

# PUBLIC DOMAIN IN THE U.S.

The public domain consists of works that are not protected by copyright - because the copyright expired, they were never protected by copyright law, or the owner didn't comply with existing copyright formalities at the time of publication.

## WHAT TYPE OF WORKS ARE IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN?

Literary works, audiovisual works like movies, music, dramatic works, paintings, photographs, sculptures, architectural works, sound recordings, choreography and pantomime.



## SO WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

Unlike copyrighted works, those in the public domain can be used, shared, remixed, copied, and distributed all completely free and without permission from the original creator.

## COOL - WHAT'S IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN?

Federal government documents  
Works created before 1927\*  
Works created between 1927-1989  
without a proper copyright notice\*



\*See **What's the Expiration Date** for more info

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF COPYRIGHT IN THE UNITED STATES

1790

The first copyright act in the United States. It protects maps, charts, and books. Copyright lasts 14 years with the option for a 14 year extension

The initial term of copyright is extended to 28 years. Published music is added to the list of copyrightable materials.

1831

1865

Photography can now be copyrighted

[HTTPS://GUIDES.LIB.UTEXAS.EDU/PD](https://guides.lib.utexas.edu/pd)



# PUBLIC DOMAIN IN THE U.S.

Works are now eligible for 56 years of copyright protection if renewed. Public domain is explicitly recognized for the first time.

1909

1912

Motion pictures can now be copyrighted.

The 1976 Copyright Act formally introduces fair use into the law and begins to phase out the requirement for a copyright notice to receive copyright protection. Copyright term extended to 50 years from authors death and up to 75 years from publication.

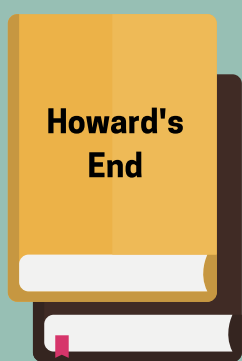
1976

1998

Sonny Bono Copyright Extension Act adds 20 years onto the copyright term. Freezes the public domain at 1923 until 2019.

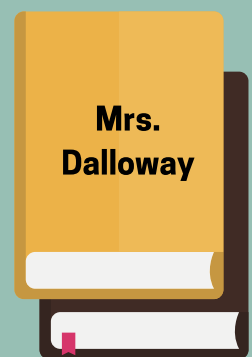
## WHAT'S THE EXPIRATION DATE?

Cornell University maintains a very useful chart detailing copyright status: <https://guides.library.cornell.edu/copyright/publicdomain>



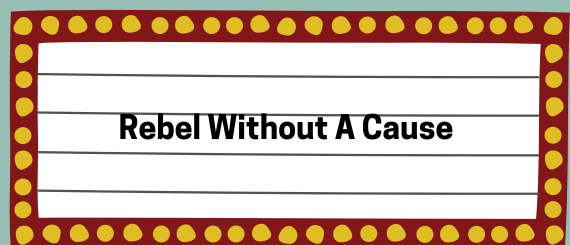
Published in 1910. Entered the public domain in 1986. Would have entered the public domain in 1967 if not for the 1976 copyright act.

Published in 1925. Entered the public domain in 2021. Would have entered the public domain in 1982 if not for the 1976 and 1998 copyright acts.



Published in 1952. Won't be in the public domain until 2048. Would have entered the public domain in 2009 if not for the 1976 and 1998 copyright acts.

Published in 1955. Won't be in the public domain until 2051. Would have entered the public domain in 2012 if not for the 1976 and 1998 copyright acts.



Published in 1984. Won't be in the public domain until 2084 - 70 years after the death of author, Tom Clancy. Would have entered the public domain in 2064 if not for the 1998 copyright act.

This document is not legal advice.

[HTTPS://GUIDES.LIB.UTEXAS.EDU/PD](https://guides.lib.utexas.edu/pd)