RESOLUTION ON THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
by the American Historical Association

Whereas, the effectiveness of the Library of Congress as a center for scholarly research has been diminished by the recent restrictions on stack access, closing of the Manuscript Reading Room on Saturdays, and reduced hours for use of all research facilities; and

Whereas, the Library of Congress has served as the storehouse for over a century of this country's knowledge and contains unique items that cannot be found elsewhere; and

Whereas, the Librarian of Congress made a unilateral decision to close the stacks following unfavorable publicity in the press and refused to consider implementing an improved security system that might protect collections from theft and damage but still allow screened researchers access to their sources; and

Whereas, there is conclusive evidence that the Library of Congress failed during the last ten years to enforce even rudimentary security measures; and

Whereas, there has been no evidence in reported thefts implicating any researcher engaged in a bona fide scholarly historical research project, and

Whereas, stack access made it possible for researchers to pursue their work rigorously and efficiently and at a level of detail that is not easily achieved through standard finding aids,

Whereas, since May 16, 1992, the Manuscript Reading Room of the Library of Congress has been closed on Saturdays, and

Whereas, Saturday closings of the Manuscript Reading Room place a hardship on both out-of-town scholars and Washington residents, for whom Saturdays are often their only opportunity to use the manuscript collection; therefore,

Resolved, that the American Historical Association urges the Librarian of Congress to recognize that closed stacks, Saturday closings of the Manuscript Reading Room, and reduced hours for use of other research rooms severely imperil the research of some scholars and urge the Librarian to reopen the Manuscript Reading Room on Saturday, to reopen the Library on Tuesday and Friday evenings, and to seek a middle ground on access to the stacks that would reflect the needs of both security concerns and scholars; and

Resolved, that the American Historical Association will inform periodically the Senate and House of Representatives' Joint Committee on the Library on research conditions at the Library of Congress; and

Resolved that the American Historical Association will encourage its members to communicate with their Congressional representatives regarding the threats to scholarship represented by the Library of Congress' current policy of Saturday closing of the Manuscript Room, reduced hours for other research rooms and a rigid policy of no access to the stacks by any scholars.

Adopted by the Council of the American Historical Association on December 30, 1992.