Finding the Public Domain: Hypotheticals

With a partner or small group, review the hypotheticals below. Be prepared to share your answers and discuss them with the group.

1. Amelia is an American citizen, born in 1930, who has lived in Spain since 1939. Amelia published her English-language novel in Spain in 1965. In 1968, she published it in the United States, but she did not comply with U.S. formalities. The work has never been in the public domain in Spain. Is the work in the public domain in the U.S.? If not, when do you anticipate it will enter the public domain here?

2. Bill wrote his memoir, *My Life in Michigan*, in the 1930s. He produced three typewritten copies, one of which he gave to each of his children. Bill died in 1942. Is the work in the public domain in the U.S.? If not, when do you anticipate it will enter the public domain here?

3. Celeste published a textbook in the United States in 1958, with a copyright notice. She died in 1968. Her heir, who inherited the copyright in the work, is unaware that Celeste wrote the textbook. Is the work in the public domain in the U.S.? If not, when do you anticipate it will enter the public domain here?

4. Darius submitted a letter to the editor of his hometown newspaper in 1982. The newspaper ran the letter. In 1988, Darius registered his copyright in the letter. He is still alive. Is the work in the public domain in the U.S.? If not, when do you anticipate it will enter the public domain here?

5. Ellen wrote an email this morning and sent it to her condo’s mailing list. Is the work in the public domain in the U.S.? If not, when do you anticipate it will enter the public domain here?

6. Select a work of your choice and determine its public domain status. Hint: It’s easier to determine public domain status when you have access to a copy of the work — you may want to select a work that’s in the room with you.

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