

Daniel Ellsberg
Truth and Consequence:
Reflections on Catastrophe, Civil Resistance, and Hope

a compilation of unpublished writings of the late whistleblower, Daniel Ellsberg, who famously released copies of The Pentagon Papers in 1971. The book is edited by Ellsberg's son Michael and by his long-time assistant Jan Thomas. Among other things, they had to decipher his nearly illegible handwriting in hundreds of notebooks that filled almost a hundred boxes in the University of Massachusetts Amherst Archives.

*The book is divided into three sections.
The first consists of personal essays that Ellsberg had intended to publish.*

The second, the heart of the book, contains selections from the notebooks in which he wrote for more than fifty years. They are a smorgasbord of thoughtful musings, of political and philosophical ideas (particularly about the Vietnam War and his role in it), and of the risk of thermonuclear war.

The third section contains nine essays on morality, mainly about nuclear weapons. Ellsberg, who died in 2023, had been deeply affected by learning of a secret 1950s American nuclear plan which, if implemented, would have killed tens of millions of Russians. The existence of the plan caused Ellsberg to become an antinuclear activist for the rest of his life.
([Source](#))

1987

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Does a citizen have a right --or sometimes, even a duty-- to interfere with, resist, challenge. indict authority that is criminal and immoral -even if this is done in ways that violate traffic, trespass, or secrecy regulations, or interfere with the rights of others to free speech, free passage, and free access to work and commerce?

I think the public intuition is right that my fellow experts are not giving advice or leadership that serves to diminish the likelihood or scope of catastrophe. Quite the contrary.

Thus, public criticism, creativity, and pressure are essential.

I believe, against most but not all historical experience. that popular sovereignty can be achieved and can avert the worst.

Unlike equally disillusioned insiders, I did not walk away from our Vietnam involvement in 1966 and simply distance myself from the catastrophe, as I had from its prospect (from 1961 to 1963). After 1969, I devoted myself to the only game in town with any prospect of succeeding: public pressure on Congress.

Speaking and acting from my Inside knowledge led to my exile from the Inside forever, both socially and psychologically.

Still, I remain nostalgic in dreams - such as last night's, in which I attended a luncheon meeting at Wohlstetter's home.*

In the last 20 years, every President has come to see democracy as part of his problem, while I have increasingly come to see it as part of the solution - with civil disobedience an essential element.

I was not moved to give the Pentagon Papers by those who vigiled. However. I was moved to join in a vigil for Quaker draft resister Bob Eaton. This was a critical step that opened me to Randy Kehler's subsequent example"

Randy first took part in an Oakland sit-in. Then he joined War Resisters' International.

Both Randy and I were changed by small" actions. Then we were ready and available to be changed by "big" actions.

A story on Derrick Bell today in the *Globe* had this quote on civil disobedience:

"When you put your person in the way of oppressive power, it does not mean you will get your way. But you can feel good, and those who are

doing bad will feel less good - and sometimes you inspire people who do have the power to change things"

Questioner: "Obviously, civil disobedience is appropriate. given the disparity between executive policy and what is needed. But what if these executive values are shared by the majority of the public! Is civil disobedience the right response then?"

Me: "All the more! Challenge and obstruct the majority to protect: rights of the unrepresented and underrepresented. Live your values and on conscience."

Version 30.7.2026

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