

# **Pentagon Papers: Defending the First Amendment into the Twentieth Century**

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Landmark court cases, the staple of American progress throughout the centuries, have always intrigued us, with the multiple perspectives and arguments involved. So when we heard “Debate and Diplomacy,” we instantly thought of court cases where debate is frequent and verdicts are often conciliatory. Subsequently, we started research on Supreme Court cases throughout the 20th century, and we felt a powerful connection to *New York Times Co. vs United States*, where America’s very First Amendment and pillar of liberty was endangered. However, the court case itself was too limited in scope, so we looked at what caused it, and that became our topic: The Pentagon papers.

Next, we tried to relate it back to the theme to confirm its relevance. The Pentagon Papers portrayed the debate between the rights of the press and national security in times of war where information is a currency more important than any other. On the other hand, the diplomacy part is where our decision to cover the Pentagon Papers instead of the court case is crucial, as there is not much diplomacy in the court case. The judgment often favors only one party: here, it was the publishers. By focusing on the Pentagon Papers and its history, we could explore diplomacy, such as when competitors in the newspaper market united to stand against Prior Restraint.

Our first step of research once we confirmed the topic was to watch a movie recommended to us by a teacher: *The Post*. A riveting story about the Washington Post’s role inside the Pentagon papers, it gave us an excellent base for our research. Of course, we handled everything with a sliver of doubt and confirmed all the information presented in a movie with many fictional elements. We then looked deeper into the databases, specifically, the New York Times and the Washington Post, as they were the major publishers involved. The TimesMachine was a treasure trove of information and newspapers, though a bit biased towards the Press, as

expected. This gave us a strong understanding of the situation and handed us multiple primary resources that we used on our website.

During our research, something that surprised us was that Neil Sheehan had promised to not publish the papers, because Ellsberg, the brave whistleblower of the Papers, feared the repercussions. This deepened the nuance of the situation, and we learned to never look at a situation at face value without doing our research in order to better our understanding. In the end, we also learned to appreciate freedom in expressing ourselves.

Finally, we chose a website. For the past few years, we have been doing documentaries, and while enjoyable, we needed a change of scenery. But as tech geeks in coding clubs, we still wanted to work with the computer, leaving us with a website. It is sure to provide its own set of new, interesting challenges, and will develop our web development skills.