

MODULE 21

LIGHTS, CAMERA,
ARCHIVES!

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Appendix A: Case Studies

JFK and *Mad Men*

With thanks to Laurie Austin

AMC's *Mad Men* was known not only for its stylish depiction of advertising executives in the 1960s but also for its devotion to historical accuracy. For one episode set in the spring of 1960, creator Matthew Weiner remarked that they wanted to include an Etch-a-Sketch but removed the toy from the scene when they learned that it was first sold in July of that year.¹⁹ Such attention to historical detail from Hollywood is uncommon, especially when directed toward archives, but *Mad Men* practiced it religiously. On multiple occasions, the show's producers reached out to the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library's audiovisual archives while in production to ensure the minutiae were perfect.

Throughout the award-winning show, historical events were interwoven into the plotline, serving as background, metaphor, or foreshadowing. Presidential campaign advertising imagery played a role in the plot of Season 1. Season 2 ended with events set to the backdrop of the Cuban Missile Crisis. In both instances, producers contacted the JFK Library's audiovisual archives and requested on-air radio broadcasts of the historic events as they occurred, to which the characters listened.

In the penultimate episode of Season 3, John F. Kennedy's assassination occurs on the eve of a wedding, and it affects many of the characters' personal dramas. While only fragments from the continuous, days-long television coverage from the time were included in the episode, the producers did show the laconic clip of CBS anchorman Walter Cronkite announcing the President's death.²⁰ Once again, producers called on the JFK Library's audiovisual archives to make sure they had their facts straight.

While this episode was in production, the writers decided to use another clip of JFK's coffin lying in state in the Capitol's Rotunda. They reached out to the audiovisual archivist at the JFK Library who had previously helped them, and they asked her what seemed to be a simple question: "What time was the flag-draped coffin shown in

19 Matt Weiner, "Commentaries," disc 1, *Mad Men: Season One*, DVD, directed by Matt Weiner (Santa Monica, CA: Lionsgate, 2008).

20 See "CBS News Announces President's Death," *YouTube*, last modified November 21, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v4q898h05HQ>.

the East Room of the White House on television on November 23, 1963?” However, early television footage is analog. Time stamps and other metadata common in the digital era doesn’t exist with celluloid. The only way to determine the answer was for the archivist to carefully examine paper records, which she did and then provided to the AMC crew within a couple of hours. She determined that the coffin was shown on television at about 9:00 a.m., 10:15 a.m., 12:30 p.m., 2:00 p.m., 5:00 p.m., and 10:30 p.m. But she also made clear that she only had the necessary documentation for NBC’s broadcast, and other networks may have shown the coffin at other times. The response from the film crew was not “Great, thanks for your hard work on short notice,” but rather, “Approximately those times, or precisely? It matters because a plot point revolves around when a character sees the clip. And we need this ASAP as we are filming as we speak.” Thirty minutes and several math calculations later, the archivist returned the answer: as close as can be determined, the times were exactly 9:02 a.m., 10:17 a.m., 12:30 p.m., 1:50 p.m., 5:06 p.m., and 10:33 p.m. Despite her work, that particular clip was not included in the final cut, perhaps because the accurate historical timeline of the video didn’t match with the writers’ creative intent, or for any other myriad reasons.

A presidential library is accustomed to receiving media requests; many of them have audiovisual archivists employed to address the needs of this specialized material and of these specialized requests. However, as this scenario reveals, even media inquirers to well-resourced institutions can test their limits. Understanding that last-minute requests are part and parcel of working with the media, how much leeway should an institute permit? Will all requests be dealt with on a “Drop everything!” basis? If not, how do you determine who gets special treatment? By audience reach, ratings, or circulation? How many hours of research service will an institution be able to provide? Determining this in advance will not only save you last-minute aggravation but also serve the greater goal of providing equitable access to your materials for all users.

Lincoln University and International Copyright

With thanks to Susan Gunn Pevar

Among today’s historically black colleges and universities, Lincoln University of Pennsylvania has the distinction of being the first institution of higher education to be founded for African Americans,