than 27 students in class, it’s fine to allow two students to play the same character. The activity also works fine with fewer than 27 students. We’ve put the roles roughly in the order of most to least essential. In most instances, the roles draw from actual historical statements made by each individual.

2 Have students fill out their nametags, using the name of the character they are assigned. Tell students that in this activity you would like each of them to attempt to “become” the people they are assigned. Ask students to read their roles several times and memorize as much of the information provided as possible. Encourage students to underline key points and make note of them for the activity to follow.

3 Distribute a copy of “*The Most Dangerous Man in America Reception Questions*” to every student. Explain their task: Students will have to leave their seats, get up and circulate through the classroom, meeting other individuals from the Vietnam War era, most of whom appear in the documentary they will soon watch. Students should use the questions on the sheet as a guide to talk with other characters about the war—the era, the role of government officials, the role of activists, decisions that were made, lies that were told, silence that was kept—and use the results of their conversations to answer the questions as fully as possible. Students must use a different character to answer each of the various questions. They cannot interview their duplicate character, if there is one. Inform students that the activity is not a race to see who finishes first; the aim is to spend time learning about each character in order to gain as full an understanding as possible of the Vietnam War era and the events surrounding the release of the Pentagon Papers. If you like, you can model a typical encounter beforehand with a student to demonstrate expectations. Tell students that all information is to be communicated through conversation; they may

not show their written role to other students. Also, our experience is that it’s best if students meet one-on-one, rather in groups, as this encourages fuller participation.

4 Give students about 30 minutes to complete the reception. Some classes may require more time, if students engage in more substantial conversations. We encourage teachers to assume roles and participate in the reception to help assess how the class is doing and whether students have any confusion as they talk with one another. Check in to see how far along the class is.

5 When you bring the reception to a close, ask students to take a moment to write about the activity. They might simply write on people they met who they had never heard about, or on information they learned that they did not previously know. Afterward, ask students to share some of their thoughts with the entire class. Take time to answer any questions students ask—clarifications about a term, an event, a concept—and write those on a board or piece of butcher paper. For instance, students may seek clarification about the domino theory, the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, Agent Orange, etc. The reception is in-

tended as a foundation to enhance viewing of the documentary, but the roles are short, so it is not meant to be definitive. The activity will have been a success simply if it has introduced students to individuals and issues of which they were previously unaware. Make sure that key characters—Daniel Ellsberg, Howard Zinn, Richard Nixon, Robert McNamara—introduce themselves to the class. Questions to help facilitate discussion can include basic information gathering about the Vietnam War to ones about Daniel Ellsberg and his decision to make the Pentagon Papers public. Initial questions should grow out of the activity:

- Who met someone who disagreed with you on the war?
- What was the nature of the disagreement?
- Who met someone who supported/opposed Daniel Ellsberg?
- Where did they differ?

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RECEPTION ROLES

(in order)

1. Daniel Ellsberg
2. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
3. Henry Kissinger
4. Robert S. McNamara
5. General William Westmoreland
6. Randy Kehler
7. Patricia Marx Ellsberg
8. David Harris
9. Janaki Tschannerl
10. Senator William Fulbright
11. Howard Zinn
12. President Lyndon Johnson
13. President Richard Nixon
14. Senator Mike Gravel
15. Anthony Russo
16. President Nguyen Cao Ky
17. Egil “Bud” Krogh
18. Neil Sheehan
19. Walter Cronkite
20. John Dean
21. Nguyen Thi Hong
22. Norma Banks
23. Howard Hunt
24. Thich Nhat Hanh
25. Joan Baez
26. Grace Castillo
27. James Goodale

Daniel Ellsberg

It was the evening of October 1st, 1969 when I first smuggled several hundred pages of top-secret documents out of my safe at the Rand Corporation in California. The study contained 47 volumes, 7,000 pages. My plan was to xerox the study and reveal the secret history of the Vietnam War to the American people.

What led up to my decision? Early in my career I was a war planner: I supported the war and worked in the Pentagon directly under Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. Over time, I came to see that the war had been built on lies. Every U.S. president from Truman to Nixon had lied to the American people about our involvement in Vietnam. I felt guilty that I helped the government to lie. And the fact that I helped wage the war meant that I had an even greater responsibility than most people to help stop the war. The Gulf of Tonkin “incident” occurred during my first day on the job. Later, I told McNamara about the dismal state of the war and then watched him tell reporters the complete opposite of what he knew to be the truth. I remember thinking that I hoped I would never have a job where I had to lie like that. Yet I still supported the war because I believed that in Vietnam we were protecting democracy against communist dictatorship.

I now know that we weren’t on the wrong side in Vietnam—we were the wrong side. The hundreds of thousands we were killing was unjustified homicide, and I couldn’t see the difference between that and murder. Murder had to be stopped. I decided to give copies of the Pentagon Papers to newspapers all across the country and to key members of Congress, prompting National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger to call me “the most dangerous man in America.” I knew I could go to prison—maybe for the rest of my life—for doing this. But isn’t time in prison a small price to pay to help end an unjust and brutal war?

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

I am the only major public figure to call for a unilateral withdrawal from Vietnam. Many people, including my supporters and comrades in the Civil Rights Movement, have criticized me for speaking out about Vietnam, but it has become impossible for me to remain silent and to not see the connection between injustice abroad and at home. The war in Vietnam is but a symptom of a far deeper sickness within the American spirit. Our nation has been on the wrong side of a world revolution. We have supported the interests of wealthy minorities against the majority of people not only here in the U.S. but all over the world, from Latin America to Asia.

Somehow this madness must stop. I speak for those whose land is being laid waste, whose homes are being destroyed, whose culture is being harmed. I speak for the poor of America who are paying the double price of smashed hopes at home and death and corruption in Vietnam. This is our war. We must stop it.

I am convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the shift from a “thing-oriented” society to a “person-oriented” society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered.

Americans have a duty to urge our government to end the war and atone for our injustice to the Vietnamese people. Everyone must decide on the protest that best suits his or her convictions, but we must all protest.

RECEPTION

Henry Kissinger

I was an adviser to and supporter of New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller and worked on his 1968 campaign for the presidency. Rockefeller lost in the Republican primary to the man who became President of the United States, Richard M. Nixon. Nixon contacted me a few weeks after he took office and asked me to be his special assistant for national security. I said yes, and went off to Washington to join him.

I learned more about Vietnam from Daniel Ellsberg than any other person I knew. Ellsberg had been a Marine in the 1950s, he worked for Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, and had spent time in Vietnam. At the Rand Corporation in California, he also worked on something that later became known as the Pentagon Papers.

People like Ellsberg almost convinced me that we couldn't win the war in Vietnam. But Nixon and I decided we could win the war. We decided to run the war from the White House. The president was hell bent on not losing that war. We thought that if we bombed the Vietnamese, they'd be more likely to want a truce. But while we were looking for a way to end the war honorably, Dan Ellsberg stole the Pentagon Papers and gave them to the newspapers.

Well, that was treason. Ellsberg was aiding the enemy. How could we run the government when we had spies like Ellsberg who were giving whole file cabinets of top-secret documents to the press? That's why I called Ellsberg the most dangerous man in America. Some people call him a hero. I call him a thief and a traitor.

Robert S. McNamara

I've been called a "whiz kid" for much of my life. I have taught at Harvard, run Ford Motor Co., and taught statistical analysis to the Army Air Forces. I served as Secretary of Defense for Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson.

In the early 1960s, before most Americans ever heard of Vietnam, I became the civilian architect of U.S. military policy in Vietnam. During this time, we steadily increased the number of U.S. military "advisors" in South Vietnam to about 17,000.

I argued that if we let Vietnam fall to communism, other countries in the region would fall like dominoes. I made the argument that the events in the Gulf of Tonkin in August 1964 were good reasons to send large forces and bombers to Vietnam. The public discovered later that the incident was based on a falsely reported attack on a U.S. ship. But this type of escalation was necessary to prevent bigger problems.

My strategy led to the commitment of 485,000 troops by the end of 1967 and almost 535,000 in 1968. U.S. deaths grew, as the number of troops and the intensity of fighting escalated. I used a statistical strategy for victory in Vietnam, because with a limited number of Viet-Cong or communists in Vietnam, the war would wear them down and finally destroy them. I applied metrics (body counts) to measure achievement of my plan. However, I gradually came to doubt that the war could be won with more troops and bombing.

Daniel Ellsberg worked for me as a speech-writer. In 1967, I ordered work to begin on the Pentagon Papers, an in-depth, top-secret study of Vietnam.

Though people have blamed me, I don't recall being involved in the decision to use Agent Orange and don't recall awareness of its dangers.

General William Westmoreland

In June 1964, I became deputy commander of Military Assistance Command in Vietnam and in 1968 I was promoted to Army Chief of Staff. I believed that, backed at home by resolve, confidence, patience, determination and continued support, we would prevail in Vietnam over the Communists.

Under my leadership, U.S. forces won every battle. The turning point of the war was the 1968 Tet Offensive—large attacks by the enemy. U.S. and South Vietnamese troops successfully fought off the attacks, and the Communist forces took heavy losses, but the ferocity of the assault shook the public confidence about the state of the war. Political debate and public opinion led the President Johnson to limit further increases in U.S. troop numbers in Vietnam.

My war plan was to use heavy artillery and airpower and repeated attempts to engage the Communists in large-unit battles. However, the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (NLF) fought a guerrilla war, avoiding large-unit battles. This denied the U.S. the chance to fight the kind of war we are best at and attrition wore down the Americans faster than the enemy. I opposed withdrawing troops and negotiating with the Communists. I tried to convince President Johnson to approve widening the war into Cambodia and Laos.

As a military commander in charge of thousands of troops, I think it is treasonous to release classified information, like the Pentagon Papers, that could endanger American troops.

RECEPTION

Randy Kehler

I was involved in several anti-war organizations in the 1960s and 70s. I am a peace activist and advocate for social justice. I left Stanford University to join the War Resisters League to work for nonviolent liberation struggles. The War Resisters League is the U.S. branch of the War Resisters' International, which began after World War I as an association of conscientious objectors when only a few countries recognized that status. I became the head of the San Francisco branch of the War Resisters League. I opposed U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War and refused to cooperate with the draft. In August of 1969, I met Daniel Ellsberg after I gave a talk at a conference of the War Resisters International at Haverford College. I talked about how many of my friends had already gone to prison and that I and many more were ready to do the same. Daniel told me that my talk moved him to a pivotal point in his life.

My wife and I refused to pay taxes for military use and as a result, the U.S. Government seized our house. When I was 25-years-old, I was indicted on five counts, each one of which had a maximum sentence of five years. My actions have let Dan Ellsberg and others know that war resistance is a positive thing, a beautiful thing. If I have to sacrifice my freedom so that others may be free, so be it.

Patricia Marx Ellsberg

I vividly remember my first date with my future husband, Daniel Ellsberg. It was April 1965, at the first big Students for a Democratic Society peace march in Washington. It wasn't exactly his thing, I could tell, since, as he said, he was helping run the war and hadn't had a day off in months. I needed to conduct some interviews for my radio show, "Patricia Marx Interviews." Besides, I wanted to demonstrate my opposition to that crazy war. I told him that's where I'd be; he could join me or not. Afterwards, we walked among the cherry blossoms and began to fall deeply in love.

As Shakespeare wrote, "The course of true love never did run smooth." Our love was no exception. After I visited Dan in Saigon, it became clear to each of us that we viewed the Vietnam War very differently. I just did not understand how he could be part of this mess! And he did not understand how I could be so critical of him. When I left Saigon, we agreed that would be the end of our relationship.

During the next few years, I continued to protest the war. Daniel in turn did some serious soul searching. He read Thoreau, King, Jr., and Gandhi, got to know war resisters like Randy Kehler, Janaki Tschannerl, and Howard Zinn, and began to shift his views. He came to see silence as complicity. He became a nonviolent activist against the war.

When we finally met again, I was impressed by how much he had changed. Our love grew ever deeper and we married. We learned that Dan might spend the rest of his life in prison once he released the Pentagon Papers, yet we agreed that the papers must be made public. I vowed to support him however I could for the rest of our lives.

David Harris

I graduated from Fresno High School just as the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War were heating up. I went on to Stanford University, supplementing my partial scholarship by waiting on tables and working in fruit packing sheds in the San Joaquin Valley in the summers.

The Civil Rights Movement called to me, and I took off for Mississippi to help out with the Freedom Summer Voter Registration campaign. When I returned to Stanford, I became more involved in the anti-war movement. I was elected student body president by calling for an end to university cooperation with the war as well as equal rights for women and men. At one anti-war demonstration, a group of fraternity boys managed to pin me down and shave my head. Nothing could deter me. I refused to cooperate with the draft and encouraged others to do the same.

When I refused to show up for my army physical in 1968, I was arrested and sentenced to three years in prison, though I ended up serving about eighteen months. I was one of many resisters. I found strength from knowing that I was part of a much larger movement. When I was out on appeal, Joan Baez, the famous folk singer and activist, and I got married. In 1969, our son, Gabriel, was born. However, by the time I was released from jail, it was clear that both Joan and I had changed. In prison, I lost my ideals, but not my principles. Joan and I divorced.

Writing had always been my passion. In college, I won the Stanford poetry prize. I began to pursue a career in journalism, starting with *Rolling Stone Magazine* where I became a contributing editor.

RECEPTION

Janaki Tschannerl

I come from a culture in which there is no concept of enemy. In other words, there is no one we have the right to destroy, or hate, or regard as an alien. There is no one from whom we cannot learn, or for whom we can feel no understanding or compassion. My philosophy of nonviolence, of satyagraha (truth force), my way of life, I learned from Gandhi in India.

When I met Daniel Ellsberg in 1968 at a conference on nonviolence held at Princeton, these ideas were as foreign to him as doing arithmetic without the concept of zero. But he was intrigued and asked me to explain. So the two of us talked and talked.

I spoke of how all evil doing, all coercive power, depends on the cooperation, the obedience and support of many people, including those who see themselves as just passive bystanders. Pacifism is about resisting and transforming evil by actively withdrawing that support. When an organized movement of people nonviolently refuses to cooperate, they unleash a tremendous force for change, like a powerful wind.

Noncooperation can take many forms. We can withdraw resources by refusing to pay taxes that pay for war; we can refuse to be drafted into the army; we can boycott and strike. We can create nonviolent obstructions by putting our bodies in the way: sit-ins, blockades, mass marches. I think what made the biggest impact on Daniel was the idea that we can refuse to cooperate by exposing the truth. Remaining silent in face of truth simply amounts to acceptance and support, to collaboration with evil. To do what is right, sometimes we have to do what is considered “wrong” in the eyes of the law. I am helping Daniel find his way along a somewhat bumpy road to truth.

Senator William Fulbright

I hold the record as the longest serving chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. As a Southern Democrat, what they started calling “Dixiecrats,” I opposed and even filibustered the Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1964, and 1965. In 1964, I sponsored and pushed through the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, believing that what the President and the Secretary of Defense McNamara said was true—that we were under unprovoked attack from North Vietnam.

Over time, I changed. I later voted for the Civil Rights Bill and grew to oppose the war in Vietnam. In my 1966 book, *Arrogance of Power*, I attack the justifications for the war and Congress’ failure to set limits on it. In fact, the biggest lesson I learned from Vietnam is to not trust our government’s statements. I had no idea until then that you could not rely on them. Yet, I am a part of “them.”

Daniel Ellsberg gave me a copy of the Pentagon Papers, and asked me to release it, to put the history of this unjust war into the public record. But I chose to sit on them, to remain silent. I just wasn’t sure that public knowledge of the Pentagon Papers would make much of a difference either to the American people or in the direction of the war. And I had my relationship with the White House to think about. I didn’t want to lose the power I had worked so many years to gain.

Howard Zinn

I enlisted in the Army Air Force during World War II and became a bombardier. I dropped bombs throughout Europe during the war. Later I came to see how brutal and unnecessary this was. After the war I went to college and became a historian. The more I studied about war—all war—the more I came to see its immorality and insanity.

Of course, I became an opponent of the Vietnam War and became friends with Daniel Ellsberg. At one time, Dan had also supported war, but he too came to see the cruelty and horrors of war. He had copied a 7,000-page secret government history of the war that became known as the Pentagon Papers. He planned to give it to newspapers and members of Congress so that they could tell the American people about the lies that led up to this war. Ellsberg knew that by copying this document he could spend many years in jail. But Dan believed that once the American public knew how the war had been built on the lies of their own government that they would demand an end to the war. Dan asked me if I could hide his copy of the Pentagon Papers, and of course I agreed to help. Ultimately, the *New York Times* and many major U.S. newspapers published excerpts of the Pentagon Papers. President Nixon and his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger were furious.

The U.S. government charged Dan Ellsberg with theft, conspiracy, and espionage. Ellsberg’s attorneys called me as an expert witness to tell the jury the true history of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. I spoke for several hours. I explained there was nothing in the papers of military significance that could be used to harm the defense of the United States, that the information in them was simply embarrassing to our government because what was revealed, in the government’s own private memos, was how it had lied to the American public. The secrets disclosed in the Pentagon Papers might embarrass politicians, might hurt the profits of corporations wanting tin, rubber, and oil in far-off places. But this was not the same as hurting the nation, the people.

Lyndon Baines Johnson—36th President of the United States

I became president when President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas in 1963. I inherited the Vietnam War as well. I am determined to win the war in Vietnam. We will use whatever resources we need, including sending more U.S. troops and artillery to defeat our enemy there. The United States has just cause for this war because we were attacked by North Vietnam's navy in the Gulf of Tonkin. We will defend the freedom of our ally, South Vietnam, and fight for a free Vietnam where democracy can be a reality for all.

The citizens of the United States must understand that we will win this war. If we lose Vietnam, then we lose Southeast Asia. All of Vietnam's neighbors will fall like a line of dominoes to the Communists. So, there is more at stake in this war than just Vietnam.

Lately, I have become discouraged. The Tet Offensive of 1968, a surprise attack against our troops during the Vietnamese New Year, has taken its toll on our resolve. It has also taken its toll on my resolve. I do not know if I can stay on as President. The more I try to not lose Vietnam, the more people turn against me. Even Walter Cronkite over at CBS Television, the most trusted news man in America, has his doubts about the war in Vietnam and about my leadership. If I've lost Cronkite, I've lost America. I do not want to go down in history as the U.S. President who lost Vietnam.

Richard M. Nixon—37th President of the United States

I am familiar with Vietnam, having served as President Eisenhower's Vice President in the 1950s when the conflict began. Back then, we were supporting the French, who had run Vietnam for about a hundred years. At one point, I proposed dropping nuclear weapons on the Vietnamese when it was clear that the French were going to be run out of Vietnam. I'm still not opposed to using nuclear weapons against those little crumbs, but my adviser Henry Kissinger discourages me. He says he doesn't want the world to see me as a "butcher." Well, to hell with the world. I will not stand for these little upstarts to challenge America. I will cream them. Though I ran for president in 1968 on a campaign that promised "peace with honor," I am secretly bombing Vietnam and its neighboring countries, dropping more bombs on Cambodia than were dropped during all of World War II because, frankly, I don't give a damn about the civilians down below. I will prevail in Vietnam even if I lose South Vietnam in the process.

Despite what my critics say, I have begun to "Vietnamize" the war, turning over as many ground operations as I can to the Vietnamese. I am following through on my promise to bring our troops home. I have to bomb the hell out of them to do that. If only the liberal press would let me be the president and carry out my entire plan. How can I succeed when I have national security leaks all the time? Things are upside down. The peace-niks, like that thief Daniel Ellsberg, are applauded as heroes while I'm called a butcher. Now that Ellsberg character is going public with top-secret documents. He's a traitor. We just can't have this nonsense. I'll get them. I'll get them all, do whatever I have to do to secure my presidency and continue my war. I am the President.

Senator Mike Gravel

As a U.S. senator from the great state of Alaska, it is my duty to make sure that the American people have access to accurate information to make decisions. Therefore, I have chosen to read the Pentagon Papers that I received from Daniel Ellsberg aloud during a special session of the Senate Building and Grounds committee that I chair. I will include the full papers in the Congressional Record for all to see. I do so at great risk because the government classified these documents as top secret. I realize that I am putting my career and my personal freedom on the line to do what I know is right. I will not let any staff member of mine even touch the boxes that contain this information lest they be prosecuted for espionage or treason.

This is not the first time I've taken action against the Vietnam War. I tried to use a filibuster to oppose President Nixon's extension of the draft. My thinking was this: stop the draft and we stop the war. I was too nice and too young to make the filibuster work. I got out-manuevered by other senators.

I began reading the Pentagon Papers to an audience of one. I began my action by stating that I would love to build more federal buildings, but can't. We don't have the money because of this war we are waging in Southeast Asia. Now let me tell you how we got in Southeast Asia. I read late into the night until I could no longer go on. The deceit, the grief . . . it was too much. I started sobbing not long after midnight. This war has to end.

RECEPTION

Anthony Russo

Daniel Ellsberg and I met at the RAND Corporation, a think tank set up to develop U.S. war policies in the late 1960s. He knew that I was an opponent of the war and he constantly asked me questions about my views. When Dan told me what he had in his possession, a documented history of our country's secret war in Vietnam spanning over five presidencies, I told him that he had to make the information public. I pushed Dan to take that next step. I decided to help him. I not only urged Dan to copy and distribute the Pentagon Papers, I provided the copy machine, the space, and the support.

I know that Dan and I face possible jail time for our actions when the Pentagon Papers become public. I also know that I will not cooperate with the criminal U.S. government under any circumstances. Mine is a choice of conscience. How can we remain silent when we know the truth and read official lies everyday? How can we remain silent when we know that thousands of innocent people are dying everyday for those lies?

I can't be a bystander. I must reveal the truth. Dan must reveal the truth, regardless of the consequences.

President Nguyen Cao Ky

I have always been on the right side of power; I make sure of it. After the partition of the Vietnam, I started my military career in the infantry, as an officer in South Vietnam. The French realized my potential and sent me to pilot training in Morocco. How I admire the French—their food, their drink, their cigarettes.

My first wife was French. What a woman. But let's be clear, I love all women. Once, when I was young, to impress a girl I was dating, I landed my helicopter in front of her house. Ha! You should have seen the locals panic! I was charged with misuse of military equipment—but it worked, so, c'est la vie.

As the commanding officer of the South Vietnam Air Force, I became part of a group of military officers known as the Young Turks—we would support or oppose attempts to take over the government. The coups and attempted coups happened all the time. My best tactic was when I scrambled fighter jets and threatened air-strikes to warn a political opponent. Extreme? So what? It worked, and in 1965 I became the Prime Minister of South Vietnam.

When we took over, South Vietnam was in chaos, it needed control; so newspapers publishing unacceptable material were closed, excessive civil liberties were curtailed and troublemakers like the Communists, Buddhists, and anyone who actively opposed our regime were shot. Sometimes there is too much freedom.

The coups stopped. American support increased. South Vietnam was open for business.

Egil "Bud" Krogh

I am dealing with a national security crisis. As head of President Nixon's secret Special Investigation's "plumber's unit," it is my job to stop the leaks of top secret information that are undermining the President's ability to run the Vietnam war as it should be run. One of my first priorities is to stop Daniel Ellsberg who leaked the Pentagon Papers to the press. I believe, along with the President, that we can still win the approval of the American people if we can find damaging information about Ellsberg's personal life and undermine his credibility by leaking his secret files to the press. Nixon is the man who invented the strategy of manipulating the press through timely leaks of sensitive information. So, I am rounding up some of the top espionage people we have, at the direction of President Nixon, to break into Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office. With luck, we'll help to bring an end to what might be a large-scale anti-war conspiracy being waged from inside government.

I must admit, though, that I am troubled by the direction this war and this president is taking. No one asks, "Is this the right thing to do?" No one looks at the legal issues, the ethical issues, the spiritual issues. Sometimes I'm worried that in the name of national security that President Nixon is really at the heart of the collapse of our national integrity.

Even though I cannot tolerate the man's actions, I feel sympathy for Dan Ellsberg. He is trying to do what he thinks is the right thing. I have not been able to do that. I am too tied in with government to step aside and ask the burning questions that Ellsberg has.

RECEPTION

Neil Sheehan—*New York Times*
Reporter

I went as a reporter to Vietnam for a press service in 1962. I spent three years in Vietnam, eventually covering the war for the *New York Times*. When I returned home from Vietnam in 1966, I saw the increased protests. I witnessed the unraveling of McNamara, the unraveling of Johnson, as a result of the Vietnam War.

In 1971, I received top-secret information from Daniel Ellsberg about CIA operations in Vietnam. I immediately wrote and published an article based on what Dan gave me. He later gave me a copy of the Pentagon Papers. I chose to write a series in the *Times* that revealed a secret U.S. government history of the war that had been hidden from the American people for decades. I wrote the series not knowing if it was legal. But don't think for a minute that I didn't take cautionary steps: other writers and I rented a hotel room in order to review the entire document and to compose articles for publication in the *Times* based on what we learned from Dr. Ellsberg's actions. After our initial articles appeared, Attorney General John Mitchell ordered the *Times* to stop further publication and threatened legal action.

I never got away from the Vietnam War, not because I was obsessed with it, but because it was the event of my generation. It defined all of our lives. I along with Dan Ellsberg, hoped that the truth about Vietnam could redefine our lives. I wanted the truth to cut through the delusions we had of ourselves as Americans and the delusions we Americans had about Vietnam.

Walter Cronkite—Television
News Anchor

As the anchor of the "CBS Evening News," every night I come into the living rooms of millions of Americans. Some people call me "the most trusted man in America." When I began to express my doubts about our country's military policy in Vietnam, President Johnson was said to have lamented that, "if I've lost Cronkite, I've lost middle America." I went to Vietnam in 1966 to see for myself what was going on. It wasn't my first experience covering war, I served as a news correspondent during all of World War II. But Vietnam is different. Vietnam is dividing America and draining our spirit and our resources. Average people are losing faith in their government and in each other.

By 1968, it became clear to me that the only option that the United States had was to negotiate a peaceful settlement with the Vietnamese. The impact of the Tet Offensive—massive attacks by the National Liberation Front (the so-called Viet Cong) on U.S. forces in Vietnam—has shown that we are not winning this war and we cannot win this war. I expressed my conclusions on the air during my nightly CBS newscast.

When Daniel Ellsberg released the Pentagon Papers and went into hiding from federal law enforcement authorities, I interviewed him on my national newscast from a secret location. My job as a reporter is to bring the truth to the American people, and win or lose in Vietnam, we all have the right to know the truth. It's the only way a healthy democracy can function. We must have a free and active press and reporters, like me, have to report the truth, even if that truth flies in the face of official government statements.

John Dean

I was White House Chief Counsel to President Richard Nixon from 1970 until April of 1973. During much of the Nixon Administration, from 1969 through 1972, Daniel Ellsberg and I were on opposing sides; his interest was exposing the truth about why the U.S. was involved in Vietnam and my role was to perpetuate the lies being told to people around the world. I initially went along with Nixon's strategy of covering up U.S. lies about the war in Vietnam. What made me change? As a lawyer I could see that Ellsberg's rights were being violated during his trial and that I would be guilty of a charge of obstruction of justice if I continued to go along.

Our opposition ended when I broke from the Nixon Administration and began telling the truth about the crimes I participated in such as the government-approved break-in of the psychiatrist of Daniel Ellsberg at Nixon's direction. I told the president that I was going to break rank. I wouldn't lie for anybody. And one of the things that I knew about was the break-in into Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office looking for information that could somehow discredit Ellsberg.

My truth-telling ultimately led to Nixon's resignation which made the end of the Vietnam War possible nine months later. Though I did jail time, my sentence was reduced because I cooperated with the prosecution and exposed the cover-up plot.

RECEPTION

Nguyen Thi Hong, Vietnam

During the American War in my country, my people fought to throw out the invaders. First the French, then the Japanese, then the French again—and finally the Americans. The Americans captured me and turned me over to the South Vietnamese government. We called the South Vietnamese “puppets,” because they were funded and controlled by the Americans. The South Vietnamese tortured me. They hung me upside down from the ceiling by my ankles, and tied my big toes to a pole. They passed electrodes through the tips of each of my fingers, and other places I won’t mention. The cruelty that we experienced was longer than a river, higher than a mountain, deeper than an ocean.

Once, I was walking on a road and the American planes came overhead and drenched me with the herbicide, Agent Orange. Lots of my friends and family were sprayed with this poison several times. Today, we have many health problems. I have terrible arthritis and strange skin problems. Many people here have died young of cancer. Lots of deformed babies. Lots.

I’ve heard that some Americans risked a great deal, and even went to prison, trying to end this war. I thank all the Americans who worked for peace.

Norma Banks

My husband, Michael, served in Vietnam. At first, he refused to talk about his experiences in the war. But about three or four years after we were married, he started to tell me things. I was curious what it had been like. He told me that he did not like the idea of having to kill, but he felt that he really didn’t have a choice.

His pains began with his joints; they bothered him. Then as time went on, he just wasn’t well. He started suspecting that it might have been Agent Orange, the chemical herbicide that the U.S. sprayed all over Vietnam. Of course, this poison affected American soldiers, too. Michael would just say, “Well, in Vietnam, I was living in the swamps. So you know, Norma, eventually it’s going to get to me.” The doctors always wanted him to describe what he felt, and he would say it’s pain but it’s not like a pain of a stab wound or a puncture. He felt that it was on the inside and it felt like things just creeping in his blood, creeping all over him.

He would break out from the bottom of his feet, just all over his body. And he itched 24 hours a day—all day, every day. I felt so bad for him, because there was nothing I could do. Michael would fall asleep but he could never sleep very long; he would jump up and then I’d wake, too. I would rub his back and that would get him back to sleep.

One night Michael got a real bad bout, and he vomited and there was all this black stuff. It turned out to be blood. He died not long after that.

Sometimes the effects of a war don’t happen right away.

Howard Hunt

I’ve always taken orders and carried them out. That’s what you do in the intelligence business—do your job and keep quiet. I am very good at what I do. I can say with a great deal of satisfaction, that as a member of the Central Intelligence Agency [CIA] I battled communism in places like Guatemala, Cuba, and Nicaragua, among others. To me, communism is a graveyard of skulls, of very unhappy people. . . it has to keep eating on its neighbors, finding new aggressive activities to keep itself going, fueling itself. Just look at what’s happening in Vietnam.

After my official retirement from the CIA, I joined the Nixon administration as a member of the Special Investigations Group. We were known in close circles as “the Plumbers.” It was our job to prevent or eliminate leaks in the Nixon White House.

The distribution of the Pentagon Papers, the top-secret 7,000-plus-page history of the United States’ involvement in Vietnam, was a major leak—threatening the integrity of our government and our success in Vietnam. Like I said, I am very good at what I do. The Administration needed to discredit Daniel Ellsberg, and I knew overt, covert, and derogatory information would destroy Ellsberg’s public image and credibility. I proposed that we burglarize Ellsberg’s psychiatrist’s office. If we found any dirt on Ellsberg, it would take attention off the Pentagon Papers and put it on Ellsberg.

RECEPTION

Thich Nhat Hanh

I am a Buddhist monk and social justice activist. In the early 1960s, I founded the School of Youth for Social Services (SYSS) in Saigon in South Vietnam. We rebuilt bombed villages, set up schools, established medical centers, and resettled families left homeless during the war.

I was a part of a Vietnamese Buddhist movement for peace. The majority of Vietnamese are Buddhist, and in the south, Buddhists were oppressed by Ngo Dinh Diem, the U.S. appointed and un-elected “leader.” One of the Buddhists in the movement said: “Each day the war goes on the hatred increases in the heart of the Vietnamese and in the hearts of those of humanitarian instinct. The Americans are forcing even their friends into becoming their enemies. It is curious that the Americans, who calculate so carefully on the possibilities of military victory, do not realize that in the process they are incurring deep psychological and political defeat. The image of America will never again be the image of revolution, freedom, and democracy, but the image of violence and militarism.”

Later, I traveled to the United States to study at Princeton and then to lecture at Cornell and Columbia. I urged the U.S. government to withdraw from Vietnam. I urged Martin Luther King, Jr. to publicly oppose the Vietnam War; Dr. King nominated me for the Nobel Peace Prize in January 1967.

Joan Baez

All my life I have been an activist for peace and human rights, a key player in the long and honored tradition of using song as a way to work for social justice. My career took off when I was still a teenager, and I often used my celebrity status to help publicize social justice actions. I performed at the 1963 Civil Rights March on Washington and at the first big Students for a Democratic Society anti-Vietnam War March in Washington. It was there that I first met Daniel Ellsberg.

In 1967, because of my anti-war activism, the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) refused to allow me to perform at Constitution Hall. Instead, I put on a free concert for 30,000 at the Washington Monument. I performed at Woodstock that same year.

Music is at the heart of social movements; the anti-Vietnam War movement is no exception. I have been able to sing and work with so many courageous, inspirational individuals throughout the world—all of us part of a much larger movement of millions fighting nonviolently for peace and social justice. There was Martin Luther King, Jr., Cesar Chavez, Randy Kehler, Daniel Ellsberg, and, of course, Bob Dylan and David Harris—loves of my life. David and I married in 1968, and although he spent most of our brief marriage in prison for draft resistance, I gave birth to our beloved son, my only child, Gabriel, a year later.

My music has mirrored my nonviolent activism throughout my life. I have refused to pay war taxes and have gone to jail for nonviolent civil disobedience. I co-founded the Institute for the Study of Nonviolence. You don't get to choose how you're going to die. Or when. But you can decide how you're going to live now.

Grace Castillo

I wonder if the “Big Men”—people like Johnson and Nixon and Kissinger—ever think about how their decisions affect the “little people,” people like my husband David and me. David believed his government when it told him that he should go fight for freedom in Vietnam. He said that he wanted our son to be proud of him and so he enlisted in the Army. He didn't even wait for the government to draft him. And soon the Army sent him to fight in Vietnam.

One night after David had been sent to Vietnam, I had a dream. I saw David walking—in a field, or a jungle or something. Lots of shrubbery. And I kept trying to tell him, “Don't go. Don't go any farther. Stay away.” And then there was an explosion.

The next morning, I dropped our son off at preschool and went to work. That dream haunted me all day long. That night I received a telegram. The telegram read: “This is to inform you that your husband, Private First Class David Reevus Castillo, has been wounded.” And it tells me that they amputated his left leg above the knee and removed his right eye. It said that he was still in a coma with shrapnel in the brain. I contacted my doctor and he told me, “Grace, pray. Pray that he dies.” I just wonder if the Big Men who planned this war think about the little people like David and me.

RECEPTION

James Goodale, Attorney, *New York Times*

I was the attorney at the *New York Times* when the *Times* was deciding whether to publish the Pentagon Papers. These were thousands of secret official documents explaining step by step how the U.S. government got into the Vietnam War. Daniel Ellsberg had given these to the *Times*. The question for us at the newspaper was, “Can we publish top secret classified government papers?” This falls under the Espionage Act. Yes, I guess if the government wanted to stretch it, it would be possible to charge us with violating the Espionage Act. And, in fact, I heard that the law firm that the *Times* had used for many years told the *Times* executives that if they published the Pentagon Papers, they could all go to jail.

This was a very big deal. The *Times* was the leading newspaper in the United States. Sure, the executives took a risk in publishing these papers. But I thought the *Times* took a bigger risk had they held onto these important documents and refused to publish them out of fear. I told the *Times* that in my opinion they had the legal right—and the responsibility—to publish the Pentagon Papers. After we began publishing, the U.S. Attorney General John Mitchell sent a telegram to the *Times* telling us to stop immediately, and threatening us with legal action if we continued. I mean what in God’s name have we been fighting for in this country for two or three hundred years? To have the right to speak and the right to publish, the right to think. Are we going to back down because someone sends us a telegram, because the government threatens us? No.

R E C E P T I O N

Student Handout

The Most Dangerous Man in America

Reception Questions

Find someone who has been to Vietnam or knows someone who was in Vietnam. Who is the individual, what is this person's point of view about the Vietnam War?

Find someone who had strong feelings about the war in Vietnam. Who is this individual and why did he or she have such strong feelings?

Find someone who faced an important choice. Who is the person? What was his or her choice?

Find someone who did not support what Daniel Ellsberg did. Who is the person and why did this individual disapprove of Ellsberg's actions?

Find someone who supported—or likely would have supported—Ellsberg's actions. Who is the person and why did (or would) he or she approve of Ellsberg's actions?

Find someone who lost something as a result of the Vietnam War. Who is the person? What did he or she lose?

Find someone who served in any capacity in the U.S. government. Who is this person and how did he or she respond to the war?

Find someone who changed in some important way. Who is this person and how and/or why did this person change?



Daniel Ellsberg with his son Michael at the April 26 Anti-Nuclear Rally in San Francisco, 1980. Photo: Ilka Hartmann © 2010.

Lesson Five

The Most Dangerous Man in America Writing and Discussion

The Most Dangerous Man in America can be the centerpiece of a strong teaching unit about Daniel Ellsberg, the Vietnam War, and issues of conscience and truth-telling. Like the era in which it is set, the film is complex and rich with information and ideas. *The Most Dangerous Man in America* raises important questions that are as relevant today as they were during the late 20th century. The film provides engaging teaching moments: opportunities for discussion, personal writing, critical thinking, and decision making.

The “Film Writing and Discussion Questions” are drawn directly from *The Most Dangerous Man in America* and follow the film closely from beginning to end. By no means are teachers expected to cover all 47 questions included in the guide. Pick and choose questions to meet your pedagogical goals. The “Film Writing and Discussion Questions” were created to serve a wide variety of needs:

- To provide teachers with logical places to pause the documentary for clarification. For instance, Question #4 seeks to amplify an important historical connection that students might miss: In the film, Daniel Ellsberg talks about his time in Vietnam in 1966. He refers to incidents when his unit was attacked by the National Liberation Front, the so-called Viet-Cong. He says, “I remember looking up at a sergeant as we lay after about the 15th of these incidents and saying, “Do you ever feel like the Red Coats?” And he said, “Yeah, I’ve been thinking that all day.” What does Ellsberg mean that he felt like the Red Coats?
- To explore issues raised by the film in greater depth. Question #5 asks students to think about the following: Why were the Pentagon Papers classified as top secret? This was just history, about how the United States got into the war. What’s the big need for secrecy? What could be dangerous about history?

- To consider implications of historical decisions highlighted by the film. Question #9 provides an insider view of presidential decision-making in a time of war: The film includes a quote from President Richard Nixon that was from a taped conversation in the White House. “For once we’ve got to use the maximum power of this country against this shit-ass little country to win the war.” What is your reaction to this quote by President Nixon?

- To help students make connections between the documentary and events today. Question #1: Daniel Ellsberg points out that the Gulf of Tonkin resolution was built on lies and half-truths. And yet no members of the House of Representatives opposed it, and only two senators voted no. Why was there not more skepticism or doubt in Congress? Do you think that if a president brought a “Gulf of Tonkin resolution” to Congress today that there would be a different outcome?

- To allow teachers to pursue an aspect of the film not covered in depth by the curriculum. For instance, some teachers might want to pursue the connection between Daniel Ellsberg and Henry David Thoreau: Ellsberg committing an act of civil disobedience in relation to the Vietnam War, Thoreau to protest the U.S.-Mexican War. Question #29 confronts students with a tough question about heroism, loyalty, and the meaning of patriotism: President Nixon says, “I think it is time in this country to quit making national heroes out of those who steal secrets and publish them in the newspapers.” Should Ellsberg be considered a hero? Why or why not? What’s your definition of a hero? What’s Nixon’s?

The “Film Writing and Discussion Questions” provide an opportunity to build continuity with earlier lesson plans. For example, students have already developed questions intended to guide their learning in Lesson One and Lesson Four. Teachers can survey the questions included here and choose items that directly connect, build on, or pursue implications with questions that students have already created. Question #39 asks the following: Daniel Ellsberg says, “I gave up my job, my career, my clearance, and I staked my freedom on a gamble: If the American people knew the truth about how they had been lied to, about the myths had led them to endorse this butchery for 25 years, that they would choose against it. And the risk that you take when you do that, is that you’ll learn something ultimately about your fellow citizens that you won’t like to hear, and that is that they hear it, they learn from it, they understand it, and they proceed to ignore it.” Should Ellsberg be disappointed in what he accomplished, in the impact that his actions had? Has the film, *The Most Dangerous Man in America*, done anything to change the minds or lives of students in your class? Has it answered questions students formulated about the war, the era, and the actions of activists like Ellsberg?

Some of the questions we include here would make excellent end-of-the-unit writing prompts. For example, Questions #43, 45, and 46 provide students with opportunities to draw new learning into the contemporary world. A “readaround” sharing of student pieces will lend itself to an exploration of students’ ideas about citizenship in their personal lives and the world more broadly.

Writing and Discussion Questions

1 Daniel Ellsberg points out that the Gulf of Tonkin resolution was built on lies and half-truths. And yet no members of the House of Representatives opposed it, and only two senators voted no. Why was there not more skepticism or doubt in Congress? Do you think that if a president brought a “Gulf of Tonkin resolution” to Congress today that there would be a different outcome?

2 Why did Daniel Ellsberg decide to join the Marines? How do his reasons compare with why people join the military today?

3 Why was Daniel Ellsberg at first such a strong supporter of the Vietnam War? How does Ellsberg begin to change his opinion about the war?

4 In the film, Ellsberg talks about his time in Vietnam in 1966. He refers to incidents when his unit was attacked by the National Liberation Front, the so-called Viet-Cong. He says, “I remember looking up at a sergeant as we lay after about the 15th of these incidents and saying, “Do you ever feel like the Red Coats?” And he said, “Yeah, I’ve been thinking that all day.” What does Ellsberg mean that he felt like the Red Coats?

5 Why were the Pentagon Papers classified as top secret? This was just history, about how the United States got into the war. What’s the big need for secrecy? What could be dangerous about history?

6 The first time Daniel Ellsberg took action against the war—outside of government—was when he leaked a secret CIA report to the

New York Times. Was he right to do this? Should he have resigned his position?

7 In the film, Daniel Ellsberg tells the story of the death of his mother and sister, and of his serious injury. His father fell asleep while driving. He says, “I think it did probably leave the impression on me that someone . . . you loved, like my father, or respected, an authority, could fall asleep at the wheel, and had to be watched, not because they were bad, but because they were inattentive perhaps to the risks.” Do you think that President Johnson and Secretary of Defense McNamara and other government leaders were “asleep at the wheel,” in Vietnam or did they know what they were doing?

8 Daniel Ellsberg describes a meeting with Nixon’s National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger: “I had given a set of options to Kissinger I’d drafted at Rand. Six or seven alternative approaches in Vietnam to consider at his first national security council with Nixon. And he one point said, ‘Dan you don’t have a win option.’” Why did Ellsberg think that “winning” was impossible? What would it have meant to “win” in Vietnam?

9 The film includes a quote from President Richard Nixon that was from a taped conversation in the White House. “For once we’ve got to use the maximum power of this country against this shit-ass little country to win the war.” What is your reaction to this quote by President Nixon?

10 This quote seems to reflect President Nixon’s contempt for the Vietnamese. If Nixon—and

perhaps other U.S. leaders—had such contempt for the Vietnamese, why were they willing to wage such a costly war, in terms of lives and treasure, to supposedly “save” Vietnam?

11 Daniel Ellsberg says that he only learned that the Vietnam War was “an American war from the start”—that President Truman financed France to retake its former colony of Vietnam—when he read the Pentagon Papers. Daniel Ellsberg was a highly educated man, why didn’t he know this earlier?

12 What does Ellsberg learn from the Pentagon Papers that makes him turn against the war so decisively?

13 When he describes U.S. involvement in Vietnam, Ellsberg says, “It wasn’t that we were on the wrong side; we were the wrong side.” What does he mean by that?

14 What are the lies that Ellsberg learns about by reading the Pentagon Papers? What other lies had he learned about earlier?

15 Did Daniel Ellsberg change all by himself or were there others who helped him change? Who were these people and how did they influence Ellsberg?

16 What was Daniel Ellsberg risking as he began to change and as he began to want to take action against the war?

17 Daniel Ellsberg describes going to an anti-war meeting where young men were going to prison for resisting the draft. Ellsberg leaves the auditorium and finds a bathroom and begins sobbing hysterically. Why does he have this reaction?

18 In the film, Ellsberg quotes Henry David Thoreau, who once said, “Cast your whole vote, not a strip of paper merely, but your whole influence.” What did that mean to Ellsberg? Why was it important?

19 Some people might think that when Daniel Ellsberg became convinced that the Vietnam War was wrong he simply should have quit. Instead, Ellsberg decided to release government secrets. Did Ellsberg do the right thing? Did he go too far?

20 Do you think that Daniel Ellsberg was right to involve his 13-year-old son, Robert, in copying the Pentagon Papers—committing a crime with him?

21 What was Ellsberg’s rationale for involving his son?

22 Representative Pete McCloskey and Senator William Fulbright both had copies of the Pentagon Papers, but did not reveal them. Why not?

23 Why does Ellsberg’s wife, Patricia Marx Ellsberg, support Ellsberg’s decision to release the Pentagon Papers even though she knows it could mean that he would spend the rest of his life in prison?

24 Patricia Marx Ellsberg says that when she read parts of the Pentagon Papers about how cold and calculated government leaders were, it was like reading “the language of the torturers.” She thinks to herself, “[H]ow can the leaders of our country be talking in this language and then misleading the American public?” What’s the answer to that question?

25 Was the *New York Times* justified in publishing the Pentagon Papers even though they were classified as top secret government documents?

26 Some of the history included in the Pentagon Papers had been known for years—for example, it was no secret that the United States took the side of the French following World War II and did not support Vietnam’s Declaration of Independence read publicly by Ho Chi Minh in September of 1945. Are the *New York Times* (and other newspapers) the heroes of this story or should they have been doing a better job throughout the entire war? Is *The Most Dangerous Man ...* about the media’s success or about its failure?

27 The Nixon administration tries to stop publication of the Pentagon Papers. Attorney General John Mitchell orders the *New York Times* not to publish them. What was the Nixon administration worried about?

28 President Nixon and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger both said that publishing the Pentagon Papers was an attack on the “integrity of government.” Were they right?

29 President Nixon says, “I think it is time in this country to quit making national heroes out of those who steal secrets and publish them in the newspapers.” Should Ellsberg be considered a hero? Why or why not? What’s your definition of a hero? What’s Nixon’s?

30 According to one of his aides, Henry Kissinger said that, “Dr. Daniel Ellsberg was the most dangerous man in America

and he had to be stopped.” Why did Kissinger consider Ellsberg the most dangerous man in America?

31 In the film, Daniel Ellsberg says, “I think the lesson is that the people of this country can’t afford to let the president run the country by himself without the help of the Congress, without the help of the public.” Is that the main lesson of the Pentagon Papers story? Are there other important lessons?

32 The former government official, Mort Halperin, says that Ellsberg, “did betray a trust and he put in jeopardy not only his welfare, but that of everybody else who was involved.” Was Ellsberg guilty of betraying and endangering others? How would he respond?

33 In the film, Ellsberg refers to the British writer E.M. Forster, who said, “If I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying a friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country.” Do you agree with that sentiment?

34 Daniel Ellsberg did what he felt was the right thing to do, regardless of the consequences. What keeps other people today from doing the right thing?

35 President Nixon said, “Daniel Ellsberg, whatever his intentions, gave aid and comfort to the enemy and under those circumstances, that is inexcusable. After all, he is putting himself above the president of the United States, above the Congress, above our whole system of government, when he says in effect that he would determine what should be made public.” What are your thoughts on Nixon’s statement?

36 How did the release of the Pentagon Papers change the Nixon administration? White House Counsel John Dean called this “the beginning of the dark period.” What did he mean by that?

37 What’s the impression you get of President Richard Nixon in the film?

38 Howard Zinn says that Daniel Ellsberg may have expected too much from the publication of the Pentagon Papers. If the revelation that U.S. involvement in Vietnam had been built on lies did not end the war, why didn’t it?

39 Daniel Ellsberg says, “I gave up my job, my career, my clearance, and I staked my freedom on a gamble: If the American people knew the truth about how they had been lied to, about the myths had led them to endorse this butchery for 25 years, that they would choose against it. And the risk that you take when you do that, is that you’ll learn something ultimately about your fellow citizens that you won’t like to hear, and that is that they hear it, they learn from it, they understand it, and they proceed to ignore it.” Should Ellsberg be disappointed in what he accomplished, in the impact that his actions had?

40 John Dean, Nixon’s White House Counsel, said that what Ellsberg did “changed history.” In what way did it change history?

41 What role did Daniel Ellsberg play in ending the war in Vietnam?

42 Where are today’s “Daniel Ellsbergs”? Do you think that there are other “insiders” who know

secrets that they should be revealing? What kind of secrets might these be?

43 Daniel Ellsberg says that, “We as a people do have that power ... to change ourselves and history.” Can you think of any examples from history that offer evidence for this statement?

44 Ellsberg’s friend, the historian Howard Zinn, says that Ellsberg’s “act had an effect on him, a profound effect on him and on the rest of his life. He was never going to rest easy from that point on unless he was part of some movement against war and for social justice.” Why do you think that Zinn attributes Ellsberg’s “act” as having this effect on him?

45 Is this just a film about U.S. history, or are there any lessons in it for us today? How about lessons for you personally?

46 The Pentagon Papers is about the U.S. war in Vietnam, but the film does not quote a single Vietnamese person. Why not?

47 What reactions might Vietnamese have had to the release of the Pentagon Papers?

Lesson Six

The Trial of Daniel Ellsberg

coming soon

visit mostdangerousman.org/curriculum for updates

coming soon

visit mostdangerousman.org/curriculum for updates

Blowing the Whistle: Personal Writing



“Blowing the Whistle: Personal Writing” provides students with an opportunity to explore the ways they themselves regularly make important choices about whether to resist injustice or remain silent. Daniel Ellsberg’s decision to copy and release the Pentagon Papers was a momentous one. Others have made similarly deliberate choices to endure potentially difficult repercussions in order to fight injustice: Henry David Thoreau refused to pay taxes to support the U.S. war against Mexico, Harriet Tubman joined the Underground Railroad, Alice Paul held a banner advocating women’s suffrage during World War I and was arrested, Rosa Parks chose not give up her seat on the bus in Montgomery, Martin Luther King, Jr. opted to go to jail in Birmingham. These are examples of well-known leaders making historical choices. However, too often our history books place these famous figures alone on a pedestal, far away and distant, inaccessible in their uniqueness.

It is critical for students to understand that none of these individuals acted in isolation. Like Ellsberg, they were all part of a much larger, enduring movement of many regular people, whose names we may not know, making similarly difficult choices. In fact, every day we all make choices about speaking up or remaining passive. In order for our students to be able to connect with the past, they need to see themselves as active participants in the making of history. They need to understand the power of their choices. Narrative writing offers students an essential tool to examine injustice in their lives and how they want to respond to it.

Suggested Procedure

1 In journals, ask students to write on the question, “What is injustice?” Discuss. Remind students that much of our history is about injustice and people’s varying responses to it. Injustice permeates not only our history, but also our

lives, even if we don’t see it clearly. Before we can respond proactively to injustice, we need to understand what it is, what it looks like, sounds like, and feels like on a personal level.

2 In small groups, students should brainstorm and record situations in which they experienced or witnessed injustice. Note that the “injustice” they witnessed needn’t be of historic proportions. Examples might include watching a student mistreated by an authority figure; someone bullied on the playground; someone mistreated for their race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, or appearance; a child mistreated by a parent; etc. Ask for volunteers to briefly share examples with the whole class and record on the board or post on large paper for students to see as well as hear. After the large group report-back, encourage students to share additional experiences and ideas. You might also ask who

else has had a similar experience. This discussion and list of ideas is critical in that it “seeds” students’ memories and imaginations and helps them begin to think in terms of the myriad of ways justice and injustice might affect them personally. The richer the ideas they have to work with, the better their writing will be.

3 In small groups, ask students to discuss how they responded to their situations. What choices did they make? Why?

4 Distribute the student handout, “Blowing the Whistle: Personal Writing.” Read the quotes together. As you read these, you might ask students for examples of any of these from their own lives and also from events from history or today that you’ve studied in class. Read aloud the narrative assignment and answer any questions.

5 Students should then individually select an event in which they witnessed or experienced injustice and begin to write a narrative story. Our stories are often our greatest teacher and frequently the greatest gift we have to offer others. In writing our stories, we not only begin to see a problem more clearly, but we help others understand the issues at hand. Stories have the power to change lives. Students should write a story that shows, as opposed to merely describes, how injustice can hurt.

It’s helpful to share examples of student work, such as Sarah Stucki’s “The Music Lesson” and Jennifer Overman’s “A Summer Night” from Linda Christensen’s *Teaching for Joy and Justice* (pp. 94-97). As students read the works, ask them to think about what makes the pieces so

compelling. Point out how the introduction draws in the reader immediately. Ask students what they think creates a compelling opening. Record ideas on a large piece of paper, which can be posted on the wall. Ideas might include dialogue, a provocative question, a rich description that incorporates metaphorical language, a shocking image.

Continue to assist students in analyzing what makes the writing work. An excellent tool for this process is Linda Christensen’s “Narrative Criteria” in *Teaching for Joy and Justice*, p. 113. How is dialogue used to help the reader hear the characters speak? Do the characters sound real? Identify the importance of blocking. Is the reader able to see clearly what the characters are doing while they talk? What does the author do to help the character come alive? (You might ask students to highlight examples of blocking.) How does the author incorporate character description? How does she describe the character’s physical details, personality traits? (Have students use another color highlighter to identify character description.) Ask students to identify how the writer describes the setting. What kinds of sensory details does she use? Does the reader know where the story takes place? What specific details do they notice about the place? (A third color could be used here.) Ask students to circle figurative language—similes, metaphors, personification. Are there examples of interior monologue? Does the reader hear the character’s thoughts? Are there any flashbacks? Does the author incorporate background information by having the character tell a story from the past?

6 Students who are not at ease with writing need ample class time to write.

7 It is critical that we not end with students simply turning in a piece of writing to the teacher. Students need an opportunity to share their stories and reflections. Seat students in a circle and encourage them to read their personal narratives aloud to the full class. This final read-around creates an essential “collective text” for the class; it’s an opportunity for students to recognize patterns in how they respond or fail to respond to injustice. As students listen to one another’s papers, ask them to highlight the varying responses to injustice. These might include: walk away and say and do nothing (“This isn’t about me...”); seethe inside; complain later to your friends; yell at the perpetrator; discuss or negotiate with the perpetrator; write a letter to ...; seek out allies and together approach the perpetrator for a discussion; do nonviolent civil disobedience such as releasing secret documents, etc. Follow up by asking why they think a person might respond one way or another? What do they foresee as the potential effects of each choice? This is where we can raise questions about why we choose to stay silent or take action in the face of injustice, what the effects are of each, and how our choice makes us feel. Use the collective text and discussion as a vehicle for helping students see the connections between their stories and Daniel Ellsberg and the choices he made. We *all* are surrounded by injustice; we *all* make choices about how to address it.

Student Handout

Blowing the Whistle: Personal Narrative Writing

Just as Daniel Ellsberg made choices, we too have the power to change ourselves and history through the *choices* that we make.

Read the quotes below. Think about a time when you chose to remain silent in the face of injustice. Recalling the event, write a narrative story about your experience. Describe the context, the setting. Where were you? What was happening around you? What were people saying and doing? What did you do?

—OR—

Read the quotes below. Write about a time when you chose to “speak truth to power,” when you chose to speak out against lies and injustice. Describe the context, the setting. Where were you? What was happening? What were people saying and doing? What did you say and do?

What were your thoughts and feelings, your questions and concerns? Reflect on your choice to speak up. Why did you make the choice that you did?

Complete these as a story.

“At times to be silent is to lie.” — Miguel de Unamuno

“The cruelest lies are often told in silence.” — Robert Louis Stevenson

“A time comes when silence is betrayal.... Some of us who have already begun to break the silence of the night have found that the calling to speak is often a vocation of agony, but we must speak. We must speak with all the humility that is appropriate to our limited vision, but we must speak.” — The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

“Lying is done with words and also with silence.” — Adrienne Rich

“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.” —The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

“The world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing.”
— Dr. Albert Einstein

“All that is needed for the forces of evil to triumph is for enough good men to do nothing.” — Edmund Burke

“The hottest places in hell are reserved for those who in times of great moral crisis maintain their neutrality.”
— Dante Alighieri

“Unthinking respect for authority is the greatest enemy of truth.” — Dr. Albert Einstein

“Everyone is a conscientious objector to something. Are there things you wouldn’t do?” — William Stafford

“The greatest gift we give to each other is the telling of the truth.” — Dr. Maya Angelou



Anti-Vietnam War protest and demonstration in front of the White House in support of singer Eartha Kitt whose career had suffered after she voiced her opposition to the war at a White House luncheon. Credit: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C., 1968.

Lesson Eight

Choices, Actions, and Alternatives

This is a culminating lesson that gives students an opportunity to review and explore the history of the Vietnam War in more depth. The lesson explores how human agency shapes history. It can be used to assess student understanding of important consequences of decisions and actions by people in history.

Although individuals' choices are always limited and embedded in social, cultural, and historical contexts, this lesson emphasizes how events are not inevitable or predetermined. We want students to recognize that they can be agents who can co-shape their world today.

This lesson asks students to recognize many important choice-points

and historical turning points that people have faced. Such moments required deliberation to speak out, take action, or choose to be passive to the momentum of the status quo. One component of this lesson asks students to use their imaginations about plausible alternative courses of action and corresponding consequences. Students sometimes find this counter-factual, imaginative exploration difficult, but even attempting it is a valuable lesson that helps them recognize how human action (and inaction) makes history pliable and dynamic. This realization can allow students to gain a sense of hope and possibility for shaping a more just world.

From a social historical approach, the activity asks students to include choices by “ordinary” people, rather than focus only on presidents or other famous “dead white men.” These can even be nameless but plausible individuals, such as a college student, soldier, a Vietnamese peasant, etc. Flexing their imaginations in this way can help remind students that it’s not only the “great and glorious” who shape events, but also ordinary people like themselves.

Materials Needed

Student handout on “Vietnam War: Choices and Alternatives.”

Suggested Procedure

1 Pass out and review the student handout on “Vietnam War: Choices and Alternatives.”

2 To prepare for the lesson, try to help students identify important choice-points that they noticed in *The Most Dangerous Man in America*. Encourage students to also use the “reception” activity, and previous lessons. Ask, for example, “What important choices did Daniel Ellsberg make before 1969? Where did he choose to go? What did he choose to go along with, to *not* object to? Who did he choose to listen to?” etc. Help students reflect on what makes certain choice-points more significant than others. For example, “Why was it an important choice for Ellsberg to attend the War Resisters conference at Haverford College in 1969?”

3 It may be helpful to explore one or a few of these as a whole class or in groups. How did a historical choice impact people and the earth, immediately and then long-term? What important alternatives were rejected at such choice-points? How do such choice-points compare to other choice-points in terms of impact? For example, was Truman’s choice in 1945 to refuse to support the independence of Vietnam historically more significant than Johnson’s in 1964 to escalate the war with the Gulf of Tonkin

Resolution? Begin by discussing the string of consequences resulting from each of these decisions. Also, ask students about other consequences that might have resulted had, say, President Truman chosen to recognize the independence of Vietnam and to not support the French. Discuss the difference between plausible and implausible choices and consequences. Choices are always limited within broader contexts. Have students brainstorm and collaboratively construct all the plausible consequences of one alternative choice. It’s important that students not presume that everything would be perfect simply because a different choice had been made.

4 On butcher paper or on the board, lead the full class in a brainstorm of all the consequences of Johnson’s decision to ask for troops after the so-called incident in the Gulf of Tonkin. Students might respond that ground troops were deployed that year, and then places in North Vietnam were bombed. Ask a couple students to look up or research more details, such as the exact number of troops deployed that year, while the class continues the brainstorm. The class might consider the impact that had on the Vietnamese people. They might consider the draft and the impact that had on families in the United States. Moving to broader and longer-term consequences,

they can include the total number of troops deployed and casualties. Students might state that there were over three million Southeast Asian casualties, hundreds of villages destroyed, tons of bombs and Agent Orange dropped, millions of dollars spent, etc. Encourage students to use historical resources from the unit to add details to these consequences.

5 Encourage the class to brainstorm an alternative Gulf of Tonkin response with different and plausible alternatives. For example, students might consider that Johnson could have determined that there was no incident to warrant the escalation, and have backed this statement with the claim that the U.S. has no ambitions in the region and wishes only for peace and freedom. Students might propose that had the United States not escalated the war at that moment, Vietnamese forces opposed to the weak and unpopular government in South Vietnam could have more easily organized to defeat the regime. You might ask students about the domestic implications of the United States being tied down in an escalating war in Vietnam. (Depending on their background knowledge, students might propose that Johnson would have more easily been able to focus on the War on Poverty program, and other “Great Society” measures.)

This article or lesson is offered for use in educational settings as part of the Zinn Education Project (a collaboration of Rethinking Schools and Teaching for Change) and Judith Ehrlich and Rick Goldsmith. It was developed to accompany the film, The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers.

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6 Ask students to come up with as many choice-points as they can think of during the Vietnam War era. Here, below, are some possibilities, but allow students to come up with their own.

- a. What if President Truman had supported the Vietnamese declaration of independence in 1945?
- b. What if Daniel Ellsberg started to publicly oppose U.S. policy in Vietnam much earlier, say, in 1961 or 1965?
- c. What if Daniel Ellsberg hadn't copied the Pentagon Papers in 1969?
- d. What if Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy had followed the Geneva Accords and supported democracy in Vietnam?
- e. What if Robert McNamara and President Johnson did not provoke an incident in the Gulf of Tonkin?

- f. What if President Nixon had not started bombing Cambodia?
- g. What if President Johnson and Congress did not implement a military draft?
- h. What if more American men had refused to be drafted into the military or chose to turn in or burn their draft cards?
- i. What if Randy Kehler had not resisted the war?
- j. What if President Johnson went along with General Westmoreland's request more troops after the Tet Offensive?
- k. What if returning veterans had not organized the Vietnam Veterans Against the War?
- l. What if newspaper editors had refused to print the Pentagon Papers?

Try not to give these choice-points away, because part of the aim of the activity is to offer students practice in recognizing important choice-points. See what kind of choice-points students can come up with on their own. Once students learn to think in terms of choice-points, they will more readily recognize moments in history where there were alternatives, whereas previously they may have taken events for granted—as just “the way things are.”

You might ask students to work on only one or two choices and examine broader consequences in more detail, instead of exploring three different ones as is suggested in the student handout.

Student Handout

Vietnam War: Choices and Alternatives

Complex chains of human decisions, actions, and reactions make history. Throughout history, both ordinary people and people in official positions of leadership have faced difficult choices. Yet, nothing in history was inevitable. Our history and our society would look very different today, had people made different decisions at critical points in the past. Even not taking action is a choice. Review everything that we've examined on the history of the U.S. and Vietnam using your handouts, notes, books, and recollections of films and class discussions. Also, carefully examine the individuals from the "reception" and *The Most Dangerous Man in America* and identify some of the important choices some of these individuals faced.

1 To consider how things could have been different, you must know what actually happened. Look back at the history of U.S. relations with Vietnam that we've examined. Identify three important decisions that people made. You may include decisions made by both ordinary people and "leaders." You may include choices that you thought were either good or bad.

2 Think about how the history of Vietnam and the U.S. could have been different, if different decisions had been made at those critical choice-points. Also think about how conditions in Vietnam and the U.S. might be different today, had different decisions been made.

3 Examine three historical decisions/actions and their consequences. Write three "What if..." pieces in which you consider how history plausibly could have been different, had different choices been made. Make sure that you include all of the actual consequences that would not have happened had a different choice been made. Also include the alternative consequences that could have occurred as a result of a different decision.

Here are examples of beginnings from a different historical period for an idea of how you might start:

What if Columbus decided not to sail to the Indies?

The Portuguese or Dutch might have dominated the world.

There could still be millions of Taínos living in the Caribbean islands.

The Taínos might not have been enslaved.

Spain would not have become rich at the expense of the native peoples of the Americas...

What if college students did not organize Freedom Summer in Mississippi in 1964?

Many young people would not have discovered their power to challenge white supremacy.

Congress would not have been pressured to pass the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

African Americans in the South might still be denied the right to vote through the "literacy" tests, poll taxes, and the terrorism of the Ku Klux Klan.

Student Handout

Vietnam War: Choices and Alternatives (continued)

CRITERIA FOR THE ASSIGNMENT

Your three examples should include:

1. A rationale for your selection of these historical choice points. In other words, why are these important moments in history?
2. Important specific historical consequences of your choice point—both those that would likely have occurred as well as those that would not have occurred. The alternative consequences should be plausible and detailed.

Remember, do not focus on some event or phenomenon that merely occurred. This assignment is about identifying people's *choices* to do or not do something. For example, "What if there were no draft ..." is not a choice point. "What if the majority of members of Congress had chosen not to vote for the Selective Service Act," is a choice point, as it involves people who were confronted with a decision.

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About the Zinn Education Project

The Zinn Education Project coordinated the production of this teaching guide. The Zinn Education Project promotes and supports the use of Howard Zinn’s best-selling book *A People’s History of the United States* and other materials for teaching a people’s history in middle and high school classrooms across the country. The Zinn Education Project is coordinated by two non-profit organizations, Rethinking Schools and Teaching for Change. Its goal is to introduce students to a more accurate, complex, and engaging understanding of United States history than is found in traditional textbooks and curricula. The empowering potential of studying U.S. history is often lost in a textbook-driven trivial pursuit of names and dates. Zinn’s *A People’s History of the United States* and *Voices of a People’s History of the United States* emphasize the role of working people, women, people of color, and organized social movements in shaping history. Students learn that history is made not by a few heroic individuals, but instead by people’s choices and actions, thereby also learning that their own choices and actions matter. We believe that through taking a more engaging and more honest look at the past, we can help equip students with the analytical tools to make sense of — and improve — the world today.

Launched in 1986, Rethinking Schools is a nonprofit publisher working for equity and justice in public schools and the broader society. Major projects include:

Rethinking Schools, an award-winning quarterly magazine, unique among education publications. Edited by practicing and former pre-K-through-12 teachers with almost 200 years of combined classroom experience, it features a wide range of articles portraying some of this country's finest social justice teaching. Other articles analyze the policies that help or hinder public education.

A series of books, providing practical examples of how to integrate social justice education into social studies, history, language arts and mathematics. They are used widely by new as well as veteran teachers and in teacher education programs. Every Rethinking Schools book grows out of diverse schools and classrooms throughout the country.

A website, www.rethinkingschools.org, offering a wealth of resources on teaching for equity and justice, and making sense out of national education policy.

Since 1989, Teaching for Change has provided teachers and parents with the tools to transform schools into centers of justice where students learn to read, write and change the world. Awarded Organization of the Year by the National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME) in 2004, Teaching for Change pursues its mission through:

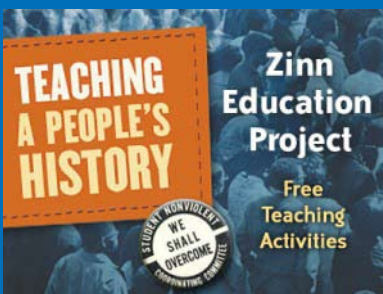
Professional development for pre-K-through-12 teachers, based on the publication *Putting the Movement Back into Civil Rights Teaching*, and for early childhood educators in our Early Childhood Equity Initiative leadership development program.

A highly-effective parent-empowerment program called Tellin' Stories, which builds grassroots multiracial parent power in schools.

Publications sold through our bookstore at the Busboys and Poets restaurant and performance space, located in Washington, D.C., and our own publications, which include: *Beyond Heroes and Holidays: A Practical Guide to K-12 Anti-Racist, Multicultural Education and Staff Development*; the *Caribbean Connections* series; and *Putting the Movement Back into Civil Rights Teaching*.



Rethinking Schools



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