



JFK, Digitized: Presidential Archive Debuts Online

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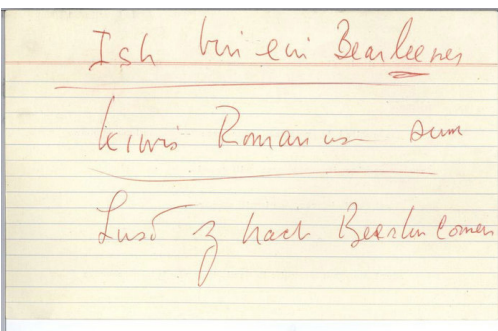
This month marks the 50th anniversary of the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy. It's an event that may seem like ancient history to some. But the Kennedy Library and the National Archives hope to make that history a bit more accessible.



On Thursday, they announced they have put all of the 35th president's important speeches, papers and recordings online at www.jfklibrary.org.

There, you can find famous memorabilia — such as the president's inaugural address from Jan. 20, 1961, in which he urged, “My fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country.”

But there are also lesser known items in the archives, including part of a 1962 TV and radio address on the admission of the first African-American to the University of Mississippi. “Mr. James Meredith is now in residence on the campus of the University of Mississippi,” Kennedy said. “This has been accomplished thus far without the use of National Guard or other troops.”



The Digital Archive includes more than 200,000 pages of speeches and notes, hundreds of reels of audio tape, and more than 1,000 recorded phone conversations. JFK Library Director Thomas Putnam says putting it online was a long and painstaking process.

“It's been a four-year project, and again, it's very labor-intensive because all of these documents and photos weren't born digitally, so each one needs to be hand-scanned,” he says.

The documents now online have been available at the brick-and-mortar JFK Library in Boston. But now anyone with access to a computer and the Internet can view firsthand drafts of Kennedy's inaugural, showing how the famous phrase “ask not what your country can do for you” evolved from “ask not what your country is going to do for you.”

Putnam's favorite find? “I really do love the conversations he has during the middle of the Cuban missile crisis. I mean, nothing can bring you closer to that moment about what he was trying to deal with than hearing, you know, even the laughter in the conversation between him and Eisenhower.” (Listen to that phone conversation between Kennedy and former President Eisenhower.)

At a reception announcing the opening of the online archive, Caroline Kennedy said her father's example, words and spirit are more important than ever.