

(d) provides a procedure for recording statements that an author died, or that he was still living, on a particular date, and also requires the Register of Copyrights to maintain obituary records on a current basis. Under subsection (e) anyone who, after a specified period, obtains certification from the Copyright Office that its records show nothing to indicate that the author is living or died less than 50 years before, is entitled to rely upon a presumption that the author has been dead for more than 50 years. The period specified in subsection (e)—75 years from publication or 100 years from creation—is purposely uniform with the special term provided in subsection (c).

AMENDMENTS

1998—Subsecs. (a), (b). Pub. L. 105-298, §102(b)(1), (2), substituted “70” for “fifty”.

Subsec. (c). Pub. L. 105-298, §102(b)(3), in first sentence, substituted “95” for “seventy-five” and “120” for “one hundred”.

Subsec. (e). Pub. L. 105-298, §102(b)(4), in first sentence, substituted “95” for “seventy-five”, “120” for “one hundred”, and “70” for “fifty” in two places.

§ 303. Duration of copyright: Works created but not published or copyrighted before January 1, 1978

(a) Copyright in a work created before January 1, 1978, but not theretofore in the public domain or copyrighted, subsists from January 1, 1978, and endures for the term provided by section 302. In no case, however, shall the term of copyright in such a work expire before December 31, 2002; and, if the work is published on or before December 31, 2002, the term of copyright shall not expire before December 31, 2047.

(b) The distribution before January 1, 1978, of a phonorecord shall not for any purpose constitute a publication of the musical work embodied therein.

(Pub. L. 94-553, title I, §101, Oct. 19, 1976, 90 Stat. 2573; Pub. L. 105-80, §11, Nov. 13, 1997, 111 Stat. 1534; Pub. L. 105-298, title I, §102(c), Oct. 27, 1998, 112 Stat. 2827.)

HISTORICAL AND REVISION NOTES

HOUSE REPORT NO. 94-1476

Theoretically, at least, the legal impact of section 303 would be far reaching. Under it, every “original work of authorship” fixed in tangible form that is in existence would be given statutory copyright protection as long as the work is not in the public domain in this country. The vast majority of these works consist of private material that no one is interested in protecting or infringing, but section 303 would still have practical effects for a prodigious body of material already in existence.

Looked at another way, however, section 303 would have a genuinely restrictive effect. Its basic purpose is to substitute statutory for common law copyright for everything now protected at common law, and to substitute reasonable time limits for the perpetual protection now available. In general, the substituted time limits are those applicable to works created after the effective date of the law [Jan. 1, 1978]; for example, an unpublished work written in 1945 whose author dies in 1980 would be protected under the statute from the effective date [Jan. 1, 1978] through 2030 (50 years after the author’s death).

A special problem under this provision is what to do with works whose ordinary statutory terms will have expired or will be nearing expiration on the effective date [Jan. 1, 1978]. The committee believes that a provision taking away subsisting common law rights and substituting statutory rights for a reasonable period is fully in harmony with the constitutional requirements

of due process, but it is necessary to fix a “reasonable period” for this purpose. Section 303 provides that under no circumstances would copyright protection expire before December 31, 2002, and also attempts to encourage publication by providing 25 years more protection (through 2027) if the work were published before the end of 2002.

AMENDMENTS

1998—Subsec. (a). Pub. L. 105-298 substituted “December 31, 2047” for “December 31, 2027” in second sentence.

1997—Pub. L. 105-80 designated existing provisions as subsec. (a) and added subsec. (b).

§ 304. Duration of copyright: Subsisting copyrights

(a) COPYRIGHTS IN THEIR FIRST TERM ON JANUARY 1, 1978.—(1)(A) Any copyright, the first term of which is subsisting on January 1, 1978, shall endure for 28 years from the date it was originally secured.

(B) In the case of—

(i) any posthumous work or of any periodical, cyclopedic, or other composite work upon which the copyright was originally secured by the proprietor thereof, or

(ii) any work copyrighted by a corporate body (otherwise than as assignee or licensee of the individual author) or by an employer for whom such work is made for hire,

the proprietor of such copyright shall be entitled to a renewal and extension of the copyright in such work for the further term of 67 years.

(C) In the case of any other copyrighted work, including a contribution by an individual author to a periodical or to a cyclopedic or other composite work—

(i) the author of such work, if the author is still living,

(ii) the widow, widower, or children of the author, if the author is not living,

(iii) the author’s executors, if such author, widow, widower, or children are not living, or

(iv) the author’s next of kin, in the absence of a will of the author,

shall be entitled to a renewal and extension of the copyright in such work for a further term of 67 years.

(2)(A) At the expiration of the original term of copyright in a work specified in paragraph (1)(B) of this subsection, the copyright shall endure for a renewed and extended further term of 67 years, which—

(i) if an application to register a claim to such further term has been made to the Copyright Office within 1 year before the expiration of the original term of copyright, and the claim is registered, shall vest, upon the beginning of such further term, in the proprietor of the copyright who is entitled to claim the renewal of copyright at the time the application is made; or

(ii) if no such application is made or the claim pursuant to such application is not registered, shall vest, upon the beginning of such further term, in the person or entity that was the proprietor of the copyright as of the last day of the original term of copyright.

(B) At the expiration of the original term of copyright in a work specified in paragraph (1)(C) of this subsection, the copyright shall endure for