

AMERICA INFORMED

WIDE WORLD OF US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS



UC Irvine Libraries

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A cornerstone of democracy is public access to information. In addition to helping citizens make informed decisions about their government, health, and finances, open and transparent information helps bolster accountability of government officials and institutions.

“[A] popular Government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy; or, perhaps, both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance: And a people who mean to be their own Governors, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.”

– US President James Madison, 1822

Curated by UC Irvine Libraries staff and student workers, this exhibit spans topics from national security and war to recipes and art. The materials included – most produced by and for the federal government and all made available for public use – are but a small, representative sample of the vastness and breadth of US government documents.

Curator's Note

The acceptability of language and how it is used continuously evolve over time. The historical materials in this exhibit contain imagery, terms, and descriptions that are representative of the eras in which they were produced.

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What Are Government Documents?

Government documents are materials produced by and for the US federal agencies within the three branches of government: executive, legislative, and judicial. In addition to governmental reports, such as census data, budgets, presidential papers, and bills and laws, government documents also include educational pamphlets, research data, maps, and much more.

A cornerstone of American democracy, open access to public records ensures transparency and accountability in government. It also helps document our history as a nation. Informed citizens have the keys to make decisions that affect their personal and civic lives.

“A democracy requires accountability, and accountability requires transparency.”

– US President Barack Obama, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) memorandum, 2009

1. **HEARING ON VACCINE SAFETY SYSTEMS.**

US House of Representative. February 15, 2024.

Public health officials testified on the effectiveness of vaccine safety systems before the House Oversight and Accountability Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic. C-SPAN, a cable news nonprofit, captures and streams unedited video of the US Congress.

2. **RACIAL AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY IN THE UNITED STATES: 2020 CENSUS.**

Visualization. US Census.

This visualization of the diversity index shows racial and ethnic demographic data by US state. The interactive, online version allows comparison of 2010 and 2020 US Census data.

3. **TARJETAS DE EDUCACIÓN CÍVICA PARA EL EXAMEN DE NATURALIZACIÓN.**

[Civics Flash Cards for the Naturalization Test]. US Citizenship and Immigration Services, US Dept. of Homeland Security. 2019.

Designed to help US citizenship candidates study for the naturalization test, civics flash cards on US history and government are available in Arabic, Chinese, English, Korean, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese.

4. **SURVIVAL IN ANTARCTICA.**

Office of Polar Programs, US National Science Foundation. 1984.

Derived from the experiences of polar scientists and explorers, this manual covers Antarctica's unique hazards and "survival problems." Tips, best practices, and emergency procedures include what to pack, building shelters, crevasse detection and rescues, and how to maintain mental health while "wintering over."

5. **BERNARD JULIUS OTTO KUEHN INVESTIGATION.**

FBI Records: The Vault, US Federal Bureau of Investigation. 1942.

Declassified, redacted FBI files detail the investigation into Bernard Julius Otto Kuehn and his wife, German-born spies who provided the Japanese government with intelligence related to the attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on December 7, 1941.

Queer Health & History

"I grew up in California and had the great luck to have parents who supported me when I came out as queer. Still, very little LGBTQ+ history was taught in schools. Seeing how much information that has been produced and distributed by the government makes me hopeful that eventually we can teach this important topic in schools all across America. Homosexuality was such a controversial topic for so much of US history that having so much research and documentation on it seems special. It is a way to say, 'We are here. We've always been here.'"

– Student Curator Kat Hansell '24 (BA in Drama)

6. **NOT THE LAW'S BUSINESS? AN EXAMINATION OF HOMOSEXUALITY, ABORTION, PROSTITUTION, NARCOTICS, AND GAMBLING IN THE UNITED STATES.**

Gilbert Geis. Center for Studies of Crime and Delinquency, US Dept. of Health and Human Services. 1972.

Discussing whether many controversial areas should be criminalized in the United States, this report explores whether acts of "private morality and immorality" should be regulated by law.

Kat's Take: "For the government to publish a deeply nuanced conversation discussing the rights of gay people, women, and addicts in the early 1970s is frankly surprising."

7. **SEVERAL NIH INSTITUTES INVOLVED IN TRACKING DOWN CAUSE OF AIDS.**

Joyce McCarthy. News & Features from NIH, US Dept. of Health and Human Services. April 1983.

This early scientific study about AIDS was published just a month before the first research paper identifying key traits of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

Kat's Take: "This is a monumental document discussing the first research performed about AIDS, when this was still a highly controversial concept."

8. **BRAIN HORMONE HALTS PREMATURE SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT.**

Susan Johnson. News & Features from NIH, US Dept. of Health and Human Services. January 1982.

In a research note, NIH researchers describe a new treatment for slowing and even reversing premature puberty in young girls.

Kat's Take: "While not strictly relating to queer people and research, this early form of hormone therapy would later help hundreds of thousands of transgender kids from going through puberty before they're ready."

9. **HOW GETTING HIGH CAN GET YOU AIDS.**

National Institute on Drug Abuse, US Dept. of Health and Human Services. 1994.

Published 11 years after HIV was first identified, this pamphlet informs teenagers of the dangers of drugs and unprotected sex.

Kat's Take: "Honestly, I just found this very fun, and I like that it emphasizes the options to both refuse sex and use a condom to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) like HIV."

10. **MEDICINE FOR THE PUBLIC: SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES.**

Thomas C. Quinn. US National Institutes of Health. 1993.

Published as part of a series to help the public learn more about their bodies, this booklet lists the causes, symptoms, treatments, and prevention of AIDS, chlamydia, herpes, and other STDs.

Kat's Take: "I think we always need more literature about STDs so they become less taboo."

Vietnam War Propaganda & Misinformation

In addition to combat and other military operations, the US government and security forces engaged in an extensive propaganda campaign as part of their involvement in the Vietnam War, which lasted 40 years (1954–1975). Leaflets dropped on Northern Vietnam from US planes used psychological scare tactics to spread misinformation and instill doubt. Films, cartoons, and print media developed for the American public and military forces also sought to justify continued war efforts.

– Student Curator Kane Hong '25 (BA in Political Science and English)

11. COME SOUTH.

Propaganda poster. US National Archives. 1954.

Part of a US campaign to urge North Vietnamese to “go south to avoid communism,” below the 17th parallel cease-fire line established by the 1954 Geneva Accords that divided Vietnam into North and South, this poster claimed they would be “welcomed with open arms.”

Kane's Take: “This poster shows how the US was involved in its containment policy in Southeast Asia since 1954.”

12. PROPAGANDA LEAFLET DROPPED ON NORTH VIETNAM.

1966. Joyce McCarthy. News & Features from NIH, US Dept. of Health and Human Services. April 1983.

Dropped by US planes on North Vietnam in 1965, this leaflet details the siege of Plei Me, one of the first confrontations between North Vietnamese and US armed forces. [English translation: Top, “This is one of more than 2,000 Northern soldiers who died at Plei Me in November, 1965.” Bottom, “These are some of your comrades-in-arms who are enjoying good treatment in the South.”]

Kane's Take: “This reflects how American soldiers took advantage of Vietnamese death superstitions to scare the Vietnamese soldiers. The way the message taunts and takes pride in the killing of Vietnamese people is especially disturbing.”

13. **PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE CAMPAIGN.**

Henry A. Kissinger. White House. November 1972.

The declassified memo from Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger to US President Richard Nixon explains that “an intensive psychological warfare is underway in North Vietnam” that included radio broadcasts, leaflets, special operations, and press activities.

Kane’s Take: “This document serves as one of the many primary sources detailing the covert military-industrial complex and its connection to US media.”

14. **THE M16A1 RIFLE: OPERATION AND PREVENTATIVE MAINTENANCE.**

US Army. 1969.

Published at the height of US involvement in the Vietnam War, the comic book manual covers how to operate and maintain an M16A1 rifle.

Kane’s Take: “This is fascinating on many levels in the way female objectification and sexual euphemisms are used to teach American soldiers serving in the Vietnam War how to treat their weapons.”

September 11th (9/11) Terrorist Attacks

"I was born the day after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. For many years, I was too young to completely understand the severity of the attacks and the vast emotions around them. It was simply something that was briefly mentioned in school every year around my birthday. Being able to research and learn about the victims, the first responders, the reporters, and how the country (including children) reacted to this life-altering catastrophe has been very interesting."

– Student Curator Monica Gomez '24 (BA in Literary Journalism and Film and Media Studies)

15. **SEPTEMBER 11, 2001: 20 YEARS LATER: A REMEMBRANCE IN NEWSPAPERS.** US Library of Congress. 2021.

From the *Washington Post* to the *Honolulu Advertiser*, this collection of newspaper front-page headlines preserved by the Library of Congress (the home of the US Copyright Office and main research arm of the US Congress) shows national coverage of the 9/11 attacks, which resulted in the deaths of nearly 3,000 people.

Monica's Take: "As a journalism major, I can't imagine being a reporter covering 9/11 – the trauma that came with having to witness this and having to process everything while focusing on objective and accurate reporting."

16. **FEATURED DOCUMENT EXHIBIT: REMEMBERING 9/11.** National Archives Museum, US National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). 2021.

A gallery collection of letters and drawings by children in the weeks after 9/11, preserved by NARA, the "nation's record keeper," shows how the youth reflected on and responded to the attacks.

Monica's Take: "The anger and patriotism expressed by some of the children is very raw and jarring. It's interesting to see that some of the children were simply sad, while others were seeking vengeance and redemption for the United States."

17. **NATIONAL MEMORIAL PARK. US NATIONAL PARK SERVICE.**

[nps.gov/flni](https://www.nps.gov/flni).

The field where Flight 93 crashed in Pennsylvania is now a memorial. Its NPS website contains crew and passenger information, details about their last phone calls, plane recording transcripts, and a layout of the plane showing where the hijackers were seated.

Monica's Take: "As I was researching, I learned about Flight 93 and its passengers who took over the plane to prevent it from crashing into the White House or Pentagon – no one is sure where it was intended to hit."

18. **WORLD TRADE CENTER (WTC) HEALTH PROGRAM STATISTICS.**

US Centers for Disease Control. 2024.

The CDC's WTC Health Program tracks incidents of illnesses and treatments among more than 125,000 first responders and survivors of the 9/11 attacks.

Monica's Take: "These statistics were shocking to see since so many first responders and survivors are still suffering from injuries and long-term mental and health conditions."

Wide World of Government Documents

Government documents are created for all ages and come in all sizes, shapes, and topic areas. Some are comical, and some are purely informative. But each represents specific time periods, contexts, and moments and helps to document and preserve our nation's history.

19. **RECIPES FOR COOKING MUSKRAT MEAT.**

Herbert Dosier. Fish and Wildlife Service, US Dept. of the Interior. 1943.

Due to World War II rationing, meat became more scarce. The US government recommended Americans eat chicken, domestic rabbits, and wild game, including muskrats, or "marsh rabbits."

20. **MILITARY FUNERAL HONORS: HONORING THOSE WHO SERVED.**

US Dept. of Defense. 2000.

Designed for the families of US military veterans, this funeral kit includes points of contact by military service in all 50 states, FAQs, US flag protocol, a guide for funeral directors, and a CD of the song "Taps" recorded at the Arlington National Cemetery in Washington DC.

21. **FAIR HOUSING ACT: FAIR HOUSING ACT AS AMENDED (TITLE 8).**

US Dept. of Housing and Urban Development. 2007.

Passed by Congress in 1968, the Fair Housing Act prohibits race discrimination in the sale and rental of housing. In 1931, the "Project, Books for the Adult Blind" (later the "National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled") began selecting book titles to be reproduced in Braille and distributed through a national network of libraries.

22. **LEARN ABOUT THE COAST GUARD: MISSIONS, PEOPLE, AND EQUIPMENT.**

illustrated by Rob Green, cover design by Bryan Snuffer. US Coast Guard. 2015.

The Official Coast Guard Coloring Book teaches kids about its role, missions, boats, and aircraft.

23. **US COAST GUARD INCIDENT MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK.**

US Dept. of Homeland Security. 2006.

Intended as an easy reference aid, this incident management handbook is designed to assist Coast Guard personnel during response operations, such as search and rescues, oil spills, marine firefighting and salvage, and terrorism attacks.

24. **FOOD STAMPS FOR YOU.**

Designed by Mississippi State Dept. of Public Welfare. US Dept. of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. 1974.

Intended to inform the public about food stamps, the Freddie Food Stamp comic walks through how to apply for and use the federal assistance program.

25. **SECURITY IS AN EYEPATCH, STARRING SALLY AND CHARLIE BROWN.**

US Dept. of Health, Education, and Welfare. 1968.

Drawn by *Peanuts* illustrator Charles Schulz, this comic educates on the testing and treatment of amblyopia, a condition commonly called "lazy eye."

26. **PREPAREDNESS 101: ZOMBIE PANDEMIC.**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), US Dept. of Health and Human Services. 2011.

Designed to be educational and entertaining, the CDC's comic shows the importance of having an emergency kit and plan so "you'll be ready for any kind of disaster, even zombies."

27. **SPROCKET MAN.**

US Consumer Product Safety Commission. 2013.

Originally created in the 1970s at Stanford University for the California Department of Public Safety and the nonprofit Urban Bikeway Design Collaborative, the comic book superhero Sprocket Man teaches children bike safety and maintenance.

28. **THIS IS ANN ... SHE DRINKS BLOOD!**

Illustrated by Theodor Geisel. US Army. 1942.

With illustrations by Theodor Geisel, this US Army poster was produced to educate troops about areas of malaria risk. Then a young Army captain, Geisel would later go on to publish children's books under the name Dr. Seuss.

29. **A CHIP IN THE CURTAIN: COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY IN THE SOVIET UNION.**

National Defense University Press, US Dept. of Defense. 1989.

Published at the end of the Cold War, this booklet details the "Soviet Union's struggle with the development and the application of computers in Soviet society." It states that the Soviet Union was unable to match the "unparalleled technological progress of the West," which will lead to "opening up of the Soviet system and society."

30. **SPIES IN SPACE: REFLECTIONS ON NATIONAL RECONNAISSANCE AND THE MANNED ORBITING LABORATORY.**

Center for the Study of National Reconnaissance, US Dept. of Defense (DoD). 2019.

Produced by the DoD, this book looks back on the Cold War era of American spies in space, why the program was set up, and why it ended.

31. **THE ROSWELL REPORT: CASE CLOSED.**

Captain James McAndrew. US Air Force. 1997.

A follow-up to the 1994 "The Roswell Report: Fact vs. Fiction in the New Mexico Desert," this report is a thorough inquiry into the records surrounding the alleged crash and recovery of an extraterrestrial vehicle and its alien occupants in July 1947.

32. **NASA FUNPAD: PACKED WITH THINGS TO DO!**

US National Aeronautics and Space Administration. 2007.

NASA's children's activity book includes trivia and facts about the US space program and learning activities such as coloring, drawing, and puzzles.

History of US Public Records & Access

1813

First authorized distribution of congressional documents to certain universities, historical societies, and state libraries

1860

Government Printing Office (GPO) created to produce and distribute information and products for all three branches of the federal government

1895

Federal Depository Library Program (FDPL) established by Congress to ensure that the American public has access to government information in depository libraries throughout the US and its territories

1964

UC Irvine designated FDLP member library, one year before the campus opened

1967

Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) gave the public the right to request access to records from any federal agency

1970s

GPO began wide use of microformat (small images of print documents stored on film) as standard for printing, storing, and archiving publications

1989

First electronic government documents published in CD-ROM format by the Census Bureau Publications

1993

GPO Electronic Information Access Enhancement Act signed by President Bill Clinton

2014

GPO renamed the Government Publishing Office (GPO) to signify shift to digital document production and preservation

2023

FDLPs begin transformation to fully digital collections