

# Modern Political Archives Digitizes More Than 3,800 Recordings

July 8, 2011 By [Edwin Smith](#)

OXFORD, Miss. – The Modern Political Archives at the University of Mississippi recently completed a yearlong project to preserve and digitize more than 3,800 recordings in its collection, helping preserve the materials and make them more accessible to scholars and researchers. The recordings include 16mm and 35mm films, audio reels, umatic tapes, quad tapes, cassettes, microcassettes, 78 rpm records, LP records, CDs, DVDs and even MP3 files. The work was completed with a \$450,000 federal appropriation through the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

“Among the wide variety of subjects in these recordings are campaign commercials, political rallies, debates on the floor of Congress, committee hearings, dedications of public works projects in Mississippi and tributes to politicians,” said Leigh McWhite, political papers archivist and assistant professor.

“One of my favorite selections is a series of eight 16mm reels documenting Jamie Whitten’s global tour in 1945 inspecting World War II naval activities. It includes footage of the civilian politicians entering the caves of Iwo Jima, watching artillery practice in Hawaii, viewing the pyramids in Egypt and visiting a U.S. military cemetery in Italy.”

Another highlight is a speech U.S. Sen. Robert F. Kennedy delivered at UM in 1966, just three years after playing a significant role as U.S. attorney general in the integration of the university. The oral histories that authors Jere Nash and Andy Taggart conducted across the state offer amazing depth and detail on Mississippi political history, while the Southern Women Legislators Collection boasts interviews conducted with female state legislators from across the South in the 1980s.

The grant also encompassed recordings in the collections of Thomas G. Abernethy, Thad Cochran, James O. Eastland, Carroll Gartin, Trent Lott, Ray Mabus, Jamie Whitten, Roger Wicker and the League of Women Voters of Mississippi.

“This project was massive in scale and numerous people contributed to the effort,” McWhite said. “The Modern Political Archives oversaw the project, adopted preservation measures for all the original recordings, compiled detailed descriptions of material in the collections open to the public and created digital collections. UM’s Media & Documentary Projects was an essential partner, digitizing the analog recordings and making restorations when necessary. Personnel in the J.D. Williams Library provided vital technical support with regards to the management and preservation of the digital files and posting resources created by the grant on the Web.”

“I consider this grant to be of the highest importance to our archive and am very proud of the work that has been done,” said Jennifer Ford, head of archives and special collections at the library.

A series of events will promote resources created by the project, including an Archives & Special Collections Brown Bag program at noon Sept. 15 on the third floor of the library.

“We’ll play clips from some of the recordings, discuss details about digitization and preservation, and describe the research value of the material,” McWhite said.

A short documentary by Media & Documentary Projects is available at the grant website, which also provides links to digital collections of the recordings created as a result of the grant. While descriptions for all the recordings in the collections open to the public are posted online, only a portion of the actual recordings are available on the Web. Due to copyright, some recordings are only accessible via computer terminals in the J.D. Williams Library.

Established in 2004 as a unit within the Department of Archives and Special Collections, the Modern Political Archives seeks to acquire, preserve and encourage research in private papers documenting Mississippians and their government at both the national and state levels.

For more information visit the [Modern Political Archives](#). For further information on the grant project, including links to the documentary and digital collections, [click here](#).