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Ephemera

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I. Scope

For the purposes of this statement, ephemera are defined as non-commercial, non-book publications in the form of pamphlets, handbills, leaflets, broadsides, position papers, minutes of meetings, information sheets, bulletins, newsletters, posters, moving images and photographic documentation. Ephemeral materials may also be produced in a variety of electronic formats, such as web sites, web pages, web logs, pod casts, etc. These materials are typically published outside of official or normal channels. "Grey literature" and "fugitive material" are terminology frequently applied to many of the types of materials included under the category of ephemera, but may also comprise non-ephemeral materials and, hence, are not interchangeable concepts.

For related topics, see also the following documents:

- [Developing Countries Collections Policy Statement](#)
- [Ethnic Publications Collections Policy Statement](#)
- [Web Archiving Supplementary Guidelines](#)

More particularly, ephemera may frequently refer to literature of a fleeting or fugitive nature, produced outside of official or normal commercial channels, encompassing both political concerns and a wide variety of currently topical social, economic and ideological issues. The significance of this diverse mass of materials, however, rests in their capacity to reflect contemporary socio-political movements and developments in a given area despite the frequently insubstantial quality of physical appearance or content.

Various collections of materials which contain ephemera as defined above have been acquired for the special collections of the Library of Congress because of their political and historical significance or rarity. They are concentrated primarily in the Prints and Photographs Division and in the Rare Book and Special Collections Division, or are included with special collections throughout the Library as appropriate. Historical collections are not within the scope of this policy statement, which confines itself to the acquisition of current ephemera.

The Library will seek to obtain ephemera when such materials contain important information on current developments or provide a perspective on issues which are of importance and of particular interest to Congress, Federal agencies, academic institutions, or researchers at the Library of Congress and which

may not be readily available through mainstream publishing. Emphasis will be placed on materials of contemporary interest which provide unique testimony of the social, cultural, economic and political events frequently under-represented in mainstream book format. In determining whether ephemera acquired for the Library's current needs are ultimately to be retained for the permanent collections, special consideration will be given to the interests of the Prints and Photographs Division, Rare Book and Special Collections Division or other custodial divisions in granting custody or determining the disposition of a collection.

II. General policy

As deemed necessary to fulfill its service missions, the Library of Congress endeavors to acquire for its immediate use, and possibly for retention in its permanent collections, representative examples of ephemeral materials. Every effort should be made toward preservation of materials so acquired through preservation reformatting, both in consideration of available long-term storage and the perishability of typical ephemera.

Ephemera should continue to be considered as an exceptional category of acquisitions. By their nature, such materials are typically intended to be of only temporary interest and should be only selectively retained for the Library's permanent collections.

The Library of Congress shall inform other libraries of its ephemera collecting activities and inquire into similar programs that they may be conducting in order to coordinate and maximize its efforts in this field, avoid duplication, and encourage possible cooperative projects.

III. Selection Principles for Collecting Ephemera

The Library of Congress has set forth the following leading principles to fulfill its mission for collecting ephemera. Specific criteria applicable for individual collections of ephemera may be identified by Recommending Officers and included in their written proposals for ephemera projects.

1. Collecting of ephemera should be organized by target areas. Materials should be collected from specified national or geographic areas documenting special local circumstances such as rapid political and social change, or ideological trends reflecting economic, environmental or societal pressures.
2. Ephemera collecting should be prioritized. The Library should not endeavor to collect ephemeral materials unless they are perceived to answer a high priority need by a significant clientele of the Library, e.g., the Congress, agencies of the Federal government, and the academic and research communities at large. National or geographic areas experiencing rapidly evolving political, social or economic change assume immediate criticality for research in such fields as foreign policy, military strategy and economic policy, and take the highest priority.
3. Ephemera collecting for any given target area should continue only so long as developments in that area remain of critical interest. When conditions in a target area are normalized to the extent that the more conventional printed media cover the viewpoints and report on the activities of the various movements and activist groups represented in a particular ephemera project, it is likely time to terminate the project. Periodic review of specific target projects is therefore mandatory.
4. Collections of ephemera should supplement and enhance already existing strong collections of the

Library. For certain target areas, the Library may neither have traditionally collected nor have anticipated developing a strong collection. If the Library should expect to make only short term use of any ephemera it might collect from such an area, but has certain knowledge that another institution holds a strong collection including current ephemera, the Library should attempt to make suitable cooperative arrangements for use of that collection rather than duplicate the efforts of other institutions.

5. Collections of ephemera should be limited to representative sampling of available source materials. Ephemeral materials by their nature tend to be repetitive in content. The groups issuing leaflets, posters, pamphlets, or other types of ephemera typically concentrate on a very narrow range of issues which they consider to be of prime importance at the time of dissemination. A careful selection of ephemeral materials obtained through approved projects will, therefore, generally suffice to document the primary themes or programs advocated by the sponsoring groups.

IV. Representative groups from which materials may be collected

Ephemera may be produced by a wide range of special interest groups of varying legal status in their particular national setting, including, but not limited to the following: dissident political groups, human rights groups, refugee groups, women and feminist groups, environmental groups, urban groups, labor and worker groups and movements, youth groups and ecumenical groups.

V. Review and evaluation of ephemera projects

Chiefs of affected custodial divisions shall annually evaluate ongoing ephemera projects to determine if the project should be continued and to evaluate the status of the materials already collected. Chiefs are responsible for approving any new ephemera collection project in their area.

The Collections Policy Committee and the Congressional Research Service should be notified when projects are begun and discontinued.

The Collections Policy Committee shall serve in an oversight capacity addressing larger policy issues, establishing general guidelines, and determining priorities pertaining to the collection of ephemera. In consultation with the Directorate for Acquisitions and Bibliographic Access and/or special custodial units, the Committee shall promote the formulation of collecting level bibliographic control standards in such a way that a practicable approach toward accessing the materials is maintained for current usefulness.

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