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FEDERAL COPYRIGHT LAW

THE LEGISLATIVE HISTORIES OF THE MAJOR ENACTMENTS OF THE 105th CONGRESS

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INTRODUCTION

Three major pieces of copyright legislation were passed by the 105th Congress. The first to be enacted was the No Electronic Theft (NET) Act, passed in response to a federal district court decision finding no criminal liability in the distribution of copyrighted software where there was no financial gain. Under the NET Act, liability is determined by the retail value of the work in question. Reproduction of works worth over $1,000 is a misdemeanor, while copying works valued over $2,500 ranks as a felony. Those convicted face fines and imprisonment of up to three years for the first offense, and up to six years for a second conviction. The act also extends the statute of limitations from three to five years and mandates "victim impact statements."

More controversial was the issue of copyright term extension. Opponents viewed such proposals as a move by major publishers and producers to deprive the public of access to copyrighted works soon to enter the public domain with the expiration of the old copyright term, most notably Disney's Mickey Mouse in 2002. Proponents claimed the extension of the copyright term by twenty years would promote creativity by offering artists and authors a greater return on their work, and would bring the United States into line with the copyright term in effect overseas.

Their views prevailed with the passage of the Sonny Bono Copyright Term Extension Act. Title I of the Act amends federal law so as to extend from fifty to seventy years the duration of copyrights. Most notably this includes copyrights on works created after Jan. 1, 1978, for which it extends the term to the life of the author plus seventy years. Section 104 of the Act provides an exception for libraries and archives, allowing reproduction for preservation, scholarship, or research during the last twenty years of the copyright term. This limited exception applies only if it can be determined that the work in question is not subject to normal commercial exploitation, cannot be obtained at a reasonable price, and the copyright holder has not provided notice that either of these conditions applies. Title II consists of the Fairness in Music Licensing Act of 1998. This provides that the use of transmission or retransmission of a non-dramatic musical work originated by a radio or television broadcast is not a copyright infringement if the establishment is a food service or drinking establishment, no direct charge was made to see or hear the

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transmission, and such, and that the transmission or retransmission was licensed by the copyright holder.

The final and most important copyright enactment of the 105th Congress was the Digital Millennium Copyright Act. The most notable part of the legislation was Title I, the WIPO Copyright and Performances and Phonograms Treaties Implementation Act of 1998. This Act, which amends federal law to conform to these treaties, sparked controversy because of its "anti-circumvention" provisions which opponents claimed would render unlawful such legitimate activities as encryption research and reverse engineering. The remainder of the legislation includes:

Title II - the Online Copyright Infringement Liability Limitation Act which limits the liability for copyright infringement of Internet service providers;

Title III - the Computer Maintenance Competition Assurance Act providing that under certain conditions there is no copyright violation where copies of computer programs are made solely in conjunction with the repair of computer equipment;

Title IV - Miscellaneous Provisions;

Title V - Vessel Hull Design Protection Act which amends federal copyright law to protect original hull designs which make vessels distinctive or attractive.

Notably absent from the Act was any provision extending copyright protection to databases. Such a provision had been a last minute addition by the House to H.R. 2281, but was dropped from the final bill version by the Conference Committee.

This compilation includes the full text of all three enactments, prior bill versions, relevant congressional reports and hearings, *Congressional Record* references, and presidential statements. Also included are the full texts of the WIPO treaties.

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