§ 105
TITLE 17—COPYRIGHTS

§ 105. Subject matter of copyright: United States Government works

Copyright protection under this title is not available for any work of the United States Government (limited exception for National Technical Information Service) prepared by an officer or employee of the United States Government as part of that person's official duties. Under this definition, a Government employee or official from disseminating the work if he or she chooses to do so. The concept is intended to be construed in the same way.

A more difficult and far-reaching problem is whether the definition should be broadened to prohibit copyright in works prepared under U.S. Government contract or grant. As the bill is written, the Government agency concerned could determine in each case whether to allow an independent contractor or grantee to secure copyright in works prepared in whole or in part with the use of Government funds. The argument that has been made against allowing copyright in this situation is that the public should not be required to pay a “double subsidy” and that it is inconsistent to prohibit copyright in works by Government employees while permitting private copyrights in a growing body of works created by persons who are paid with Government funds. Those arguing in favor of potential copyright protection have stressed the importance of copyright as an incentive to creation and dissemination in this situation, and the basically different policy considerations applicable to works prepared by private organizations with the use of Federal funds.

The bill deliberately avoids making any sort of outright, unqualified prohibition against copyright in works prepared under Government contract or grant. There may well be cases where it would be in the public interest to deny copyright in the writings generated by Government research contracts and the like; it can be assumed that, where a Government agency commissions a work for its own use, it has an option to having one of its own employees prepare the work, the right to secure a private copyright would be withheld. However, there are almost certainly many other cases where the denial of copyright protection would be unfair or would hamper the production and publication of important works. Where, under the particular circumstances, Congress or the agency involved finds that the need to have a work freely available outweighs the need of the private author to secure copyright, the problem can be dealt with by specific legislation, agency regulations, or attention to its relations.

The prohibition on copyright protection for United States Government works is not intended to have any effect on protection of these works abroad. Works of the governments of most other countries are copyrighted. There are no valid policy reasons for denying such protection to United States Government works in foreign countries, or for precluding the Government from making licenses for the use of its works abroad.

The effect of section 105 is intended to place all works of the United States Government, published or unpublished, in the public domain. This means that the individual Government official or employee who wrote the work could not secure copyright in it or restrain its dissemination by the Government or anyone else, but it also means that, as far as the copyright law is concerned, the Government could not restrain the employee or official from disseminating the work if he or she chooses to do so. The use of the term “work of the United States Government” does not mean that a work falling within the definition of that term is the property of the U.S. Government.

HISTORICAL AND REVISION NOTES

Proposed Saving Clause. Section 8 of the statute now in effect (section 8 of former title 17) includes a saving clause intended to make clear that the copyright protection of a private work is not affected if the work is published by the Government. This provision serves a real purpose in the present law because of the ambiguity of the undefined term “any publication of the United States Government.” Section 105 of the bill, however, uses the operative term “work of the United States Government” and defines it in such a way that privately written works are clearly excluded from the prohibition; accordingly, a saving clause becomes superfluous.

Effective Date

Section effective on the date the North American Free Trade Agreement enters into force with respect to the United States (Jan. 1, 1994), see section 335(a) of Pub. L. 103–162, set out in an Effective Date of 1993 Amendment note under section 1052 of Title 15, Commerce and Trade.

URUGUAY ROUND AGREEMENTS: ENTRY INTO FORCE

The Uruguay Round Agreements, including the World Trade Agreement, but the United States Government is not precluded from receiving and holding copyright protection under this title. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, entered into force with respect to the United States on Jan. 1, 1995. See note set out under section 351 of Title 19.
Retention of a saving clause has been urged on the ground that the present statutory provision is frequently cited, and that having the provision expressly stated in the law would avoid questions and explanations. The committee here observes: (1) there is nothing in section 105 that would relieve the Government of its obligation to secure permission in order to publish a copyrighted work; and (2) publication or other use by the Government of a private work would not affect its copyright protection in any way. The question of use of copyrighted material in documents published by the Congress and its Committees is discussed below in connection with section 107.

Works of the United States Postal Service. The intent of section 106 [this section] is to restrict the prohibitions in section 105; the Postal Reorganization Act of 1970 (Pub. L. 91–375, which enacted title 39, Postal Service), this section does not apply to works created by employees of the United States Postal Service. In addition to the scope of their official duties, the Postal Service could, if it chooses, use the copyright law to prevent the reproduction of postage stamp designs for private or commercial non-postal services (for example, in philatelic publications andcatalogues, in general advertising, and in art reproductions, in textile designs, and so forth). However, any copyright claimed by the Postal Service in its works, including postage stamp designs, would be subject to the same conditions, formalities, and time limits as other copyrightable works.

§106. Exclusive rights in copyrighted works

Subject to sections 107 through 122, the owner of copyright under this title has the exclusive rights to do and to authorize any of the following:

1. to reproduce the copyrighted work in copies or phonorecords;
2. to prepare derivative works based upon the copyrighted work;
3. to distribute copies or phonorecords of the copyrighted work to the public by sale or other transfer of ownership, or by rental, lease, or lending;
4. in the case of literary, musical, dramatic, and choreographic works, and pictorial, graphic, or sculptural works, to perform the copyrighted work publicly;
5. in the case of literary, musical, dramatic, and choreographic works, and pictorial, graphic, or sculptural works, including the individual images of a motion picture or other audiovisual work, to display the copyrighted work publicly; and
6. in the case of sound recordings, to perform the copyrighted work publicly by means of a digital audio transmission.

(HISTORICAL AND REVISION NOTES)

HISTORICAL

Reproduction.—Read together with the relevant definitions in section 101, the right “to reproduce the copyrighted work in copies or phonorecords” means the right to produce a material object in which the work is reproduced, transcribed, imitated, or simulated in a fixed form from which it can be “perceived, reproduced, or otherwise communicated, either directly or with the aid of a machine or device.” As under the present law, a copyrighted work would be infringed by reproducing it in whole or in any substantial part, and by duplicating it exactly by imitation or simulation. Wide departures or variations from the copyrighted work would still be an infringement as long as the author’s “expression” rather than merely the author’s “ideas” are taken. An exception to this general principle, applicable to the reproduction of copyrighted sound recordings, is specified in section 114.

“Reproduction” under clause (1) of section 106 is to be distinguished from “display” under clause (5). For a work to be “reproduced,” its fixation in tangible form must be “sufficiently permanent or stable to permit it to be perceived, reproduced, or otherwise communicated for a period of more than transitory duration.” Thus, the showing of images on a screen or tube would not be a violation of clause (1), although it might come within the scope of clause (5).

Preparation of Derivative Works.—The exclusive right to prepare derivative works, specified separately in clause (2) of section 106, overlaps the exclusive right of reproduction to some extent. It is broader than that right, however, in the sense that reproduction requires fixation in copies or phonorecords, whereas the preparation of a derivative work, such as a ballet, pantomime, or improvised performance, may be an infringement even though nothing is ever fixed in tangible form.

To be an infringement the “derivative work” must be “based upon the copyrighted work,” and the definition...