

From Sandra's Study
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October 2006 marked 35 years since Beacon Press published the Pentagon Papers. Dozens of other presses refused to do so. This was the topic of a panel discussion at our June General Assembly in Portland, Oregon. For me, the recognition of 35 years since this historic event was a highlight of the annual convention.

Amy Goodman, anchor of *Democracy Now*, facilitated the panel of three men who led the effort to reveal the truth about the Nixon administration's duplicity over the Vietnam War. Daniel Ellsberg, who worked for the Rand Corporation, copied classified documents that uncovered the government's secrets. Alaskan Senator Mike Gravel helped get the Pentagon papers into the Congressional Record. It was Rev. Robert West, president of the Unitarian Universalist Association at the time, who supported the publication of the papers by Beacon Press. That decision, said West, "led to two and a half years of harassment and legal difficulties." In 1974, for example, the FBI subpoenaed the UUAs bank records.

In publishing the papers, our Unitarian Universalist Association stood up to enormous pressure. It was a courageous act and one worth retaining in our denominational memory. This is especially true because it isn't much of a stretch to see the relevance of governmental secrecy then to our situation now. And it isn't much of a stretch to imagine that the day may come again when we are called upon to act with that kind of courage.

While it was undoubtedly noble for these men to do what they did, Daniel Ellsberg could not help observing that there were many who remained silent who could have spoken up and that even he himself could have acted sooner. He said, "I rue every day that I kept silent from 1964 to 1969. There are a hundred people who could have done what I did not do in 1963 or 1964. Sen. Wayne Morse once told me that if I had released the papers then, and not in 1971, there would have been no Gulf of Tonkin resolution and thus no Vietnam War."

I can't help but wonder, who will risk confronting today's governmental secrets and when? Who will step forward to reveal secrets that are damaging the democratic spirit of our nation and undermining our country's future and when?