

# The Google Books Settlement: Class Actions, Copyright, Antitrust—or All of the Above?

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The Challenge of Building a Digital Library That Benefits All

12 February 2010

# In this talk

- Three ways of looking at the settlement:
  - Class action
  - Copyright
  - Antitrust
- The real story is the connections

# I. Class actions

# The U.S. class action

- Aggregation of claims
- Requires representative plaintiffs
- Effectively controlled by class counsel
- Threat to defendants—and to plaintiffs

# Internal limits

- Procedural: notice, opt-out, objections, etc.
- Fairness to class members
- Jurisdiction over class members
- Future claims

# Settlements 1.0 and 2.0

- Notice: most countries removed
- Fairness to orphans: UWF
- Class definitions sharpened

## II. Copyright

# Fair use

- Original scanning and searching
  - To Google (and me): obviously fair use
  - To © owners: obviously not fair use
- Settlement gives Google 90%
- But doesn't set a precedent, either way



# Orphan works policy

- Recognized problem of unknown scale
- It's the "fault" of the copyright system
- Argument for scanning as fair use
- Settlement enables reuse of orphan works
- Congress balked at more modest reforms
- Ought they be in the public domain?

# Opt-out and opt-in

- Berne dogma is that © allows only opt-in
  - But what about collecting societies?
- Authors Guild then: opt-out unacceptable
- Authors Guild now: settlement is opt-out

# III. Antitrust

# Consumer Purchase

- Rightsholders can set price
  - But if they don't, Google uses algorithm
  - Orphan works *must* be priced by Google
- Settlement 2.0 says to price competitively
- What are Google's incentives? © owners'?

# Institutional Subscription

- Collective pricing for whole catalog
  - Looks and smells like BMI/ASCAP
  - But with individual purchase option
- Rube Goldbergian oversight mechanisms
- Is price-gouging likely?
- Even if it is, is that an *antitrust* problem?

# Exclusivity

- For orphan works, no alternative sellers
  - Me-too class actions highly unlikely
- Is this raising or lowering entry barriers?
- Is the settlement output-increasing?

# Interlude

- Point: the settlement faces class action, copyright, and antitrust objections.
- Counterpoint: there are colorable replies to all of these objections



# IV. Synthesis

# Class action $\Rightarrow$ copyright

- Class action as “solution” to orphan works
  - “Works” because orphans are plaintiffs
  - But we *know* they won't/can't object
- Class action as override of Berne
  - “Works” because foreigners are plaintiffs
  - Which they are *because* of Berne

# Copyright $\Rightarrow$ class action

- Copyright makes some tricky distinctions
  - Contract drafters have made many more
  - Result: a troublesome class definition
- Is the orphan works problem legislative?
  - Large scope, absent stakeholders, etc.

# Class action $\Rightarrow$ antitrust

- How could DOJ intervene?
  - Could it sue the plaintiff class?
  - *Noerr-Pennington* issue has been averted
- Settlement grants Google market power
  - Why precisely is this troubling?

# Copyright $\Rightarrow$ antitrust

- “Output-increasing” in a static sense
  - Copyright cares about dynamic incentives
  - Copyright “monopoly” is important
- Concentration of power in Google
  - Privacy, censorship, etc.
  - Copyright’s norm is decentralization

# Class action + copyright + antitrust

- I understand 0 and  $\infty$ , but 1?
  - Google stands in shoes of © owners
- If the settlement were nonexclusive ...
  - The incentives look very different
- This is collective copyright management ...
  - But “authorized” by private action

**Conclusion**

# A few parting thoughts

- There are some exciting ideas in here
  - But this is a procedural Pandora's Box
- Is the U.S. borrowing from other models?
  - Or imposing its class action on everyone?
- International coordination will be very hard
  - Territorial copyright law may be obsolete



**Questions?**