FROM ATOMIC BOMBS TO SQUEALING PIGS OU'S KANTER COLLECTION SHOWCASES THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE BIZARRE OF POLITICAL CAMPAIGN ADS.

Forever caught in black and white images, the little girl licks away at a melting ice cream cone, oblivious to the political message that she will drive home for millions of 1964 television viewers.

"Do you know what people used to do? They used to explode atomic bombs in the air," a motherly narrator intones over the wholesome scene. "Now, children should have lots of Vitamin A and calcium, but they shouldn't have any strontium 90 or cesium 137. These things come from atomic bombs, and they're radioactive. They can make you die."

This disquieting commercial – and its even more controversial twin, "Daisy Girl" – helped sweep Lyndon B. Johnson to victory over perceived Cold War hawk Barry Goldwater and shaped today's political landscape. The ads are preserved alongside 160,000 other campaign icons at OU's Julian P. Kanter Political Commercial Archive.

The archive, safeguarded at the Political Communication Center in Burton Hall, contains the largest and most comprehensive collection of broadcast political advertising in the world and has been designated as one of "America's Treasures" by the White House Millennium Council and the National Historic Preservation Trust. Radio ads stretch back to 1936, and the earliest television ads date from 1950, when only 9 percent of U.S. homes had TVs. Political campaigns of all shapes and sizes are represented.

"We're pretty comprehensive. We collect state-level and issue-level ads all the way down to dogcatcher," Political Communication Center Curator and Archivist Lisa Henry says with a smile. "If it's being voted on and there are campaign commercials running, we want them."

Such bounty attracts academic researchers, local and national media, political consultants and committees, and documentary filmmakers. Most recently, commercials from the archive were featured in CNN's original series, "Race to the White House."

The collection was started by the late Julian P. Kanter, a self-professed "political junkie" with two decades in television

The 60-second

Candidate

By Anne Barajas Harp

Photos courtesy OU Political Communication Center

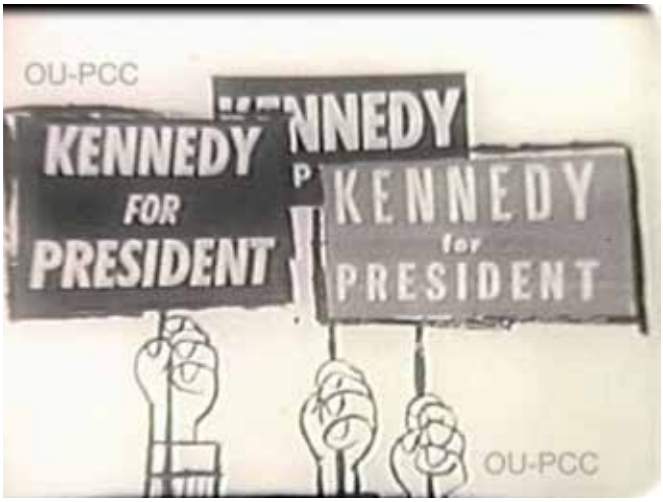
news. Kanter knew that TV stations tossed old ads and, after volunteering for Adlai Stevenson's 1956 presidential campaign, asked if he could keep the castoffs. He soon was scooping up hundreds of political commercials nationwide from news stations, ad agencies and political campaign staffs.

Kanter's Illinois home was stuffed to the gills with a collection of 25,000 commercials valued at $1 million by the time of the commercials, and images are never sold.

"The only restriction we have is that we do not loan material from politicians with active campaigns, for obvious reasons," Henry says. "Every election season I turn down the big Political Action Committees looking for juicy stuff."

By far, the most requested commercial is "Daisy Girl," which aired only once, on the night before LBJ's 1964's "Ice Cream"

Dwight D. Eisenhower 1953



John F. Kennedy 1960

OU established the Political Communication Center in 1983. OU Communication Professor Lynda Lee Kaid and department Chair William Carmack vied for two years against a most worthy opponent, the Smithsonian Institution, to buy the archive. The collection was considered so significant that the Oklahoma State Legislature appropriated $250,000 in the midst of a historic oil bust.

Academics gave OU the winning edge. Kanter, who became the archive's curator and an adjunct professor of communication, later told the *Los Angeles Times* that he chose OU over the Smithsonian because he was excited about working in the relatively new field of political communication, an interdisciplinary blend of political science, communication and journalism. He also was hesitant to see his life's passion become "one more collection among collections."

"Instead of locking them up in a vault somewhere, we wanted to catalog them and make them widely available," he said.

These days, the Political Commercial Archive's 160,000 titles are searchable through an online catalog. Clients submit a list of requested materials, and Henry responds either by sending a DVD loan or allowing clients to view materials at Burton Hall. Some researchers request only a handful of commercials, while others spend an entire summer onsite viewing hundreds of titles. The archive does not own copyright to any

commercial. In this ad, a girl counts as she plucks petals from a flower. Her voice is replaced by that of a man mechanically counting down to zero, and the camera zooms in until an atomic mushroom cloud blooms in one of the girl's large, dark eyes. "These are the stakes," President Johnson's voice declares. "To make a world in which all of God's children can live, or to go into the dark. We must either love each other, or we must die." The commercial created such a shocked furor that it was immediately pulled from the air. But its message and fame were already assured.

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Henry says "Daisy Girl" represents the moment that political ads went from simple position statements to manipulating voters' deepest emotions. Political persuasion had come a long way from the first presidential ads in 1952, which featured a stiff Dwight D. Eisenhower staring slightly off-camera and

stating, "Today, people can afford less butter, less bread, less fruit, less milk."

The contrast is even starker now, as Henry demonstrates by playing a 2014 Joni Ernst commercial. "I grew up castrating hogs on an Iowa farm, so when I get to Washington, I'll know how to cut pork," Ernst says a trifle gleefully. "Let's make 'em squeal." The ad helped her win a U.S. Senate seat.

George H.W. Bush 1992

Joni Ernst 2014

Henry casts a wry grin. "You can't make this stuff up."

Entertainment aside, the Political Commercial Archive's primary job is to bring context and insight to a crucial component of American life. "It really does come down to archives like ours to be society's memory," says Pat Meirick, director of OU's Political Communication Center and an associate professor of communication. "What were candidates and campaigns talking about? What issues were they emphasizing? What were the images they tried to use to persuade the public? If we didn't have an archive like ours, a lot of history, communication and understanding of the public conduct of politics would be lost."

Henry and her staff work diligently to make sure nothing is lost. Two 24-by-24-foot rooms contain rows of racks stretching toward the ceiling, filled with archival boxes of ads in 14 different formats. A large refrigeration unit keeps 5,600 film commercials at a conservation-friendly 35 degrees Fahrenheit. Contemporary ads take considerably less storage. "We have some film reels that are this big and have a one-minute commercial on them," Henry says, mimicking a circle the size of a large pizza. "And then we have a 500-gig hard drive with two complete presidential campaigns on it." That pocket-sized drive contains all of President Obama's 2008 and 2012 commercials and was sent to OU by chief campaign strategist David Axelrod. All told, 8,000 ads were collected from the 2012 elections.

Henry expects that number to double during the 2016 elections due to the social media revolution. Her team of one graduate research assistant and four OU students is on constant vigil to capture an unmatched onslaught of political commercials, sometimes within minutes of their posting. "We have collected ads in media that we've never collected before this year – Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook. There's politics all over Pinterest. You name an app, we're probably on it," she says, adding that many of the apps didn't even exist during the last presidential election.

Ironically, Kanter himself forecast the emergence of a new media paradigm. "I think [TV advertising] is going to play a very important role in political campaigning," he told C-SPAN in 1985, "until we have some form of communication which is even more effective in reaching masses of people in a short time."

Things have altered less than Kanter predicted. "Television is still the number-one player. No matter how you slice it, there's more money being spent on television than anyplace else," Henry says, reflecting that the core message of political advertising also has remained unchanged since the days of a little girl eating ice cream against the backdrop of looming atomic war.

"If it walks like a duck and talks like a duck, it's a political ad," she says. "I find it remarkable how little ads vary from year to year. It's 'taxes, seniors, education, the budget.' We're concerned about the same things: taking care of our children, educating them, and feeding our family."

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