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Happy Birthday, Big Brother

by Alexander C. Hoffman [vice president, Doubleday]

..... In June 1971, after excerpts from the Pentagon Papers appeared in The New York Times and other newspapers, Senator Mike Gravel of Alaska placed the complete papers in the public record before his Senate subcommittee and released copies to the press. In July 1971, Senator Gravel approached the Unitarian Universalist Association and his publishing arm, The Beacon Press, concerning their willingness to publish the papers in book form in order to make the complete record available to the public in schools and libraries. The same month Bantam Books published a single volume condensation.

.....This case is a threat to the entire publishing industry because it provides a chilling example of how the Government can make any publisher, large or small but particularly small, hesitate to publish controversial material even after it is in the public domain if they can be subjected to the harassment and cost of grand-jury investigation and the sweeping stigma of "possible criminal activity." (In this case the Justice Department will apparently claim that Beacon was guilty of criminal activity in acquiring and not returning stolen Government documents, even though the entire contents of their books were already part of the public record - a line of reasoning that suggests either Lewis Carroll or Joseph Goebbels.)

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