

Brazil's Popular Groups Microfilm Collection from the Library of Congress

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by

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Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. It is a pleasure to be here with you to discuss the use of ephemeral resources in scholarly research and particularly the Brazil's Popular Groups microfilm set. I would first like to thank the University of London, the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, the Institute for the Study of the Americas and Danny Millum, in particular for inviting me to participate in this unique workshop.

For those of you who may not know, the U.S. Library of Congress maintains 6 regional overseas offices with the express purpose of obtaining the intellectual output of some 85 countries worldwide. Our collective mission is to obtain, catalog and preserve the highest quality books, journals, music, posters, ephemeral materials, etc. in nearly all subjects that may be of use to today's and future congressional representatives and scholars. Thomas Jefferson, founder of the LC stated that "there is, in fact, no subject to which a member of Congress may not have occasion to refer" and we take that very seriously and continue to collect very broadly. The Library of Congress offices are located in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Cairo, Egypt; Nairobi, Kenya; Islamabad, Pakistan; New Delhi, India and Jakarta, Indonesia.

In two of the offices, Rio de Janeiro and New Delhi, we earnestly collect, organize and microfilm a variety of ephemeral serials, pamphlets and posters and I would like to describe to you today our efforts towards preserving and providing access to these sets. I will cover practical information about the Brazilian collection in greater detail since I work with it more closely, but much of what I say is relevant for the collection of the New Delhi office.

So, what is it precisely that we are doing? Since the Rio Office opened in 1966, we have collected ephemeral materials issued by a variety of Brazilian organizations and grassroots groups, organize them into groups and produce a microfilm set titled “Brazil’s Popular Groups.” The original base set covering 1966-86 was conceived as a means of documenting popular movements which sprouted during the “anos de chumbo” the leaden years, of the Brazilian dictatorship from 1968-1984. The base set was followed by two triennial collections for 1987-89 and 1990-92 and by annual sets thereafter. The particular goals of the collection are:

To document current events from the perspective of the participants by collecting their intellectual output,

Document important social, political environmental, governmental institutions providing a look at their growth and development over time,

Document the participants, their motivations, activities and outcomes of political and social movements, and,

To provide early primary resource documentation of emerging trends, events, ideas, and movements.

So far, over 22,000 serials, pamphlets and posters have been organized and microfilmed for posterity. The number of pamphlets filmed per year varies between 900-1,500 more or less. In 2003 we devised a “quick and dirty” keyword index to the set and began seeking the rights from publishers to digitize materials included in the set.

Movimento dos Sem Terra, prostitution, HIV trends, abused women and children, gays, lesbians, transgenders, Indians, Afro-Brazilian civil rights, are just a few of the disenfranchised groups and topics covered by the collection. For convenience, the collection is divided into 14 broad topical groups:

Agrarian Reform and Land Issues

Human and Civil Rights

Children and Youth	Labor and Laboring Classes
Education and Communication	Political parties and Issues
Environment and Ecology	Religious Organizations, Ecumenical groups and movements
Ethnic Groups: Blacks	Urban Affairs
Ethnic Groups: Indians	Women and Feminists
Ethnic Groups: Others	
Homosexual and Bisexual	

The materials for this collection tend to be less than 60 pages in length with timely information that may appear in pamphlets well before appearing in monographs. This primary source material may describe the workings and/or organization of a new NGO, institution or governmental agency; or it could be writings that advocate an agency's agenda. The materials may provide information to target audiences including "how-tos" for the organizing of women's rights, environmental activism, or political issues.

How do we acquire the materials? Most items come in over the transom, so to say. Others we go out and seek. We have even had taxi cab drivers in other cities save santinhos (broadsides for political candidates promising anything and everything if you "vote for me") and mail to us later. We may write or visit NGOs or PAC headquarters to acquire others. Basically we collect these items as a by-product of our other, usual work to acquire mainstream scholarly books and journals.

The formats include newsletters, house organs, reports, posters, clippings collections, brochures, resolutions of congresses, educational manuals, independent news services, catalogs of publications and political flyers, and santinhos from every state of Brazil. The focus of the collection may shift from year to year, depending on the current events or movements in vogue for a given year. Some years we may have more information on political elections, if the Catholic Bishops convene, we will most likely have more on Catholicism that year, if there is a massacre of MST demonstrators, you can be sure that will generate a good deal of flyers and protest statements.

During the selection process, we consider how the pamphlet will add to the overall collection on the given topics. Is there added value that is not available or accessible in another format? Is there enough material by one group to warrant separate treatment as a special set? As a matter of policy, we do not include technical agriculture or clinical medicine.

The challenges we face for today and tomorrow:

Although microfilm is still considered the most effective preservation medium by most libraries and archives, it leaves a lot to be desired from the perspective of the researcher. We need to move on to digitizing as many of these materials as possible. One of the reasons I am here today is to learn more about how others digitize their collections. We have done a sample set of 20 or so posters from 2003, but we need to do more. Currently, there is a proposal to have future Brazilian and Indian sets filmed and digitized by the Library's India Office, but it must wend its way through the bureaucracy before that can happen.

How to access or acquire:

Besides the Library of Congress, there are about twenty universities in the U.S. with partial or complete sets of the BPG microfilm. In Europe, the Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine of the Musée d'Histoire Contemporaine has the base set and supplements up to 1994. The Institut Ibero-Américain purchased the complete set and supplements up to 2002 last year. One can contact the Library of Congress Photoduplication Service for further information on how to acquire.