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Photography

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I. Scope

Photography is both a documentary medium and a subject of study in itself. Acquisition policies have been developed for documentary photography and for the history of photography to address both of these aspects of the medium. The dictating policy for Documentary Photography defines the range and nature of the subjects on which photographic documentation is to be sought for Library collections. The policy for the History of Photography indicates which aspects of the photographic medium and the history of its various uses - artistic, documentary, persuasive, and other - are to be documented, and to what extent they are to be documented, by the Library's collections.

The Library's role as the national library of the United States is defined as being to "strengthen and advance the intellectual and cultural life of the American people by assembling and preserving a universal collection of human knowledge, information and expression..." The photography collections will support this larger goal by documenting a range of national and regional subjects, and by representing the history, concerns, and significant achievements with an emphasis on diversity. Areas of interest to Congress, including coverage of significant national legislative activities, programs, and issues, the impact of these on the nation and the world, will be collected to document a plurality of viewpoints in American society. The Library will collect photographs of international concern supporting the research collections and interest of the Library's area studies divisions.

II. Research Strengths

The Library of Congress supports scholars engaging in research on photography or using photography to

document the history of American architecture, design, and engineering, the lives of prominent, noteworthy and significant public figures in the fields of politics, government, science, and culture, including music, theater and dance. The photography collections are strong in Americana, which can be described as American social history, arts and culture, technology and science, landscape and the built environment, public policy and programs, and journalism and the press.

In its capacity as an international research library, the Library of Congress collects photography documenting subjects of global and international interest; foreign events, individuals and trends impacting or affecting American history, achievements and concerns; and provides insight on matters of American interest, influence and concern abroad. Included are regions designated by the Library as areas of concentration consisting of Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, the Middle East, Asia, the former Soviet states, Eastern Europe and China. While the Library's photographic documentation of regions and countries other than the United States is less comprehensive and in-depth than its American coverage, we endeavor to work with area specialists selectively acquire photographs related to foreign events, individuals, and trends exerting a significant influence on U. S. history.

III. General Collecting Policy

Original photographic images in their various forms including those created digitally will be collected to support the mission of the Library of Congress across the broad spectrum of its collecting areas.

In determining the acceptability of any photographic materials, consideration should be given to their size, quality, physical condition, and relationship to other materials in the Library. Practical matters such as the organization, housing, and use of collections must also be taken into consideration. A degree of flexibility in applying the following criteria is desirable. If a possible acquisition would fill a significant gap in the Library's holdings, its importance might balance possible negative factors. Some of the technical considerations are listed below.

1. In acquiring all photographic materials, the highest technical and expressive quality will be sought. Whenever possible, the materials should meet accepted archival standards. American National Standards Institute standards for negatives, prints, and transparencies, both in black-and-white and color are followed.
2. While currently no standards exist for digitally created works, the Library of Congress considers several factors when acquiring digital works including the current discussion available through the National Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program (NDIIPP) and other currently accepted standards and guidelines such as planning for sustainability of digital formats (e.g., Sustainability of Digital Formats Planning for Library of Congress Collections). When considering re-formatted materials, the Library will use the guidelines suggested by the Federal Digitization Standards [Working Group] once they are issued.
3. Ideally when acquiring large collections, they should be organized with prints in good condition, negatives keyed to prints, and accompanied by caption information or identifying metadata.
4. Before the decision is made to acquire a collection, all concerns related to cataloging and preservation should be documented in writing.

5. Questions of legal rights and restrictions should be considered where pertinent, and should be documented in writing before any acquisition is final.

Additional considerations for materials collected through copyright deposit can be found in the Copyright Best Edition statement, Best Edition of Published Copyrighted Works (Circular 7b).

The Library of Congress does not systematically acquire snapshots, travel photos, photographic or digital copies of prints, drawings, posters, commercial art reproductions, or other graphic work, in lieu of original works. With the long-standing exception of the HABS/HAER/HALS collections produced by the National Park Service, the Library does not collect photographs produced by the United States government or its agencies; portions of extant archives whose acquisition might contribute to the dispersal of significant bodies of material and correlative loss of documentary or creative integrity; photographic documentation of events, individuals, concerns, and issues that are of a strictly local or regional interest except under special conditions. The Library of Congress will avoid duplicating established collecting patterns and/or established strengths of major repositories of photography. In addition, efforts will be made to reconcile the continued development of established Library areas of strength with the continuing and established collecting activities of other major institutions.

IV. Specific Collecting Policy and Guidelines

This statement addresses the acquisition of works in the format of photographic and photomechanical print media collected by the Prints and Photographs Division and within other divisions throughout the Library of Congress. Photography is the process of recording images initially on a light sensitive medium like glass, metal, paper or film and output in a variety of ways involving a chemical process. Photomechanical prints originate with photographic negatives, but are printed in ink photo specially prepared printing plates. Using the latest technology, digital imaging eliminates the need for chemicals altogether. Digital photography uses an electronic light sensor capturing chip device to produce images as binary data.

Photography in its various formats are collected to support the Library of Congress' mission to sustain and preserve a universal collection of knowledge and creativity for Congress, and an international community of scholars and researchers.

A. Documentary Photographs

1. The Library endeavors to acquire a wide selection of photographs documenting United States history and culture, and including:
 - a. prominent individuals;
 - b. events of national political, historical, or cultural interest;
 - c. certain periods or subjects, such as the Depression, the Civil Rights Movement, AIDS, the environment, the industrializing world, etc.;

- d. changing developments in architecture, costume, technology, social customs, etc.
2. The Library endeavors to acquire on a worldwide basis a selection of photographs illustrative of the categories listed under 1.
3. Material of strictly local interest generally is not accepted, but is referred to the appropriate regional institutions.

B. Artistic Photographs

The Library acquires, on a highly selective basis, photographs which show excellence as works of art, in conception and presentation of image and form, and which are illustrative of a movement, an aesthetic theory, or particular period of artistic photography made by leading practitioners.

C. History of the Medium

The Library endeavors to acquire a selection of photographs, which illustrate the history, and technical advancement of the medium in its many iterations including a range of digital print and file formats.

D. Collections of Photographs and Negatives

The Library acquires, on a highly selective basis, collections in any of the above categories, which represent a complete, self-contained unit. In most cases, these constitute the work of a single individual or are the product of a single institution. With the long-standing exception of the HABS/HAER/HALS collections produced by the National Park Service, the Library will not acquire pictorial records of Federal agencies, as these are the responsibility of the National Archives.

E. Slides and Transparencies

1. The Library endeavors to acquire for its permanent collections only those slides and transparencies which present information of value for reference or research which is not available in the Library in another form.
2. Slides or transparencies which are original photographs will be acquired on a selective basis.
3. Written or recorded texts which are issued with slides or transparencies will be retained with them.

F. Bound Materials (published and unpublished)

Photographic albums (intact unpublished bound material) have been and continue to be among the bound materials acquired by the Library of Congress. Photo albums are a collection of photographs created as a record of a family history, a record of a social, business or organization history or whatever the compiler deems important to collect. The Library will continue to acquire photo albums to support the various collections areas and mission goals.

Special emphasis will be placed on acquiring published works needed to support the Library's collection of original documentary and artistic photographs. Books and folios illustrated with original photographs of documentary or aesthetic interest will also be acquired.

G. Related Collections Policies

For related topics consult also the Collections Policy Statements for:

Fine and Decorative Arts: Books and Periodicals

Fine and Applied Arts: Non-Book Materials

Manuscripts

Moving Image Materials

Music

Theater

Folklore and Folklife

V. Acquisition Sources: Current and Future

Photographic materials will be collected to support the mission of the Library of Congress across the broad spectrum of its collecting areas. Currently the Library acquires documentary and artistic photographs in the various forms from a variety of sources including photographers, collectors, dealers, auctions, galleries, copyright deposits, etc. Future acquisitions regardless of format, of artistic and documentary photographs will most likely be acquired in a similar manner. There is the additional possibility of acquiring some web only published support material from the internet as the technology progresses and becomes the sole outlet for publication.

VI. Collecting Levels

The Library of Congress acquires photographic materials selectively within each category as described above in the Specific Policy Guidelines. Acquisition is determined by the content of the work offered to the Library for gift or purchase, desire not to duplicate the collecting efforts of other local institutions, attempt to fill in gaps in existing holdings, efforts not to duplicate existing collections, and the financial cost to the Library in accepting material, whether it be financial, spatial, or other.

Revised by the Curatorial Staff of the Prints and Photographs Division, November 2008