Lynda L. Crist interview regarding Jefferson Davis, for documentary "Jefferson Davis: an American President" 2008, by Flying Chaucer Films
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PART 1

Speaker 1: Okay. Um, Linda, would you please state your name?

Lynda Crist: Lynda Crist.

Speaker 1: And your –

Other Speaker: Can you spell it please?

Lynda Crist: Oh, L-Y-N-D-A C-R-I-S-T.

Speaker 1: And your official title?

Lynda Crist: Editor, The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Rice University. I should add that. Rice will be, like that.

Speaker 1: And that's, that's what we see.

Lynda Crist: Mm hmm. Yeah, that'll be fine.

Speaker 1: Did you count it?

Other Speaker: Yes.

Speaker 1: Oh, I missed your counting.

Lynda Crist: I didn't count.

Speaker 1: She didn't count.

Other Speaker: **** what?

Speaker 1: Sound.

Lynda Crist: You asked me to count and I didn't count.

Speaker 1: She didn't –
Other Speaker: Sound fine now.

Lynda Crist: You were, you were –

Speaker 1: Okay.

Lynda Crist: – doing something with your battery or some such thing.

Other Speaker: No, I'm good.

Speaker 1: Okay. Good.

Lynda Crist: Okay. Everybody's ready. Huh, hanging on my –

Speaker 1: Okay.

Lynda Crist: – every word. I love it.

Speaker 1: ****. Davis wrote a letter, uh, to his fa, to his sister –

Other Speaker: Hold on a second –

Speaker 1: – about the death of his father.

Other Speaker: – hold on a second. Sorry. **** here.

Speaker 1: Ready?

Other Speaker: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Okay. Davis wrote a letter on August 2nd, 1824, to his sister about the death of his father. What we can learn about the relationship from this letter?

Lynda Crist: When Davis learned of his father's death he was away at school, a teenager who was away at school and of course he was the youngest of ten children so his father was already an old man when Davis was born, or at least old for that time. Davis really was not around him that many years and I think probably the death was a shock but not unanticipated, really. Of course anyone who loses a parent is devastated by such a thing but they were not particularly close. I think that's what I would say.

Speaker 1: What can we understand regarding the relationship between Joseph and Jefferson?

Lynda Crist: Joseph Davis was 20-plus years older than Jefferson and by the 1820s, when their father died, Joseph actually was the titular head of the family. He was quite prosperous. He took it upon himself to provide for his younger brothers and sisters as needed and of course was a
father figure to Jefferson for the rest of his life until Joseph died in 1870. Davis revered his older brother. He paid attention to what Joseph wished him to do. In fact, they thought alike in political terms and social terms and Davis was really quite devoted to him.

Other Speaker: Can we hold for a second?

Lynda Crist: Mm hmm.

Other Speaker: Question.

Speaker 1: Mm hmm.

Other Speaker: Do we want Lynda to ****?

Speaker 1: What were Jefferson Davis's feelings about his appointment to West Point?

Lynda Crist: When Davis learned about his appointment to West Point, he had not been involved in the actual decision to go to West Point. This again was part of Joseph Davis who had decided this was the best thing for him. He was very happy at Transylvania College in Lexington, Kentucky which is where he was when he found out that Joseph had engineered this for him and in the letter that he wrote about it he, he basically said, I like what I'm doing, I'm happy here with my friends, and I really don't want to go to New York and go to a military school, but if Joseph thinks that's the best thing for me then that's what I'll do. He's gone to some trouble to secure this appointment and naturally I'll go with what he thinks is best for me.

Other Speaker: Pause a second. Pause and break.

Lynda Crist: Mm hmm.

Other Speaker: Um, in a –

Speaker 1: I don't know if we had this elsewhere but I know we were talking over here. Would –

Lynda Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: – would you mention that he actually wanted to go to law school? I'm not sure anyone else has talked about that.

Lynda Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: Yet.

Lynda Crist: Oh when you get to that –

Other Speaker: Yeah.
Lynda Crist: – letter, the later letter, yeah.

Other Speaker: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Lynda Crist: Yes, ordering –

Speaker 1: But not, not –

Lynda Crist: – the law books and so forth –

Other Speaker: **** year later.

Lynda Crist: – that's when he's, that's the army letter. Yeah –

Other Speaker: Twenty years later.

Lynda Crist: – that's the 1829 letter.

Speaker 1: Speak?

Other Speaker: Yes.

Speaker 1: Okay. What were the, what were the, what was the relationship with his other siblings like?

Lynda Crist: Jefferson Davis was the youngest of ten children and I think was a rather spoiled youngest child. He was devoted to his sisters, particularly the two that were closest to him in age and I'm sure they had been very helpful in caregiving for him when he was young and had also lived at the family plantation where he grew up, uh –

Other Speaker: Hold a second. Gotta watch, uh, eye line. Be very careful looking towards Brad's direction –

Lynda Crist: Oh okay –

Other Speaker: – try and keep your –

Lynda Crist: – sorry.

Other Speaker: – try and keep your focus towards Wendi [Berman], yeah.

Lynda Crist: So I –
Lynda Crist: Jefferson Davis was the tenth of ten children and I think from the early documents you can see that he was quite spoiled. He was the adored youngest child, particularly close to the two sisters who were closest to him in age, who lived, of course, at the family home when he was growing up. He really didn't know his older brothers that well except for Joseph, who took him in hand in the 1820s. Both his, all three of his other brothers had died rather early in their lives, one in the '20s and two in the 1830s when Davis was away in the army. He particularly liked his sister Lucinda Stamps, who lived at the family homestead and continued to live there her whole life.

Lynda Crist: When Davis went to West Point in 1824, he really had not been around that many people from the North in his whole life, and he was armed with letters of introduction to southerners and those were the cadets who became his close friends. I think he found the cadets from the North and the West to be a very different breed of person than he was used to, and I think probably like all kids at college he joined up with a little clique of like-minded people from the same part of the country and they had a lotta things in common so naturally they palled around together. So I think he just was a little skittish I guess of, of people from, who seemed so different to him.

Lynda Crist: Sectionalism was part of the United States from the very start. The South was basically a rural economy and always had been. The North was moving into industry and cities. The South simply didn't have cities except for New Orleans. You could argue there were really no cities in the south until after the Civil War. They were an agrarian economy that sent their
trade through the marketplaces, the port cities, and they were not very much in the way of cities. They were really basically trading centers.

Speaker 1: What can we glean from the record of delinquencies of the corps of cadets regarding Davis's tenure at West Point?

Lynda Crist: Davis's record of delinquencies is quite long when he was a cadet at West Point. He was just about in the bottom third of his class as far as delinquencies are concerned. He was court-martialed a couple of times at West Point for infractions and a couple of times just barely escaped being expelled from West Point. His roommate was expelled from West Point. He was not the best-behaved and he was not the best of students, but I think most of his infractions we would regard as relatively minor, youthful pranks, and so forth. Nothing terribly serious or he wouldn't obviously have stayed to graduate. I love “spitting on the floor.” That's my favorite.

Speaker 1: ****.

Other Speaker: ****.

Speaker 1: No one does.

Lynda Crist: Yeah, or not attending –

Speaker 1: I know.

Lynda Crist: – not attending chapel, and some of his infractions were funny, I mean to us, but, of course, at a military school they were serious. I mean they were trying to inculcate discipline and subordination here but spitting on the floor, failing to attend chapel, hair too long. A lot of these things, parents of current college students would probably recognize as infractions, too, so it was, you know, just, it was a youthful misbehavior.

Other Speaker: Let's, if, if it, if possible compare say the delinquency record of Davis versus that of Lee.

Lynda Crist: Lee had none. Robert E. Lee had no demerits at West Point, for example. He was really a paragon, but that was incredibly unusual. That didn't happen again until the 20th century. Or late, maybe the late 19th – yeah, I think that's wrong, I think. I think Macarthur also did not have and he graduated before so I would say later in the 19th century but I think Lee may be one of two or three people at West Point who had no demerits.

Speaker 1: On June 30th, 1829, Davis wrote a letter from Fort Winnebago to his favorite sister, Lucinda, and did you wanna take a look at this one. Do you know –

Lynda Crist: Oh that's the wonderful –

Speaker 1: – what I'm talking about?
Lynda Crist: – long one.

Speaker 1: The very long one.

Lynda Crist: Yeah.

Speaker 1: That I am 22 –

Lynda Crist: Yes. “The same –

Speaker 1: – ****.

Lynda Crist: – obscure poor being,” something like that. On his 22\textsuperscript{nd}, no, 22\textsuperscript{nd} birthday? 21\textsuperscript{st} birthday? Depends on what year you use.

Other Speaker: It is 22\textsuperscript{nd}.

Lynda Crist: Yeah, early ’20s.

Other Speaker: ****.

Speaker 1: Yes.

Lynda Crist: On his birthday in the late 1820s he wrote to his favorite sister Lucinda a very reflective personal letter about his life as an, young army lieutenant on the western frontier and about his thoughts on what he would do in the future. I think it's very clear from that letter that he is just not sure that army life is for him. He'd been in the army basically for 5 years beginning with when he arrived at West Point, and I think he was finding life on the frontier very difficult. It was a very isolated existence. He didn't like the winter weather, naturally, and he's casting about for what he might do in the future. Being in the army was not much of a career at that point. There were no wars going on. Promotion was very slow. The pay was poor, but it was a job, it was a steady employment, and in the letter he mentions the possibility of going to law school, that he's ordered law books. Here again, we think he was probably emulating Jeffer, uh, Joseph Davis, his brother who was a lawyer, and being a lawyer was a profession that was looked up to in Mississippi. It was also a road to politics. Most politicians were lawyers in Mississippi.

Other Speaker: Can I ask a question?

Speaker 1: Sure.

Other Speaker: Do you think he had a desire to be a politician at that age?

Lynda Crist: I don't think Davis ever really thought of a career in politics until the 1840s and I think it was largely Joseph Davis's idea that he enter politics. They lived in a predominantly Whig county, Warren County, Mississippi. Joseph Davis was definitely a Democrat with a small
d and a capital D and I think I certainly influenced Jefferson Davis's political thinking and perhaps saw in Jefferson what he, Joseph, might like to have done himself, except that he was so tied down with his plantation and his family, and I think he really looked to Jefferson as being the exemplar of the family--being out there in public, winning fame, being a public figure. Davis was well-educated. He was well-spoken. He was young. He had his whole life ahead of him, so it seemed a rather obvious choice, I think, to Joseph, and I guess Jefferson came to see that it was a possibility for him, too, and he was interested in public affairs and in politics and government.

Speaker 1: Examining the tone of Davis regarding his career path, while we're on the subject, what can we understand about his early military career?

Lynda Crist: I think he went to West Point at Joseph's instigation and when you went to West Point, of course, you had to agree to be in the army for a certain amount of time, then as now. Many, many West Point graduates resigned their commissions after only a few years. They went into seminary--some of them did--many of them became engineers because, of course, that's the basic education you got at West Point was engineering and science. Very few really stayed in the army in the 1820s and '30s. The army was not a wonderful path to career advancement. There just weren't that many chances to advance quickly. It was steady. You were obviously provided room and board, but if you wanted to really shine, if you wanted to have a family and settle down, the army was definitely not the place for a young man.

Speaker 1: He writes about his dreams as a youth and that by age 22, believe it or not, they're not yet realized. I love that thought. Was Davis a dreamer before the death of Sarah Knox Taylor?

Lynda Crist: Davis probably was romantic. He even said himself in early letters that he was possessed of a melancholy disposition and I don't think that ever really changed his entire life. He was a private person who ended up being a very public person, and I think he always sought to guard his private life and his private feelings as much as possible. It also was the Victorian age, when men simply did not voice their feelings. I think he was a romantic. He really liked Romantic literature, quoted it often, and of course dreamed that life would be rosy for himself and whatever family came along. I think he really hoped that he would have the good life, as we all aspire to have.

Speaker 1: ****

Other Speaker: I do not have ****.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Other Speaker: I'm writing about a totally different subject.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Other Speaker: ****
Speaker 1: Okay. We see, uh, in Davis's life a pattern of distraction, being distracted by things that he could otherwise be doing. For instance, as a soldier he thinks about the law –

Lynda Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: – and as a politician he thinks about soldiering, as a president he thinks about being –

Lynda Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: – running out there and being the, uh, uh, a general. Was this pattern, when did this pattern surface?

Lynda Crist: When Davis went to West Point, I don't think he probably had a very good idea of what he was going to be doing with his life. His brother, of course, was a planter and a lawyer. I think he, I really don't know what he thought about what he would do after West Point, except that once he was there he was obviously in uniform, he was going to be in the army for a certain time and he did stay in the army until 1835, and the ‘30s were a particularly bad time for the army. The Congress was really anti-military and kept cutting, what essentially was cutting the army appropriations because there was no threat to the United States. There was, and they thought having a big standing army was a dangerous thing or it could be a coup, the generals could take over, we just don't need it basically. Davis went home after the army and became a planter like his brother and I think was a happy as a planter in Mississippi, but, there again, he had an extraordinary education for a planter and what do you do with all of this wonderful education that you've had both at West Point and in, in the army? So I think when the chance for politics came along, that's what he did. He never really enjoyed being a politician per se. I think he would much have preferred the role [of] statesman. He liked being in the Senate. He did not particularly want to be president. He knew how hard that would be, and when war came in 1861, he felt ready to strap on his sword and get his, on his horse and go out and fight another war as he had in Mexico. He felt he had the training, he had the experience. It was kind of an obvious choice to him, that the battlefield would be his sphere and not politics.

Speaker 1: On December 16, 1834, he wrote to Knox and there's a great deal of passion in the letter. I, I believe we only have one letter ****.

Lynda Crist: As far as I know it's just that one.

Speaker 1: Uh, he obviously had very deep feelings for Sarah. Would you consider, would you consider him, uh, you already answered this.

Other Speaker: Yeah.

Lynda Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: He was romantic. Sorry. Um, how does his relationship with Sarah compare and contrast emotionally with that relationship with Varina?
Lynda Crist: Jefferson Davis was 26 when he married the first time, to Sarah Knox Taylor. He was 37 when he married Varina. There's a big difference between being in your mid-20s and in your mid-30s, especially if by your mid-30s you have already lost a wife, you have lost several of your siblings, your parents or, at least, he had lost one parent and another was very elderly at that time. He was just a much more mature and serious person in the 1830s then he had been in the 1820s when life was spread out in front of him with all its possibilities. By the 1840s, he knew a lot of tragedy in his personal life. He knew that things did not always go as you plan, and I think he was just being a lot more careful. He was a widower for ten years, so he was obviously taking his time in deciding to be married again, go down a different path.

Speaker 1: Were his letters to Varina, uh, markedly different?

Lynda Crist: They were. His letters to Varina were quite different from the one letter we have to Sarah Knox Taylor. Varina [Howell] Davis was half his age, she was not, had not known, they had not known each other that long, and I think he was much more careful. He was just much more careful the second time around. It's hard to know whether he ever thought he would, would ever marry again, if he'd ever really seriously considered it. Once again, it’s Joseph E. Davis who engineers the match, is the matchmaker in all of this. He obviously had decided it was time for Jefferson Davis to have a wife and start his family and be equipped with a wife for the political arena.

Other Speaker: Why don't we have Lynda explain ****.

Other Speaker: Which one?

Other Speaker: How Joseph knew the Varina ****.

Speaker 1: Oh, the Howell family in Natchez.

Other Speaker: I want to throw something in before. Uh, during the period, approximately 10-year period between Knox's death and the marriage of Varina –

Lynda Crist: Mm hmm.

Other Speaker: – is, one is there anything that survives? Letters, anything of Davis's did he write, did he leave any record at that time and, and also, um, he, he threw himself into literature, into books and discussions with Joseph. Is there anything from that that, which you can speak on, that we can understand that period?

Lynda Crist: During the 10 years that Davis was a widower, he mainly devoted himself to getting his plantation going. Joseph had given him a certain acreage adjoining his own plantation, which Joseph always explained was part of their father's estate. That was Jefferson's share of their father's estate. Although he never transferred the title to Jefferson--Joseph still owned the land--Jefferson Davis always thought of Brierfield as his plantation. The two brothers were together constantly since they lived so near each other, and Davis in fact lived at Hurricane
plantation--Joseph's plantation--for most of that period before he could build a house of his own. He worked in the fields with his own slaves to clear Brierfield and to make it work as a functioning cotton plantation. The brothers spent a lot of time, according to both of their accounts, doing a lot of studying in Joseph's extensive library and a lot of that studying involved politics. Joseph was very keen on politics and Davis became quite an expert, Jefferson Davis became quite an expert himself. Joseph Davis, I'm sure, also influenced whatever other reading Jefferson Davis did. That was the only library for miles and miles around. Newspapers were infrequent, so I think they relied on each other and on discourse and probably on argument to learn more about each other and about government and politics and books in general, literature in general. And as far as we know Jefferson Davis never courted anyone else in the interval between Sarah Knox Taylor and Varina Howell.

Speaker 1: Now we're on the subject. Do you know how, um, can you tell us about the relationship between Jim Pembert, James, James Pemberton –?

Lynda Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: – and Davis?

Lynda Crist: James Pemberton was a slave who had been given to Davis when he went into the army as a slave, as his servant, his body servant, basically. This was not at all unusual. Most army officers had what we would now call an orderly, and it could be a black person or a white person. Even the northern-born officers had servants, either black or white. It was a very common thing to have someone who would help take care of your horse, watch after your uniforms, be sure you had food, take care of you when you were ill, and so forth. Because posts were very isolated, there's no such thing as a post-hospital or a PX or a mess tent. Every officer was, basically, responsible for his own room and board and keeping care of all his belongings. James Pemberton was older than Jefferson Davis. Davis respected him, I think, as a person. He, of course, was a slave. Davis did offer to manumit him when Davis himself left for the Mexican War, and James Pemberton refused to be liberated. He preferred to stay on what had become his home and to take care of Varina Davis and the other slaves who were there on the place. He was, basically, Jefferson Davis's overseer, a rather unusual arrangement to have a black overseer. But Davis trusted him implicitly, and they certainly knew each other very well and acted together as equals on many occasions.

Other Speaker: Could we do the quick estimation of the Howells?

Other Speaker: Yeah, yes, yes. Um, could you explain how Joseph engineered Davis and Varina's, um, meeting?

Lynda Crist: Joseph Davis and Varina Howell Davis's father, William Howell, had been business partners in Natchez, before Joseph Davis bought the land in Warren County and established his plantation. Joseph Davis knew the Howell family very well, of course, knew the children. And we imagine [he] admired Varina, their young, their eldest daughter, for her intellect and wit, which were quite legendary. Uh, once anyone knew her, that's, those were the usually, the two things they commented on. And I think he saw her as a good helpmate to his
younger brother. She was very outgoing, very vivacious, well-educated, and I think he saw her as a possible match, which, indeed, it turned out to be.

Speaker 1: In –

Other Speaker: Add, add to this one **** –

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Other Speaker: – said about how ****.

Other Speaker: Um, **** about that.

Speaker 1: Oh, that's right.

Other Speaker: So just add that into this question.

Speaker 1: That's right. Um, we were talking about this earlier.

Lynda Crist: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Um, in 1845-1846, Davis made several speeches as a congressman, a junior congressman, a freshman, –

Lynda Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: – in the House of Reps. Uh, how would you characterize these speeches and would you –?

Lynda Crist: I don't remember these speeches. Um, –

Speaker 1: Do you need to look at them? You, you said you made notes.

Lynda Crist: I did make a few notes, I think.

Other Speaker: ****

Other Speaker: **** yeah.

Speaker 1: I’ll ask the question again. What sort of accent, if any, did Jefferson Davis have?

Lynda Crist: Whether or not Jefferson Davis had a southern accent, no one will ever know because, of course, no one ever heard him, no one now alive. I think, if I were guessing, I would say he had a very generic, educated accent. He went to school in the North and in the border states. He was not always around southerners. He was not always around African-Americans. No one ever commented that his accent was particularly regional or particularly flat or
particularly bad. A lot of the newspaper reporters did comment on the accents of some of his colleagues in a not-very-complimentary way, so I think if he had had some kind of a regional accent that that would have turned up in some of the partisan press, particularly; they were always looking for something to criticize, and I think that would've been one thing they could've seized on to make, to ridicule or to make fun of him. But no one ever said that. Even the partisan press commented on the musical tone of his voice, how pleasant he was to listen to. Not necessarily always did they like what he was saying, the text, but they always said that he had a very nice speaking voice, and he certainly could give very long speeches that held people's attention. So I think his voice could not have been too grating or unpleasant.

Speaker 1: Now, should we ask –

Other Speaker: Yeah.

Lynda Crist: What did he think about abortion? I don’t know.

Speaker 1: No, no ****. In, in, in the compare and contrast to Lincoln's voice –

Other Speaker: No, no, no, that's coming up, that's coming up.

Speaker 1: Oh, okay.

Other Speaker: Yeah ****.

Speaker 1: All right. I didn’t recall. Uh, could you talk generally then about his, um, his several speeches that he made and, and, and his im, the impact he made as a freshman congressman?

Lynda Crist: When Davis was elected to Congress in 1845, he was already an accomplished speaker because he had been a presidential elector the year before and had toured around Mississippi, giving speeches at many different venues. So he was certainly well aware of how to make a speech, and he had plenty to say. As a freshman congressman, he did not make that many speeches, then as now. The freshman congressmen waited to see what their committee assignments would be and waited to see how the debate was going and deferred to their elders. Davis did speak in the 6 months that he was in the House on the issues of the day, which included the Oregon bill and the coming of the Mexican War. John Quincy Adams, the grand old man of the United States House of Representatives at that time, did make a comment that he was impressed with Davis as a speaker and as a congressman and predicted that he would make a mark in politics, which, of course, he did.

Speaker 1: In, uh, on July 28, 29th, 1846, Davis sent a letter to Varina. Um, he was heading for the Mexican War, and he wrote I asked that the season of our absence may be a season of reflection bearing fruits of soberness and utility and certainty of thought and action. How does this and the formality of the rest of, of the letter reflect the evolving relationship, uh, between Davis and Varina?
Lynda Crist: Jefferson Davis was almost 20 years older than Varina Howell. He had been married before. She had not. She went to Washington with him when he was a young congresswoman. She loved Washington. She really always was a city person, enjoyed the bustle and the excitement and the social life of being in Washington and loved being at the center of attention, which, of course, the congressmen and senators' wives were. She did not want him to accept the colonelcy of the First Mississippi Regiment for the Mexican War. She wrote to her mother that she had cried 'til her eyes were faded with tears. He, however, did accept the offer and did go to Mexico, and counseled her to be brave, basically, and to not fight about this because it was done, and that was his decision. He was older than, than she was, and I think he did take on the tone of a parent or just an older person with a younger person who had much to learn. And Varina was very feisty, she was very opinionated, and I think he found that a little difficult in the early years of their marriage. He suddenly found himself faced with more of an equal than he had planned. He thought she was going to be, I think, a lot more pliant than she turned out to be. She definitely had her own opinions, and they, obviously, were voiced.

Speaker 1: In another letter written the same year, he almost admonishes Varina, as you said, as a child.

Lynda Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: He comes very close to it in this letter.

Lynda Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: He doesn't just flat out do it. Was that tone typical during this part of their marriage?

Lynda Crist: In the Victorian era, which this was, marriages were not partnerships. We tend to lose sight of the fact in this century and even in the 20th century, women were expected to go with their husbands' wishes. Women did not have a lot of rights, legal or otherwise. And I, Davis, I'm sure, was following the pattern that he had observed in his own family probably and in other families of his friends, where the husband, basically, made the decisions. You might talk it over with your wife, but in the end, it was the husband who was going to decide what course was taken. Certainly, most of the time that was true. I think some wives, you know, had more of a say than others, obviously, as they do now. But that was his ideal.

Speaker 1: He wrote a letter to, Davis wrote a letter to – and here, here I am using pronouns – to Charles J. Searles on September –

Lynda Crist: I know what you're talking about.

Speaker 1: – 19, **** 1847, where he detailed the growing sectional division in the states, a division that he hoped to avoid. Uh, the war’s still a decade away, yet, Davis lists several of the grievances that would spark the conflict 10 years from then. What views and opinions are forming and solidify, solidifying in Davis's mind, uh, in the letter?
Lynda Crist: In the 1840s, sectionalism was a fact. There, it had been since the founding of the country. The Mexican War only served to point up the divisions: what to do with the territory we had won from Mexico, was it going to be slave, was it going to be free? Even admitting Texas in the 1840s turned out to be a big sectional controversy. We have all this new land. Well, okay, are we going to let slaves go in there or are we not? And virtually, every issue that came up before the Congress was freighted with the idea of slavery in one way or another. It was the North against the South, and I think everyone recognized that. It was unfortunate that that was the way the United States had operated almost since the start. There were the southern states, who were the planting states. There were the northern states, which were the farm states and the business states and, increasingly, the industrial states. And there was just not a lot of common ground.

Speaker 1: Could you tell us in greater detail Davis's feelings about slavery?

Lynda Crist: Davis was a slave-owner by the 1840s. He had grown up with slavery. Slavery was a fact of life for him. Slavery was provided for in the Constitution. Slavery was an American institution, not just a southern one. Northerners owned slaves, too. He knew that. I think he saw slavery as a beneficent institution, mainly from watching what went on around him as far as the treatment of slaves. His brother Joseph was known as a particularly tolerant and easy slave-owner, gave his slaves a lot of freedoms. And because of their isolated location, Davis didn't have the opportunity to observe other slave-owners who might've been more harsh and doctrinaire. I think he saw slave, slavery as a good institution for blacks. He, like most Americans of his time, believed blacks were inferior to whites and needed guidance and needed care and, perhaps, could not exist on their own or be independent. They never had been. No one really knew what that, what was going to happen. There weren't a lot of free blacks for him to observe anywhere he lived except, perhaps, in Washington; even there, a largely slaveholding city. So I think he saw slavery as a good thing for both sides. For the whites, of course, it provided ready labor, and for the blacks, it provided a very paternalistic—we're giving you room and board, all you have to do is work, go to work during the day, and we'll take care of everything--your medicine, your clothes, your food, all is provided.

Speaker 1: There were things that he said in the **** in the letter to Searles. Uh, he used the Bible.

Lynda Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: Do you remember ****? Give us, uh, – could we stop for a second? Can I see the quote?

Other Speaker: Camera has to be –

Other Speaker: Do you mind?

Speaker 1: Uh, there's a letter dated April 18th, 1848, that illustrates the conflict already arising in the early marriage between Davis and Varina. I'm sorry. Conflict between Varina and Joseph Davis. When would Davis –
Lynda Crist: Wow, Jefferson, too.

Speaker 1: What effect did this long-distance turmoil have on Davis when he away, and what was the source of the conflict?

Lynda Crist: When Davis went away to Mexico, Varina Davis was left behind on the plantation and also visiting her parents in Natches while he was away. In November of 1847, he learned that Varina and Joseph Davis, her brother-in-law, had had quite a big dispute over the building of the home for Jefferson and Varina. Joseph, of course, was in charge of all things going on at the plantation while Jefferson was away. Jefferson Davis believed that he and Varina had decided to provide a home for his widowed sister-in-law and her eight children. However, this did not suit Varina at all, and Davis, Jefferson Davis, eventually came home from the Mexican War to try to settle this terrible dispute between his beloved brother and his beloved wife. However, as usual, Joseph Davis won. The house was not built to accommodate two families, but it was definitely Jefferson's plan that Varina would pay attention to what Joseph had to say when he was away, and he did not appreciate being called home in the middle of the war to mediate this dispute between his wife and his brother. It was a terrible position to put him in. Both of them he loved very much and felt beholden to both of them for different reasons. And, of course, he wished that they would get along and manage to co-exist peacefully.

Speaker 1: Did this difficult relationship continue?

Lynda Crist: I think Varina Davis recognized how important Joseph Davis was in Jefferson's life. At the same time, she wished to be the first person in Jefferson Davis's life. She wished to say who was going to be living in their house and how things would be going between her and Jefferson and not have Joseph as a puppet-master on the side. And I think Varina and Joseph were both very strong-minded people, willing to speak their minds. Neither one was ready to give in to the other very easily. And Jefferson, unfortunately, was a pawn between it, also, very unfortunately, ended up in an estrangement between the brothers in the 1850s. And it also caused Jefferson Davis to tell Varina that he really wished she would act a little better and not be so disputatious with his brother and with everyone else, that he really wished she would not be so forthcoming with her opinions.

Other Speaker: ****. Um, just looking at this letter, **** –

Lynda Crist: The “shape up or ship out” letter.

Other Speaker: Yeah. **** he’s gonna be returning to Mississippi, and he says I did not stay home –

Lynda Crist: Right.

Other Speaker: – **** “without hearts there was no home.”

Lynda Crist: Mm hmm.
Other Speaker: Your words, you know –

Lynda Crist: I hope you'll read some of that letter, one of the best ones.

Other Speaker: **** “I will not answer your assaults or your insults.”

Lynda Crist: Mm hmm.

Other Speaker: Do any, any correspondence, does any correspondence exist from Varina, and is there, I mean, is this common for these battles between the two of them to go on the page as well as ……? And then if you could maybe talk about how this kind of – I mean, this, this is a full-on argument that's going on back and forth.

Lynda Crist: Right.

Other Speaker: And then these letters. Is she writing to him, and is it just gonna go back and forth? So if you could discuss that.

Lynda Crist: When Jefferson and Varina are apart, of course, they write letters, and that's the only chance we really have to know what they were talking about. When they're together, they could've fought like cats and dogs all the time, but we would never know that because, of course, they weren't writing. And no one else was witnessing this except, perhaps, the servants who would never talk or didn't leave records. She did, Varina did write to Jefferson. We have very few of her letters. We have really relatively few of Jefferson's to Varina during this early part of their marriage. And the few we have are very specific, that he did not feel she was being a proper wife to him, she was not providing the solace and comfort that he needed, particularly after the Mexican War. It's quite apparent from this because he left her in Mississippi when he went to Washington to be a senator. And I'm sure he knew how much she loved Washington, but he simply could not abide their constant turmoil. He had a job to do, and so he went to Washington on his own and left her in Mississippi to take care of the plantation and, perhaps, to consider what her future course might be or what their future course might be. I think, perhaps, in the 20th century, they might have divorced. We don't know. But in the 19th century, that was not at all a common thing. It would've been a devastating thing for his political career as well. So I think they agreed to live apart and just see how things would go once they got back together at the end of his senatorial term.

Speaker 1: How long did they live apart, and how did it manifest itself in his, uh, uh, malaria and his, uh, his illnesses. He was wracked with illnesses.

Lynda Crist: Mm hmm. Jefferson Davis really never was in robust health after he left the army. He had recurrences of malaria. He had terrible problems with his eyes. Like most 19th-century people, he had a lot of illnesses and not much way to treat them. But I'm not sure how much her presence or absence figured in that. He roomed in a boardinghouse in Washington, as did most congressmen and senators, very often without their wives, who were at home tending their families and children. I think he was so involved in his work in Washington that probably
he would've had little time for her in any case, especially in the early years in the Senate. So we don't really know how that would've influenced him one way or the other. It was simply the way it happened for them at that time. She did come back to Washington with him, of course, in the 1850s, and they lived together in Washington all through the secretary of war years and the later Senate periods, she was in Washington the entire time.

Speaker 1: In the letter to William R. Cannon, December 7, 1855, Davis wrote –

Other Speaker: Where are you? Where now?

Speaker 1: **** [question] 12.

Other Speaker: What about 10 and 11?

Speaker 1: I'm sorry. What about 10 and 11?. On page –

Other Speaker: Three, five, sorry.

Speaker 1: ****. Oh, my goodness, Haynes, yes. Thank you. Uh, Davis wrote from Brierfield on August 18th, 1849 in a letter, a long letter to Malcolm Haynes, an editor –

Lynda Crist: Is that the one I marked?

Speaker 1: Uh, yes. **** –

Lynda Crist: Glasses on.

Speaker 1: In a long letter that Davis wrote from Brierfield, uh, in 1849 to Malcolm D. Haynes, he elucidated his thoughts on slavery and states' rights. In it, he states, we rely on the Bible as authority for the establishment of slavery among men and on the Constitution for its recognition throughout the United States. What can we gather from Davis's writings and his speeches like the one in the Senate November 10, 1850 about his thoughts on these topics, and then how did they change in the course of the next several years?

Lynda Crist: In 1849 and 1850, the divisions over slavery were obvious to everyone, and everyone was taking sides. It was obviously the South against the North at this point. That's why we had the Compromise of 1850. But during the 1840, '49-50-51 period even, everyone focused on the Compromise measures and what might be done to save the Union. There was a real danger that South Carolina was going to secede in 1849 and '50. Davis was trying to present the southern viewpoint. When he wrote to Malcolm Haynes in 1849, he knew that his letter to Haynes would very likely appear in the newspaper. Malcolm Haynes was an editor. This was a very common way for politicians to give their views to a wider public. In fact, it was the only way was through the newspapers. So Davis tried to list things on which he would base his argument to retain slavery. One of them was the Bible, although he didn't use the biblical defense of slavery that often. The other much more common one for him was the United States Constitution and the United States way of government as it had existed since the founding era.
He believed that slavery was sanctioned by the Constitution. He believed the Constitution protected slavery and that the South was, therefore, fine to keep going the way they had always gone with slavery as the, as the way to get their produ, products to market. And he believed the North was being very radical, that they were going against what the founding era patriots had decided would be the way this country would be organized, and that they were essentially perverting the Constitution, that the South was standing by strict construction of the Constitution, and their way was the correct way.

Speaker 1: Did Joseph, did Joseph and Jefferson Davis ever write about the specifics of slave life on, uh, Hurricane and Brierfield ****?

Lynda Crist: Joseph and Jefferson wrote very rarely about slavery because I think their ideas were so in tune with each other that there was, that was really not necessary. Joseph Davis acted as the overseer in Jefferson Davis's absence. He was frequently on Brierfield, took care of Jefferson Davis's slaves as well as he took care of his own. He wrote about specific slaves if they needed medical treatment. He wrote about the crops on the two plantations and how things were going. But as far as any philosophical musings on is slavery right or wrong, no, we have nothing, and I think it's because they both thought alike, and there was no reason to philosophize about this on paper.

Speaker 1: **** slavery?

Other Speaker: No.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Lynda Crist: I'm sure you've got plenty of 'em, everybody.

Speaker 1: Can we go on? Oh, I know. Can you talk about if Jefferson, uh, Jefferson Davis, if his thoughts on slavery changed over the years, even after manumission [emancipation]?

Lynda Crist: Well, manumission was kind of –

Other Speaker: **** the question.

Lynda Crist: Yeah. Davis defended slavery as long as it existed. After slavery ceased to exist, he did not ever advocate going back to slave days. He realized that the issue had been decided. It had been decided by war, it had been decided in the Congress, laws were now in place that it would never exist again, and he certainly never advocated going back to slavery. He did worry about what would become of the recently freed African-Americans. He did not believe they were well-equipped for life on their own. He feared they were vulnerable to politicians of whatever stripe, that they would follow whatever prize they were, that was put in front of them; whether they were promised land or whether they were promised a job or whether they were promised something immediately for their votes. He did worry about their vulnerability and their lack of education and their lack of ability to make livings on their own. But he never
advocated going back to slavery. He certainly accepted the result of the war and the actions of Congress as the law of the land.

Other Speaker: Can I jump in on this?

Speaker 1: Yeah, definitely.

Other Speaker: Along those lines, what about much later in life, not so much the 1860s, but the 1880s? What was his view at that point of blacks, if, if you know?

Lynda Crist: By the, by the end of his life by the 18, by the late 1880s, of course, the United States was a reunited country, and he welcomed that. He had been very loathe to leave the Union in 1861. He was very glad when the days of Reconstruction were over, when the states had all been readmitted. He, of course, never was allowed to vote again, so he was essentially out of political life and never spoke very much about politics in an open way. But I think he was very glad to see that his beloved United States was going to survive and, indeed, prosper. I think he welcomed the future as holding great promise for everyone.

Speaker 1: ****

Other Speaker: Did you, did that make it in?

Other Speaker: I don't know if it made it in. We have it.

Other Speaker: ****?

Lynda Crist: Now, where was I? You’re in what part? I'm not sure.

Other Speaker: It, his, his views on, on African-American –

Speaker 1: Uh, he was no longer able to vote anyway is where you –

Lynda Crist: Right. No, he, he was disfranchised as a result of the war and never was able to vote and, in fact, tried to stay out of public affairs as much as possible, really did not like even speaking about politics in a public forum. He, of course, gave his views in private, but he asked that they remain private because, indeed, that's what he was, was a private citizen. He had no influence on public affairs anymore. And he was, I think in some ways, very relieved that the dissensions and the sectionalism of the past were behind us and that the United States was going forward as a united country because, of course, it would do much better as one country than it would've done as two. It was obvious. And that African-Americans were beginning to find their own place in society and culture and make their way. I'm sure that gratified him, too.

Speaker 1: In the following speech to the Senate, sorry, in the speech to the Senate on August 13th, 1850, Davis speaks very eloquently on the merits of the Union. **** Union.

Other Speaker: Right. ****
Speaker 1: Yeah, so, uh, if you could just talk a little bit about Davis's thoughts and feelings regarding unity of the United States.

Lynda Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: Uh, obviously, in 1850.

Lynda Crist: Yeah.

Speaker 1: So pre, pre-war.

Lynda Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: And his thoughts on the Constitution in greater detail if you could.

Lynda Crist: I don't know how much detail. Um, even during the war, Davis often referred to his devotion to the what he called “the old Union” at that point, he said that he had been educated by the Union, which he was, of course, at West Point, that he had served the Union both as a military man and as a young army officer and in the Mexican War, that he had served the Union in Washington as a congressman, as a senator, a secretary of war. He always described himself as a national Democrat, not a southern Democrat. And I think he always held a devotion for the Union, even the sight of the United States flag during the war often affected him emotionally because that was the flag to which he had sworn allegiance so many years earlier when he was at West Point. And I think he found the ties very, very difficult to break. He, of course, always revered the United States Constitution. The Confederate Constitution was modeled very, very closely on the United States Constitution. That was not an accident. The Confederate government was almost a mirror image of the United States government. Many of the same procedures, even the same forms, were used in the Confederate government. It was something everyone was familiar with and everyone felt comfortable with. He didn't go off and establish a whole new dictatorship or monarchy or any other form of government. This was the form of government that he loved and believed in, and he wanted to carry it forward.

Speaker 1: Now, let's do [question] 11 or 12?

Other Speaker: Twelve.

Lynda Crist: Way back there.

Speaker 1: Davis wrote in a letter dated December 7th, 1855, to William R. Cannon, the “panacea of 1850,” and I'm assuming this is the, uh, –

Lynda Crist: Compromise of 1850.

Speaker 1: ****.
Lynda Crist: Uh huh.

Speaker 1: “has already lost its efficacy, and the disease it was promised to check for all future time seems to have been rendered chronic by the treatment” [Papers of Jefferson Davis, 5:142]. What were Davis's thoughts regarding the various attempted compromises between the North and South?

Lynda Crist: During the 1850s, Davis was a very vocal spokesman for anything that would reconcile the two sections. While he certainly was a southerner and was seen as a southern spokesman, it was not his idea to establish a separate country in the 1850s. It was i, his idea to work out the differences, of course, hopefully, to bring the North around to his way of thinking. But he did participate in several compromise committees including the very last one in 1860 and '61, when everything seemed darkest. But he was willing to go to the very last minute to try to preserve the Union if it could be preserved. He was the very last person of the Mississippi delegation to leave Washington. He was physically ill over the prospect of what many saw as a coming war in January of 1861. He went very reluctantly leaving the Union and leaving his friends. He tried everything in the 1850s to try to work out a solution.

Speaker 1: And we have the, the historian from the U.S. Senate **** –

Lynda Crist: Mm hmm. Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: – talk about those last moments, so when he did leave.

Lynda Crist: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Do you know anything about that?

Lynda Crist: The final speech, the farewell speech?

Other Speaker: That's coming up.

Speaker 1: Oh.

Other Speaker: It's coming up

Speaker 1: Oh, that's right.

Lynda Crist: Oh, it is. Yeah. It is here, eventually here.

Speaker 1: Uh, –

Lynda Crist: Brett's falling asleep. We need an exciting question here.

Other Speaker: No, I'm fine.
Speaker 1: In his annual report — yeah, yeah ****. She covered everything to make sure. In his annual report to President Pierce at the end of 1856, Davis goes into great detail on the innovations of the War Department. What did Davis see as his greatest accomplishments during his tenure as secretary of war?

Lynda Crist: Jefferson Davis was probably the best secretary of war of the 19th century by education and by experience and by training. He was ideally suited to be secretary of war. It was not a job that he really wanted. His wartime, Mexican War-time friend, Franklin Pierce, really had to urge him to accept the War Department secretaryship. He did. He then threw himself into it full throttle. I think he saw his main accomplishments as the improvements he made in the standing army, increasing the army, increasing the pay of the army, trying to provide for the widows and orphans of soldiers, trying to provide a home for disabled and retired soldiers. He also was very keen to revamp the curriculum at West Point, to bring it into a much more professional school status than it had been. He sent the first military observers to a foreign war during his tenure. He had the routes to the Pacific surveyed by the army engineers for the coming transcontinental railroad that he foresaw as a great unifying force for the country. He pushed forward the chain of forts ever farther westward, to provide protection for the settlers who he hoped would go west and reclaim the country and use it for the United States, reclaimed from the Native Americans. He also was very interested in all the new technologies for armaments and ammunition, was quite keen to have every, the latest and greatest weapons for the army. He involved himself in the affairs of the Smithsonian Institution. He was a member of the American Academy for the Advancement of Sciences. He really was very forward-looking, looking to the future, trying to make the United States as strong as it could be. That was his job, and he was going to do it the best he could.

Speaker 1: What were Davis's greatest challenges at this time?

Lynda Crist: When he was secretary of war, I think he found his greatest challenge was the entrenched bureaucracy of the War Department. Many of the heads of bureaus had been in office for decades. Many of them also were of a different political persuasion. They were Whigs. Davis was a Democrat. There were a lot of fights when he tried to infringe on these old bureaucratic officers' territories, and he had several very public squabbles with general officers of the army. Winfield Scott was the general in chief at that time. He and Scott got along so poorly that Scott moved the army headquarters to New York, away from Washington, and was really very un, insubordinate to Jefferson Davis, who was his junior in age, his junior in experience, but who was effectively his boss. Scott didn't quite see it that way. He believed he was bigger than any secretary of war who came along, so that was a very unfortunate squabble that did not make either man look very good. It became very petty and quarrelsome, really very childish at times on both sides.

Speaker 1: Was Scott—I don’t remember--was Scott one of the people that Davis challenged to a duel in Washington?

Lynda Crist: No. Mm mm. No, no.

Speaker 1: Do you want to talk –
Lynda Crist: But he was a Whig and a Whig candidate for president.

Speaker 1: Would you deal with this because I don't think anyone's done this yet?

Lynda Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: Can you, uh, explain the differences between Whigs and Democrats in a nutshell?

Lynda Crist: In a nutshell. Hmm. Jefferson Davis was a Democrat his entire life. The major party opposed to the Democrats until the 1850s were the Whigs. The Democrats were essentially the strict construction and state rights thinkers. The Whigs were the strong central government thinkers. The Democrats of Davis's time were the descendants of the Republicans of Thomas Jefferson's time and saw themselves as Jefferson's followers, whereas, the Whigs saw themselves as more Alexander Hamilton and George Washington followers--strict construction versus more loose construction of the Constitution, state rights versus central government.

Speaker 1: Thank you. I think we need that in the statement. People don’t know the Whigs.

Lynda Crist: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Whigs, spelled with an H. Uh, by using the extant, uh, documentation, what can we learn about Davis? I know there's not much. Uh, what can we learn about Davis as a planter?

Lynda Crist:  Jefferson Davis was only a full-time planter for about 10 years of his life, really. He was away in Washington for so much of the time during the pre-war period. There are very few records remaining of plantation business affairs--only a few scattered receipts--so we really have no idea of the actual finances of plantation management--what was bought for the slaves, what was bought for the plantation, what the annual crop yield was. Davis was very prosperous as a planter, according to the census records. But as far as any year-to-year account records, there simply are none. We would assume that he followed a pattern that had been developed by Joseph Davis. He was a very kind master, according to all accounts, not just his own partisans, but in people who had no say, no stake, really, in what they said about his handling of his slaves. And even his slaves and ex-slaves, many of them remained friends their entire lives and remained in touch with him.

Speaker 1: Was he a successful businessman in general?

Lynda Crist: Jefferson Davis really never saw himself as a, as a businessman. And I think he regretted that, especially after the war when he tried to find employment and did engage in business. He did well as a planter, but, of course, that was not an option after the war. And I think he always hoped that he would go back to farming with ex-slaves and tenants, but that never really materialized.

Speaker 1: Okay.
PART 2

Other Speaker: Hold on a second. Wendi [Berman], let’s roll a couple of seconds here. [it's at the tape?]. Okay.

Speaker 1: In your estimation, was Brierfield a successful plantation?

Crist: It's very difficult to know whether Davis was a successful planter because so few records survive. The only thing we really have to go by is his standing in the community, which was quite high, the fact that he owned a lot of land, which also was an indicator of success, and from the census records, which tell us that he was indeed very prosperous. His brother Joseph was one of the ten largest landholders and slaveholders in Mississippi, so that gives you an idea of the stratum that he lived in and worked in.

Speaker 1: In the Senate, where Davis replies to William H. Seward. Could you talk to us about the significance?

Crist: When Davis replied to Seward in 1860, the whole world was watching, really, because they realized that Davis was a chief spokesman for the South and that Seward was a chief spokesman for the then still-new Republican party and the
North. We thought it was even more interesting because Jefferson Davis and Seward were very close personal friends. They were political enemies but the Davises and the Swards were very close on personal relationships. They socialized together. Seward was particularly fond of Varina Davis and they got along famously. So it's interesting on both levels, public and private. Davis’s main point in the speech itself for public consumption was to keep the territories open, in his viewpoint, open for slavery. Seward's point was that the territories should choose for themselves whether they wished to be slave or free.

Other Speaker: Can I interject for a second?

Speaker 1: Sure.

Other Speaker: Along the point of Seward and Davis being very good friends –

Crist: Mm hmm.

Other Speaker: – it's my understanding that, uh, Mr. Seward, though, was very harsh as it related to Jefferson Davis after the war.

Crist: Mm hmm, he was.

Other Speaker: Could you talk about that and what that must have done to Davis? I mean here's one of his closest friends.

Crist: The pre-war relationship between Seward and Jefferson Davis was a very strong one. They served in the Senate together and they were personal friends and
I think this even happens today, where senators are personally friendly to each other even though they're on opposite sides of the aisle, either from long service or family connections or just finding that they have a lot in common, a lot of things to like about each other. Uh, Davis, of course, cast his lot with the South and Seward even more wholeheartedly for the North and was very much identified with the Lincoln administration, and when Lincoln died, Seward took it upon himself to try to avenge his death, Lincoln's death, and avenge the nation's wounded heart, really, by charging that Davis was complicit in the Lincoln assassination, so, of course, they were not friends during or after the war, which is sad, but that did just happen in a lot of communities as well as on a more public stage.

Speaker 1: What is the significance of the speech, the May 8, 1860, speech, and the resolutions that Davis discusses therein?

Crist: Let's see here, oh, this is –

Speaker 1: Um, he's [written a?] letter to Robert Barnwell Rhett on November 10, 1860, uh, he seemed to be arguing against, uh, secession. What were Davis’s views on secession both in principal and in practice?

Crist: Davis believed that secession was a right under the Constitution, that any state had the right to secede from this compact of union that the states had entered voluntarily, that if they thought something was going wrong in the federal government that was not according to the Constitution, that they definitely had a right to withdraw. Naturally, the Union was stronger if all the states stayed in it, but he did believe that if a state had a real grievance and if the state legislature voted to leave, that the state could leave. He hoped that that would not happen.
He realized it probably would happen, especially after South Carolina voted to secede. When he wrote to Robert Barnwell Rhett in 1860, it's a case of writing to a very public person who also controlled a major newspaper. He knew that his views, if not used explicitly by Rhett, would certainly be reflected in the pages of the paper somehow.

Speaker 1: One moment, please, I’m sorry, could you name the [paper]?

Crist: Oh, yes. If he, when he wrote to Robert Barnwell Rhett, he was writing to not only a major political figure, but also the owner of the Charleston Mercury, a very influential southern paper that was widely read throughout the South and indeed throughout the country. So even though he might have said these are my private thoughts, he had to know that Rhett would use these views in whatever writing was written about Davis in the paper in the years to come, and indeed that is true. Rhett himself was a very rabid secessionist and Davis’s views did not accord with his editorial policies, so he never really gave much publicity to what Davis thought because he personally was on the side of the fire-eaters, the people who were ready to secede and form the new nation in 1860, right after Lincoln's election.

Speaker 1: In discussing Davis’s farewell address to the Senate –

Crist: Oh, oh, so sad.

Speaker 1: – uh, on January 21st, 1861 and the, uh, the emotion of the, of the audience and spectators –
Crist: Mm hmm. Jefferson Davis was the last to leave of the Mississippi delegation. He really delayed long after the secession vote was a sure thing. All the other congressmen and his fellow senator had already left for Mississippi. I don't know whether he was still hoping against hope that something would happen to change things, but he did linger in Washington longer. He was reluctant to leave, obviously dragging his feet. When he gave his farewell speech, it was a major event in Washington. The galleries were crowded long before the Senate convened. Everyone wanted to see him for what might be the last time, hear what he had to say. The speech was very emotional for everyone concerned, even his political enemies because I think they respected him as a person of principle. They realized that he was saying what he said because he truly believed it, that he was not looking to make a new career for himself in this new nation. He became emotional and I think a lot of the audience did, too. Even people whom he hadn't had much to do with ordinarily came up to him afterwards and embraced him and said their goodbyes, so it must have been quite an incredible scene, just laden with sad emotions on all sides, that the Union was really going to break up.

Other Speaker: Was there any evidence that Jefferson Davis and his southern compatriots had a sense that war was just months away? Anything from the writings?

Crist: Davis, himself, realized, probably better than most people, that war would be a devastating thing. He had been in war. He realized how far behind the South was in preparing for any kind of armed conflict, that most of the industrial might of the country was in the North. Most of the big arsenals and armories were in the North. He feared war, I believe. I think he knew that it would be very, very difficult, as he said “long and bloody.” That was a very, uh, favorite quotation of
his. And even when he wrote to Varina after he had been elected president, when he wrote to her before he was inaugurated in February of 1861, he commented on how the crowds were all very enthusiastic and his reception was just so warm and marvelous. But, he said, beyond this, “I see troubles and thorns innumerable.” He was a realist, and he, he knew that it was going to be a very difficult thing to set up a new country and make it independent.

Speaker 1: Would you please discuss for us the impact of Davis’s speeches made on that circuitous 700-mile trip that he made because of the problems with the southern railroad –

Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: – system, um, to Montgomery in February of 1861, the impact both on the, the southern people and on the very new president, almost new president himself.

Crist: When Davis learned he had been elected president, it was not a happy occasion for him. Varina said that he looked like, he, when he read the telegram, he looked like he was reading news that someone had died in their family. That's how shocked he was and not pleased, obviously, but once he had been chosen as the president, he took it at his duty to take that job and do the best he could with it. Because of the southern railroads, which were really infants as compared to the northern railroad system, he took a very long and strange route to get from his home in western Mississippi to Montgomery in central Alabama, including going up to Tennessee and back down. So there was plenty of chance for him to be seen along the way, which was a good thing, probably, for a lot of people to see what
their new president looked like and to hear what he had to say. And everyone was thrilled, I think probably, that something had actually happened after all these years of wrangling over North versus South, that something new was going to occur, that a new government was going to be set up. It was a very exciting new frontier and new opportunity, a chance to be a southern republic, and they were pleased, I think, with Davis’s election. He was a moderate. He was not one of the fire-eaters and he was not one who really dragged his feet. Once he realized it was a fact, he was willing to go with his state and be a general or whatever the Mississippi had asked of him.

Speaker 1: How was his inaugural address received?

Crist: I don't really know about that. No, I think, his inaugural address was very, again, like is own viewpoint, very moderate. He did not come out and say well, we have a new nation here and we're just going to fight the United States immediately and we're going to whip 'em in the field, and he didn't carry on like that at all. He just looked on it as a new opportunity to start a new nation, a nation founded on the Constitution that he hoped that the United States would let them depart in peace and just basically let them alone to find their own way.

Speaker 1: Did he think, even then, that there would be a long, bloody war?

Crist: I think he realized when he took the job of president of the Confederacy that it was going to be incredibly difficult and that the chances were not very good that the United States would stand for having another republic on soil that had been part of the United States. There were still United States installations of all sorts in the South, United States Army troops were stationed in the South, the United
States was paying for all of the postal system and all the other services that the central government provided, and I, I'm sure he realized they were not just going to say okay, fine, just go make your own little country and we'll be okay with that. He was, as I said, he was a realist. He knew that it was going to be quite difficult. I'm not sure that he knew the war was going to last 4 years or anything like that. No one really probably knew. But he also knew there were a lot of people who were very determined.

Speaker 1: By looking at the written communications between Davis and his generals, how do you rate Jefferson Davis as a commander in chief?

Crist: Jefferson Davis was a military man himself, as Lincoln was not. Jefferson Davis meddled far less in his generals' affairs than Lincoln did. Davis was a great believer in generals' discretion. He wrote that on more than one occasion. He realized that he was not in the field. He did not know everything that was happening in front of all the generals, who were scattered around the Confederacy, and he had to leave it to their discretion. They were trained military men themselves and he believed they should know and would know what to do, and he gave them the widest possible attitude in most cases to do as they saw fit.

Speaker 1: Was he an effective communicator and manager of his personnel?

Crist: Hm, that's hard to answer. Jefferson Davis was not a communicator in the same league with Lincoln.

Speaker 1: Okay.
Crist: He wasn't. He simply didn't have that gift of language that Lincoln had. He didn't really have the common touch that so many people found appealing about Lincoln. He was much more authoritative and much more aloof as a person. He did not tell jokes in his speeches, he did not try to win over the common man and, and wade into the crowd and shake hands and slap backs. That simply was not his style. Likewise, his generals, many of whom had also been trained at West Point, uh, were very authoritative, not very willing to compromise, not very happy if suggestions were made to them about what they should or shouldn't do, and I think they simply, a lot of his generals, were too much like him. I think they just couldn't really get along because they both, on both sides, there were, there were problems of compromise and flexibility.

Speaker 1: I'm dying to hear what you think about Joseph E., E. Johnston and, and the –

Crist: Those two particularly, uh, Joseph E. Johnston had a morbid jealousy of Robert E. Lee, despite the fact that they were both from Virginia and had been fellow students at West Point and had come up through the army. Lee was obviously the more talented of the two. Johnston was very jealous of this. Johnston shone as a staff officer, Lee as an officer in the field. Johnston and Davis had a lot of personality, um, elements in common and I think that just led to clashes almost from the start. Johnston was very jealous of his prerogatives, of his rights, of his rank, and was not really willing to subordinate that to the larger cause, and Davis found that just unacceptable.

Speaker 1: Could you characterize for us the tone of Davis’s address to the Confederate Congress on November 18th, 1861?
Crist: Davis’s first message to Congress in November of 1861 was like very many of the messages he had heard and read himself when he was in the United States government. In many ways, these messages to Congress had a set quality to them. There were things that you reported on, you tried to pay attention to each bureau of the cabinet to tell the state of the country, the state of the economy, much like the State of the Nation addresses are today, because these were widely printed in the newspapers. They would print the entire text of the president's message to congress so the whole country would know what we were about and how things were going, and in November of 1861, things were going pretty well for the Confederacy. I think he really saw that there was a chance. They had won some battles. The economy was okay. People were still volunteering for the army and things were going really pretty well; if they could enlist some European aid and get through the blockade, there's a possibility that the Confederacy would survive and flourish.

Speaker 1: How did –

Crist: I'm losing my voice. I'm not –

Speaker 1: – please –

Crist: – used to talking so much.

Speaker 1: – please take a break when you need to.

Crist: I'm sorry. What's happening –
Other Speaker: **** –

Crist: – over there?

Other Speaker: Just checking on making sure that –

Other Speaker: **** –

Other Speaker: – **** the lights –

Crist: Mm hmm.

Other Speaker: – sure that it doesn't shine.

Crist: Not too shiny?

Other Speaker: Yeah, that's –

Crist: Yeah.

Other Speaker: – where it's at.

Crist: Okay. I got a Kleenex handy here –

Other Speaker: Right.
Crist: – I can mop up.

Speaker 1: **** –

Other Speaker: There's somebody –

Other Speaker: No, there's **** –

Crist: There's somebody **** –

Other Speaker: **** right now.

Crist: Yeah.

Other Speaker: **** fine now.

Other Speaker: **** not tellin' him ****.

Speaker 1: How did Davis’s second inaugural address of February of ’62 differ from the first one about a year before in Montgomery?

Crist: His second inaugural in February of 1862, of course, happened almost a year after the war had begun so, of course, it was quite different from the first one, when there was no war and everything was still a great possibility for the Confederacy. Also by ’62, he was the permanent president. He was just not the president of a provisional government but this was a permanent arrangement, and they realized that they were going to have to fight for independence, so I think it's a
lot, much more sober assessment of how the Confederacy was and the obstacles that he saw in the future.

Speaker 1: He wrote, I think he wrote a series of letters to Varina in May and June of 1862. How did he, chara, please characterize th, the, their marriage during the beginning of the war.

Crist: By the beginning of the war, the Davises were parents of several young children. They had made their peace in their relationship apparently as far as we know. There are a few letters until 1862 because of course they were living together. In 1862 Varina and the children were sent to North Carolina because Richmond, the capital of the Confederacy, was being very seriously threatened by the Union army and many people, not just the president's family, left Richmond. Anyone who could leave tried to get out of there or get their families out of Richmond, lest they be captured. So we do have a nice series of letters between Jefferson and Varina Davis in the summer of 1862. It's very clear that they miss each other a lot. There's a lot of conversation back and forth about the children and how they're doing and the health of the children. Davis also writes to Varina about what's happening in Richmond--the threat to the capitol from the Union armies, how he feels the generals are doing. These are obviously things that she knew a lot about because he uses a kind of shorthand way referring to people and events, and it's, uh, just a wonderful heartwarming series of letters because they obviously are, are still in love with each other and very concerned about each other's well-being and being able to get back together and get the family all together in one place again.
Speaker 1: He also, Davis also received many letters. You could say he was effectively bombarded with letters at the beginning from people, uh, m, m, most of whom were strangers, uh, people, uh, who suggested, um –

Crist: Everything.

Speaker 1: – everything from how to fight the –

Crist: Yes ****

Speaker 1: – war, could, could you talk about that? I don't we had, um, uh, Profess, um m-

Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: – Professor Vandiver didn't discuss that yesterday.

Crist: It's hard to remember that for many Confederates, Davis was George Washington. He was the father of their country as Washington had been the father of his and if all else failed, you rode straight to the top and they did. They believed that Davis would respond and he did in many speeches say that he read letters from the people. He didn't always have time to respond to them. They often received a reply from another government official, usually the secretary of war, but people did write to him and say we're desperate out here, you know, we need some help, or the army is behaving badly, or my slaves are running away, what shall I do? Or here is a great idea for a new weapon that will vanquish the Yankee foe or, you know, we should have another day of prayer and fasting. We're not being careful
enough about our duties to the Almighty, or we think your cabinet is a mess and you should appoint this person and fire that person. A, a lot of people had a lot of really interesting ideas and they were, wanted Jefferson Davis to hear them. This was part of their contributions to building the new country. There are some wonderful letters. There's a wonderful letter from the pastor of my church here in Houston, who, on the first page, talks about, um, his devotion to God and, you know, how he's so glad that the Confederacy's a Christian nation and Jefferson Davis is a Christian gentleman and all, you know, he's very pleased by this. On the second page he says, I think we should go at 'em with broadaxes and swords, I mean, he is, like, the most bloodthirsty, we should get rid of these people, off our soil and out of our lives and get on, you know, with what, it is the funniest letter, just, I couldn't believe it when I saw it. It's so, yes, I'm a man of God, but we've got to get rid of these people.

Speaker 1: He also received, uh, Davis received in, uh, in, in addition to letters from strangers, uh, I guess ****. Yeah.

Crist: Everybody was his constituent.

Speaker 1: Uh, everyone was.

Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: Um, but the people seeking appointments, in fact, Jack Davis goes into great detail about this.

Crist: Mm hmm.
Speaker 1: Do you, do you recall any of those letters?

Crist: Because Jefferson Davis had been in the federal government for so long, and had been the dispenser of jobs and patronage when he, especially when he was secretary of war, many, he knew a lot of people in the old government, as they called it, and the old army, and many of those people were now southerners and expected him to remember them and supply them with employment, not only in the army, but in the bureaus in Richmond and this, of course, was even more pronounced as the war went on and the Confederacy began to shrink, and people went to Richmond truly desperate for some means of livelihood, men and women. Many women served in government jobs in Richmond, because their husbands and fathers and brothers were away in the army or had already died or were back on the farm, and they had to have some kind of income. There were lots of clerks' jobs occupied by women in Richmond. Many of them wrote straight to Jefferson Davis. Some of them wrote to Varina Davis and asked her to pass on the letters to him, which she did. We have several of those. But he was the boss of the whole outfit, and they just expected that he would provide for them if he possibly could.

Speaker 1: ****, um, you can't, uh, hang one second, 'cause I lost, I lost myself. Right?

Other Speaker: ****. If I could just –

Speaker 1: **** on a different –

Other Speaker: Just follow up.
Speaker 1: – tangent.

Other Speaker: Um, you've suggested that he read all these letters, often had them responded to –

Crist: Mm hmm.

Other Speaker: – by, by himself or others. Uh, criticism has been lodged against Mr. Davis because he was so –

Crist: Micromanager.

Other Speaker: – ****. Yeah, micromanager –

Speaker 1: Yes.

Other Speaker: – involved in the minutia –

Speaker 1: In the minutia.

Crist: Mm hmm.

Other Speaker: If you could address that, um, criticism and talk to us about, uh, that trait in his character and how that played out during the presidency, as evidenced in the papers [i.e., correspondence and speeches].
Crist: The charge is often made that Davis was a micromanager, and it's definitely a criticism when you are trying to manage a war, manage a country, manage the Congress, manage your own life, etc., and I think it's a fair charge. I think, increasingly, as the war went on, he began to see small issues as things that he could control. He could not control what was happening in Arkansas. He could not even control what was happening back home in Mississippi, but things that he could manage and make decisions on, I think he seized on those with great energy and enthusiasm, and perhaps with a little bit of a bureaucrat's heart. I mean, he had been a very effective secretary of war, handled a lot of paper, made a lot of decisions, and shuffled things around to the proper departments with great success, and I think he just didn't realize how much bigger a sphere he had to deal with, and so he did often involve himself in small matters that should not have taken so much of his time and attention, and wore down his health. He was conscientious. If you can say conscientious to a fault, I would say he was.

Speaker 1: In a letter from May 29, 1862, to Governor Joseph E. Brown of Georgia, Davis defends the increasing powers of the Confederate government. Can you discuss for us the increase in the federal power during the Confederacy and Davis’s thoughts on those increases, just regarding conscription –

Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: – income tax, suspension of habeas corpus, measure that were enacted –

Crist: Mm hmm.
Speaker 1: – within the Confederacy despite the state's rights platform?

Crist: Yeah.

Speaker 1: – uh, ****. Thank you.

Crist: Jefferson Davis and a lot of other people found it very difficult to keep to their strict state rights theories when confronted with war and nation-building. It was Davis’s idea that, yes, you should respect state rights, and it was, he tried to do that because he had been doing that all his public career, but it was also his thought that while these states, which have joined together voluntarily, are threatened by a common enemy, that those states should be willing to work together for a common goal of independence, and basically whatever it takes to get to that goal, the states should be willing to do their part, whether it was by enforcing conscription, which no one was really happy with, but there was no other way. Volunteering had dried up. Whether it was having martial law, which occasionally even the governors requested that he establish, because things got out of hand, or control of things that the states were used to controlling themselves. There had to be a central government when you were involved in such a mighty effort to be independent.

Speaker 1: ****, wasn't there, I recall reading there was martial law in Richmond?

Crist: Yes.

Speaker 1: Yes.
Crist: That was, Davis’s goal was to win independence, and he was going to do that by whatever means it took. He hoped not to trample on individual rights or state rights, but if it was a temporary expedient to get to the ultimate goal, then he was willing to do that, and he thought other governors, legislators, regular people should be able to see that.

Speaker 1: Because we just discussed Brown, I, I just think **** talk about fire-eaters in general. You, you did –

Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: – talk about them, and that's probably coming up, and I figured –

Crist: Yeah.

Speaker 1: – this is now the good time to –

Other Speaker: Actually, let me just follow it directly –

Speaker 1: Sure.

Other Speaker: – with this point. Was there any indication in any of Davis’s writings that at the end of the conflict, that there would be a return to, uh, a more states' rights approach, that there would be a, a return to the states of being empowered with all these, uh, income taxes and all that would be gone?
Crist: I don't remember anything specific about Davis’s ideas of what the Confederacy would look like after the war, but I think it's fair to expect that he would think it would be a much more state rights-friendly place, that the central government would only do the very necessary things, such as making war and having treaties and seeing to a national transportation system and delivering the mail and all the things that the central government had been doing before. It was just really extreme measures were called for in wartime.

Other Speaker: ****.

Speaker 1: Okay. Now, if you could ****, the, but the fire-eaters –

Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: – and including Joseph Brown, um, uh, the next question actually, just, is, was Davis successful at managing, um, disparate southern leaders and groups as the Confederate president? A good question.

Crist: Hmm. Jefferson Davis was not very good about his relations with Congress. I think he really regarded Congress as a second-rate bunch of talent, that he thought most of the talent was in the field, and some arguments can be made for this. Congress, for its part, never really coalesced into political parties. There were some pro-Davis people and there were some anti-Davis people, and people came and went. There was a lot of turnover in the Congresses during the war, so Davis didn't really feel he had to mollify Congress that much. He mainly got what he wanted from Congress, for the most part. He didn't use the veto power very much at all, although he did have a line [item] veto, which Lincoln never had and
wished he had. Um, and by the end of the war, Davis, especially, regarded Congress as pretty superfluous to the effort.

Speaker 1: Looking at his letters and speeches, do we see a man successful leading the new country?

Crist: Jefferson Davis did as well as I think anyone could possibly have done, considering the slim resources he had to start with and the tremendous difficulties of being so isolated by both Union armies, Union territory, and the blockade. The South was really thrown upon its own resources, for the most part. There was not that much that got through the blockade or got across the border in Mexico in the way of supplies. The railroad system was just terrible before the war, and it certainly didn't improve much during the war. Communication was very, very difficult in wartime. I think he really did the best with what he had to work with, and he certainly labored heart and soul for 4 years.

Speaker 1: Do you think that he was, that Davis was constantly under siege from his detractors? You said there were anti-Davis camps, pro-Davis camps. Um –

Crist: Davis was always criticized in the newspapers. There were always people who didn't agree with what he was doing. There were several anti-Davis newspapers in Richmond, in fact, but he made it part of his policy simply not to answer criticism. He thought that would be endless if he, they said, "You did this," and he said, "I did not," and then they said, "Oh, yes, you did," and he said, "Oh, no, I didn't." He had a war to run and a government to run, and he thought that people were entitled to their opinions. They owned the newspapers. They could say what they want, but he never had a government newspaper. People urged him
to have one, try to have an organ that spoke for his government, but he said, "No. The press is free and they can say what they want, as well as I can say what I want," and so he never stooped to trading barbs back and forth.

Speaker 1: Interesting. I read in Davis’s, Jack Davis’s book [Look Away! A History of the Confederate States of America (2002)], that he did, as you say, stoop –

Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: – in this case. He did have, I believe it was William Preston, his assistant, uh, **** Albert Sidney Johnston.

Crist: Oh, William Preston Johnston.

Speaker 1: Yes. William Preston, Preston Johnston had him out, and would often edit –

Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: – the letters that he would have written, uh, have Johnston write in, uh, in defense –

Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: – of the government.
Crist: Oh, yes. Members of Davis's administration did write to the newspapers. There's no doubt about that. Judah Benjamin wrote very frequently for one of the Richmond papers, and therefore was espousing the administration line, but they were not signed editorials, for example. They would just be contributions from “anonymous” or “Mr. X” or “a member of the government,” you know, the unattributed source that we're all so familiar with, or an import[ant], “an official who doesn't wish to be identified” kind of thing. But, yes, members of Davis’s administration, and indeed, his, his, uh, official family, his aides, did write for the newspapers. John Taylor Wood was another one who wrote for the papers. So Davis was well aware of the value of public opinion.

Other Speaker: Do you believe this was an error for him not to engage the press? Did it hurt his administration? Did it hurt the war effort for his relations?

Crist: I wouldn't say it was an error not to engage in trading insults back and forth. In fact, it probably made him look a little more dignified and statesmanlike, rather than getting down in the gutter and duking it out with the editors and the reporters, and there were people who kept diaries during the war who said the same thing, that they really thought he had made the wise choice not to get down into the common marketplace and deal with people who were saying whatever, you know, whatever their background was, they were saying whatever they thought, much of which was without foundation, but it was a, really, a lose-lose situation for him if he had gone that route, I think.

Speaker 1: Um, November 26, 1862, Jefferson Davis sends a letter to multiple Confederate governors appealing for continued support.
Crist: Nothing happened there. I went back and looked that up. I mean, that letter, I don't really remember why he sent that letter, but no, there was really no official response from the governors. I think it was the letter to the governors in 1862, I believe was sent after a governors’ conference. The governors occasionally got together and talked about their common problems and hopes, and so forth, and usually presented some resolutions to the central government about which what they wished the government would do for them, but when Davis wrote in '62, he was mainly asking them to support conscription and support the war effort. I don't think he really expected each governor to reply back and say, "Yes, this is what I'm doing, and this is what Governor Brown is not doing, or Governor Smith is doing." I think that was just a, kind of a PR gesture on his part to say, "Yes, we should all be fighting on the same side."

Speaker 1: How did Jefferson Davis come up, 1862, in his address in Jackson, Mississippi, on December, uh, 26th of that year?

Crist: Davis went home to Mississippi in 1862. It was the last time he would be in Mississippi until after he was released from prison in '67. He was back among his friends, his original constituents, the people who had sent him to Congress and to the Senate. He was very melancholy, because he realized the war was a serious business. A lot of his friends had already died. A lot of the relatives and friends of his audience had died in the war or were far away and wouldn't be home for a long, long time. So, it's a, in one ways it, it was a, a chance for him to say, "Let's stick together, and we'll win, and we'll fight, and don't worry," and on the other, I think everyone realized that it was going to be a very serious thing, that it was tragic for so many families and so many people that he knew who had already lost their possessions and their slaves had run away, and it just was not a happy time for the
Confederacy. It was difficult for him to get to Mississippi in 1862, and people said he shouldn't have gone. It was very close to the Union lines, but I think he regarded it as a show of faith on his part, and also a chance to thank his friends at home for supporting him and supporting the war effort.

Speaker 1: What is the significance of the Missionary Ridge speech, uh, in October –

Other Speaker: Okay, you forgot ****.

Speaker 1: I'm sorry. This, Richmond speech –

Crist: Oh.

Speaker 1: – Richmond speech in 1863.

Crist: Yep. Most of his speeches in Richmond were talks that he knew would be reported in the newspapers. There were four, there were four or five newspapers in Richmond at the time, so most of those speeches were sugar-coated, I would say. "We're doing great," you know. "The fight is on. We have had a few reverses, but know if we stick together, we can prevail," and so they were, they were definitely for public consumption, not just at the time, but for later, because he realized that his remarks would be reported North and South, and he wanted to make sure that the North also know that they had the will to stick it out and that things were going okay.

Speaker 1: And about the Missionary Ridge speech?
Crist: I don't remember that speech. What did he say then?

Speaker 1: **** 1863.

Crist: Okay, is that in here? Hmm.

Speaker 1: ****.

Other Speaker: ****.

Crist: Mm hmm. In late 1863 things were not going well at all for the Confederacy. That was after Vicksburg and after Gettysburg, and after Missionary Ridge, and the Army of Tennessee was in terrible disarray. People were very, the generals were very unhappy with Braxton Bragg, and Jefferson Davis knew that. So, the speech that he made when he was visiting the army was really a rabble-rousing speech, where he really tried to demonize the North, to point up all the outrages that had been inflicted upon southern citizens by northern armies, and to really be sure that people knew the North was the enemy, hoping to steel their resolve to continue. It was a very hard time for the Confederacy, which, of course, got harder in the year and a half to come.

Speaker 1: In the letter that Davis wrote to, to Governor Zebulon B. Vance on Jan, January 8th, 1864, he wrote, "If then proposals cannot be made through envoys, because the enemy would not receive them, how is it possible to communicate our desire for peace?" Please describe Davis’s diplomatic effort to end the war.
Crist: There were several chances to end the war during the war. Several peace delegations got together. They were unofficial peace emissaries sent by both sides, some from the North to Davis, some from the South to Lincoln, but Lincoln really refused to treat with anyone except the government of the Confederacy, that is, the very highest level, and Jefferson Davis did likewise. He was very willing to meet with the emissaries and explain the southern position, but he was not willing to negotiate for peace, and, of course, the top point of his list of negotiating ideas was that the South had to be independent. Well, the top point on Lincoln's list was that the Union be reunited, and that never changed throughout the war. Even the very last peace efforts in February of 1865, the emissaries met. Lincoln met with Vice President Stephens, whom he had known before the war. Stephens had been a Whig, as had Lincoln, and I think Jefferson Davis hoped that their pre-war acquaintance would serve well in the negotiating talks, but Lincoln would not give way and Davis would not give way. Davis would only talk about two countries; Lincoln would only talk about one country.

Speaker 1: Speaking of the VP, would you characterize their relationship, uh, and the demise of, of Davis and Stephens?

Crist: Jefferson Davis and Alexander Stephens were never friends. They had been on opposite sides of the political divide before the war. They were totally different personalities. Davis, I think, believed that Stephens, who was well-regarded as a very keen political thinker and writer, would be a good support for him as vice president. Stephens was never really happy in that role. He stayed away from Richmond for long, long periods. The vice presidency was not much of a job, and he didn't play much of a role in the government at all except to criticize from afar,
which Davis really found insupportable. Since he was part of the administration he really should have been heart and soul with Davis, and he really was not.

Speaker 1: Did Stephens join the, um, the fire-eating camp against him?

Crist: Alexander Stephens was not really a fire-eater before the war. He was rather moderate as well, but he came from a state that was full of fire-eaters, like Joseph E. Brown and like Howell Cobb, and he was friends with a lot of fire-eaters. The Georgia delegation was a very, very strong delegation in the U.S. Congress and in the Confederacy. Georgia politicians were very well-regarded and very strong personalities, and Stephens was identified with them.

Speaker 1: ****.

Other Speaker: There's two more questions.

Speaker 1: Yeah, I know. I'm just seeing where I am, because I went off on something else.

Other Speaker: Okay.

Speaker 1: Um, I think we've already done the –

Other Speaker: ****.
Speaker 1: Oh, here we are. Thanks. What, if any, correspondence went back and forth between, uh, the Confederate government and the Union, uh, with regard to ending the war, uh, peace nego, negotiations?

Crist: I'm trying to think. Let me see. Jefferson Davis wrote once to Lincoln, but it was not replied to. He sent delegations to Wa, uh, a delegation to Washington in 1863. The delegation was not received by Lincoln. It was turned away, I think, before it even got to the White House. So, there really is no direct communication between Lincoln and Davis at all. There are no letters between them, except for the one letter that Davis wrote to Lincoln, which was never answered [three letters to Lincoln, dated Feb. 27 and July 6, 1861, and July 2, 1863].

Other Speaker: Is there any evidence in the papers that they ever met?

Crist: No. They never met. No.

Other Speaker: Would you say that –

Crist: Uh, Davis and Lincoln were in Washington very briefly for maybe a year, when Lincoln was in the House and Davis was in the Senate. Davis was a very senior Democratic party functionary by that point. Lincoln was a freshman congressman from Illinois. It was very, very unlikely that they would have socialized together. They could have met somewhere in the halls of Congress, I guess, and been introduced to each other, but there is no evidence that they knew each other at all, ever.
Speaker 1: In your opinion, how did Davis perform as a diplomat for the CSA, both on the Continent and abroad?

Crist: The Confederacy always hoped for recognition from Europe, and sent ambassadors – well, they were emissaries, they were not really ambassadors – to England and France and Belgium and a few other countries, but most countries were not willing to recognize the Confederacy because of slavery. A lot of countries had a vested interest in keeping the war going. They would very much like to have seen both countries destroy themselves, the United States and the Confederacy, so they could then step in. France was already willing to do that, sending Maximilian to Mexico. Great Britain, of course, was, would be quite happy [if] the United States divided and they, too, could jump back in and have another sphere of influence. So recognition was just really a vain hope. It, uh, there were a few politicians who spoke for it on the Continent and in England, but it just never got very far.

Speaker 1: In his message to the Confederate Congress on May 2nd –

Other Speaker: ****.

Crist: And the emissaries were inept, too.

Speaker 1: Are you willing to say that?

Crist: No. Those poor guys. They were doing the best they could.
Speaker 1: Can you tell me something about Slidell and Mason? Uh, do, do you remember ****?.

Crist: I'm trying to remember the Trent Affair. The Trent affair. Let me see. How was that? Play back in one second, let me think.

Other Speaker: I think it was not 1862. I think it was January, December or January of 1861 ****.

Crist: Yeah, '61. It would be in '61. Uh –

Other Speaker: They were trying to ****.

Crist: I can't remember all the details.

Speaker 1: ****.

Crist: Yeah.

Speaker 1: ****.

Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: ****. That's okay.

Crist: Yeah.
Speaker 1: We've already got a couple folks talking about it.

Crist: There you go. Trent affair. Not very interesting. Much ado about very little.

Speaker 1: Davis wrote in a message to the Confederate Congress on May 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 1864, "In the meantime, it is enough for us to know that every avenue of negotiation is closed against us, that our enemy is making renewed and strenuous efforts for our destruction." How did the Union deal diplomatically with the – I think we already discussed this.

Crist: Mm hmm.

Other Speaker: Right.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Other Speaker: But I, I would say –

Speaker 1: It was –

Other Speaker: Um, no, uh, we covered it.

Speaker 1: No, uh, we covered it.

Other Speaker: Mm hmm.
Speaker 1: Let me just make sure that we get the next one. One moment. Hold, please.

Other Speaker: ****, get ****.

Speaker 1: ****. In the latter part of 1864, Davis made speeches in Macon, Georgia, Montgomery, Alabama, Augusta, Georgia, and Columbia, South Carolina. They were attempts to rally the people behind the cause, um, that he said in his speech in Macon, was not lost.

Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: How were these speeches received?

Crist: The 1864 speaking tour was really his last speaking tour of any length in the Confederacy. After that, he was really in Richmond the rest of the war. It was an attempt to rally support and rally the people, who were, by then, pretty tired of war, and it was, I think, kind of obvious for everyone that the war was not going well and that maybe the end was in sight, and in one of his speeches, Davis said something, like, "One third of the army is absent without leave," or something like that, which a lot of his critics pounced on and said, "Oh, you never should have said that. The North will now know that we're weak," and, and so forth. There was a lot of controversy over some of those statements, but, they were, in fact, true. The, the army was just melting away by desertion or by failure to reappear when they should reappear, coming back a month late or something. People were in really dire straits at home, and the soldiers were getting letters from their families saying, "We've got to have some help here. We can't feed ourselves. We
have no way to buy anything, Confederate money is useless, You need to come home." So, a lot of soldiers did desert in the last 6 or 7 months of the war. It was a terrible problem.

Speaker 1: Along the same lines of desertion for good causes, there was, there was a, charming letter by a woman from South Carolina, and I for, forget her name, but she was not illiterate, but she had a huge heart. Um, I mean, she was not literate –

Crist: Yeah.

Speaker 1: but she had a huge heart. **** read this letter. She didn't know how to spell very well –

Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: and she appealed straight to the president, uh, President Davis, she, she –do you recall this? -- to please let her, whatever his name is, her soldier come home –

Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: at least to marry her –

Crist: Right.

Speaker 1: and then she will –
Crist: And then she would send him back.

Speaker 1: – send him right back.

Crist: A lot of women wrote to Davis, and said that if he would only let their husbands or brothers or fathers or nephews come home and get them through the planting season, that the women would send him back, they would send their menfolk back to the war if he would just allow them to have leave and come home. Well, of course, Davis didn't have much say on who got leave from the army, but the generals, for the most part, could not do that. They couldn't allow a whole regiment from South Carolina to go home and plant the crops, or they couldn't allow a whole company from Texas to leave. It would take months for them to get home and get back, so it just was an impossible situation. Davis was hearing these heartrending pleas from all over the Confederacy, but he, in fact, had very little control over what happened to soldiers' lives. Their, their lives were in the hands of their commanders and the generals in the field.

Speaker 1: And despite this being the Victorian age in general, Davis did have a soft spot for women, did he not?

Crist: Jefferson Davis really had a soft spot for soldiers, and I think, from his own experiences as a cadet at West Point, he was very much inclined to be lenient. Um, this was true during his secretary of war period and court-martials and so forth. He was more than willing to give someone a second chance. During the war, he was very often willing to reverse a death sentence for someone who had deserted, saying, "Let's just give him one more chance, and I know he'll be a good soldier."
Well, Robert E. Lee found this unpalatable. I mean, he simply could not stand being reversed, because he thought it was so subversive of discipline in the army. If everyone appealed to the president, and the president reversed every decision of every court-martial, where would his army be? So, Davis did have a soft heart, I would say, but he very often wasn't the last word, so ….

Speaker 1: Compare and contrast the oratory of Davis and Lincoln.

Crist: Didn't we already go over this?

Other Speaker: We did that one.

Crist: I think we did this.

Speaker 1: We did. We did?

Other Speaker: ****.

Crist: Yes, we did.

Speaker 1: ****.

Crist: Yes.

Speaker 1: ****.

Other Speaker: The second part.
Crist: Yeah.

Speaker 1: We did.

Crist: We did.

Speaker 1: Uh, why, why do many Lincoln quotes and speeches survive as easily quotable, palatable, for, um, Americans of any age –

Other Speaker: ****.

Speaker 1: – uh, ****.

Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: We did this, too?

Crist: I think so. Yeah, Lincoln's speaking style was just very different from Davis’s. It was much more folksy and down to earth and pithy and quotable, and he loved to tell a good story. He was a wonderful story-teller himself, loved a good joke, and could often just repel criticism by, of himself and others, by telling a, a story, either, on, he liked to make fun of himself, even, which Davis would never have done. Davis was just a much more dignified person who really understood that being in public life was something quite different from being a country lawyer.
Crist: Since 1861, Davis had been receiving letters suggesting the use of slaves in the army. Some letters suggested that slaves be enlisted as soldiers.

Other Speaker: Uh, **** start that again and watch the –

Crist: Oh, yeah, I'm sorry –

Other Speaker: – ****.

Crist: Sorry. Since the beginning of the war, Davis had received letters suggesting the use of slaves in the army, or for government service of whatever kind, use on the railroads, or use in the government bureaus. It was obviously a big manpower resource that the Confederacy was not taking full advantage of, except for agricultural use. In November 1864, Davis proposed formally that slaves be used as laborers in the army, thus releasing teamsters, cooks, laundry people, ordnance workers, people who carried the ammunition to the front and so forth, using slaves for those jobs, thus releasing men for the front lines to pick up a musket and go to
the battlefield. By February of 1865, it became clear that that was not going to do the job, either, that the shortage was so severe that he suggested enlisting slaves as soldiers. This had always been a very controversial point since the very start of the war. Many people believed that slaves were property, that slaves were not people. Many people thought that slaves should not be given a weapon, that the slaves could then join together and turn against their white former masters or turn against all whites. They believed that the slaves, if sent to the front lines, would run away immediately when they saw how close they were to the Union army; they would just desert, and it, it really put to the trial the whole basis of southern society, where slavery was an institution, and if you destroyed slavery by making them almost equal with whites, and even manumitting them if they served in the army, then the whole reason for going to war was, was lost, that you couldn't turn your back on the whole reason that we left the United States in the first place, which was to preserve our way of life, and that meant keeping slavery in place as an institution.

Speaker 1: Would you discuss ****?

Crist: No, I'm okay.

Speaker 1: Okay. Would you discuss Jim Limber, and are there any writings, uh, from Davis and Varina about Jim Limber, and why they adopted him, or was this just part and parcel of their character?

Crist: Jim Limber was a young black child. According to Varina, they had seen him in Richmond being abused by his caretaker, guardian, that Davis had rescued the child and had procured his free papers from the Richmond city government.
Unfortunately, those records don't exist anymore, but in any case, the child was brought to live with the Davis family. He was about the same age as one of the Davis children. He lived in the mansion with the children, played in the nursery with them, was taken with the Davises when they left Richmond, and he is mentioned in several letters. When the Davises were captured, they turned him over to Rufus Saxton, who had been a friend of theirs, who was a general in the Union army in Savannah, and they turned the boy over to General Saxton for safe, for safety, really, because obviously he couldn't go with them to prison, and whatever was going to happen to them, they had no idea. So, it was a very tearful scene, apparently, when this child was torn from the family he had lived with for a couple of years, and I'm sure felt very safe and secure with, when he was turned over to the Union general. The general sent him to school in South Carolina, and then in Massachusetts, and unfortunately, the record goes blank at that point. No one really knows what happened to Jim Limber after the war.

Speaker 1: So, Richmond fell, and Davis temporarily established a government in Danville, Virginia. Uh, he sent out a letter addressed to the people of the CSA on April 4th, 1865. What was his plan to keep the Confederacy alive at that late stage?

Crist: In April 1865, early April, after the Davises had fled Richmond – all the Confederate government had fled Richmond – they established a temporary headquarters in Danville and tried to set up what government offices still remained. They still had a lot of Confederate records with them, and a lot of the Confederate personnel and cabinet members and so forth were still all traveling together, and I, they were reluctant to leave Virginia. That was, they really felt as if they left Virginia, they basically signaled that the war was over, because everybody began scattering, and indeed that was true. After they left Virginia, the various cabinet
members scattered to their homes, and everyone was saving what they could and saving themselves. Davis’s proclamation, I think, was intended to reassure people that the government was still together, and that they would still try to maintain a government somewhere, assuming they could escape from the advancing Union army coming at them from both directions by that time.

Speaker 1: What did he mean when he, he talks about a new phase of the struggle?

Crist: A lot of people think that the “new phase in the struggle” phrase from, uh, his proclamation meant that he was willing to undertake guerrilla warfare. I personally don't think that is true. I think neither he nor Lee, who were both educated, West Point gentlemen, believed that that was the way to conduct a war. Um, that was not war to them. War was official armies fighting each other, and a guerrilla warfare was an absolutely, just unthinkable option for either one of those men. They realized how terrible partisan warfare and guerrilla warfare was on civilian populations, and for them, that was not what war, where war was supposed to be fought. It was not by predatory bands on, you know, people preying on civilians. War was to be fought between armies.

Speaker 1: Do you think that Davis was realistic in his assessment of the situation?

Crist: I think in those last days of the war, he probably was not very realistic. I think he was probably about the last person to believe that the Confederacy could survive by April of 1865. I don't, people have said he was delusional, and I'm not sure you can say that. It's very hard to know, but considering the pressure that he
was under and the events that were happening around him, I think all he was really trying to do by the end was just survive and get his family back together, and perhaps escape from the Confederacy, go across the river into the west or go to Cuba or go somewhere, just try to save his own family unit by that point.

Speaker 1: Right before their ultimate capture, he and Varina corresponded.

Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: What did they talk about in those letters?

Crist: When he and Varina left Richmond, they left separately. She left several days, she and the children left several days before he did. He, of course, was still with the government and the officials. They became separated and remained separated for about a month, and their main concerns back and forth were for each other's existence for a while, to be sure they were all alive. He was worried about the children. She was worried about him. Every letter she tells him what each child is doing, and how they're faring and how the pet, the pets were that the children took along, and the servants and so forth, but near the very end they both realized that things were just falling apart; that there really was not much order anymore in the countryside, that there were predatory bands of Union, Union and Confederate soldiers just roaming about without any supervision, and they feared losing their wagon trains, losing their supplies, being separated even more than they were already, and they just mainly tried to get back together and decide where to go next.

Speaker 1: And speaking of pets and children –
Crist: Uh huh.

Speaker 1: – would talk about how, just how desperately poor they were?

Crist: Mm hmm. He's asleep. Almost.

Other Speaker: No, this is fascinating.

Speaker 1: **** think that, uh, uh, Davis, they were, they were desperately poor –

Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: – and, and Davis had to, he loved his, his late night companion, cat Maryland.

Crist: I don't know ****.

Speaker 1: No, you don't know. Okay.

Crist: Mm mm.

Speaker 1: He had to give him away, because they could no longer afford to –

Crist: Oh. Mm hmm.
Speaker 1: – feed him.

Other Speaker: But there just were financial ****.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: Yeah. Uh –

Other Speaker: Of the first family.

Speaker 1: Yeah, and –

Crist: They –

Speaker 1: – how Varina, uh, wanted to, in fleeing, wanted to bring, uh, was it a barrel of flour, and, because people were starving, Davis for, forbade her and made her bring the barrel of flour back. Do you remember that?

Crist: I don't. Percival [Beacroft] mentioned that to me, but I don't remember that specific incident. Davis, when, during the war, when Davis was given delicacies, particularly late in the war, when meat was hard to come by and real coffee was hard to come by, occasionally things did get through to him. People would send him gifts, and, just for his family use, and he would almost always refuse them and have them sent to the prisons, where he knew food was very inadequate. He preferred to dine, as he said, on just regular fare, as the regular people did. He
would take his chances getting what he could get in the marketplace just like everybody else did – and really did not think it was fair to accept these gifts. Likewise, after the war, when he really had no cash, he was offered various amounts of money from Confederate friends, ex-Confederate friends, who had raised money for him, and he almost uniformly turned it down, except for a few gifts which were made for the education of his children. Those he did accept so that the children could continue in school. His whole life after the war was one long search for employment. Far from absconding with the Confederate treasury, he really had nothing. He had lost his plantation. He had no means of livelihood. He had no law practice to go back to, no school-teaching job he could return to, so he was looking for just anything that would provide him a regular income for himself and his family.

Speaker 1: Did he talk about –

Other Speaker: Oh, I'll have to change tape.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Other Speaker: Yeah, I'm ****.

Other Speaker: Here we go, scene, this is, um, room tone, 30 seconds starting now. All right, got it. All right, good.

PART 3

Crist: Use some of ours.
Crist: In the safe, but she doesn't know the combination.

Other Speaker: Yeah, okay, **** Steve –

Other Speaker: Yeah.

Other Speaker: He's got it together.

Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: I'm confident, okay. Lynda would, would you talk about, uh, Davis, Davis's family life, Davis and Varina’s family life, uh, and, particularly the children that they lost and the mourning they had to endure –

Crist: Jefferson and Varina Davis had six children. The youngest, the first was born in 1852 and died, we think, of measles in Washington, so they lost him relatively early in their married life, their first child. They had two more children in Washington and then, uh, two more during the Confederacy; actually, one was born in '61 and one was born in 1864. During the war, one of their sons died in a tragic accident at the White House of the Confederacy; after the war, their second oldest son died of diphtheria in Memphis and a few years after that, the eldest, Jefferson, Jr., died in the yellow fever epidemic in 1878. So Davis lost all four of his sons during his lifetime and only the two daughters were living when he died in 1889, and then his younger daughter, died –

Other Speaker: ****.

Other Speaker: **** –

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Other Speaker: ****, let's, let's do it again if we can.
Crist: Okay.

Other Speaker: Because we may pull this whole thing out. Okay Brian [Gary]?

Other Speaker: Yes –

Crist: Okay. Jefferson and Varina Davis had six children. One was born in Mississippi, their first child, Samuel, who died, we believe, of measles in 1854, had three children born in Washington in '55, '57 and '59, and then two children born during the Confederacy, a son and their final child, sixth child, a daughter, in 1864. Joseph Davis was killed in a tragic accident at the White House of the Confederacy in 1864; the second eldest son, William, died of diphtheria in Memphis in 1872; and the eldest, Jefferson, Jr., died of yellow fever in, in Memphis in 1878. Only Davis's two daughters survived him and one of them died about 10 years after his death. So there was only one daughter who lived to marry and have children. So Varina Davis buried five of her six children and Davis buried four of his six children. Really very tragic, but not all that uncommon in the 19th century. Almost every family lost a child to some childhood disease or accident, including Lincoln, of course, who also lost a child during the war.

Speaker 1: Could you describe what happened to Davis when he lost his so-called favorite child during the war, during, at the White House of the Confederacy?

Crist: During the, um, when Joseph Davis died in 1864, the Davises were not home at the time and were told about it and rushed, both of them rushed home from different locations to be with Joseph, and at first, I guess, no one realized how serious his injuries were, but he died very soon after the parents reached him. Varina was pregnant at the time and Davis was as worried about her as he was for himself. They both tried to soldier on and everyone said they were very brave and dignified, but there are several descriptions of them at the grave site, you know, standing totally defeated-looking and that Davis himself was really not able to do much of anything for a few days after Joseph Davis's death. It was just a horrible thing to happen, especially in the midst of all the other tragedies of war when they were losing other friends and family members.
Speaker 1: I didn't ask ****, before we broke, I didn't ask if Davis, if Jefferson and Varina had a plan for their escape.

Crist: When they were fleeing Richmond, I don't think they really had a definite plan in mind. They really, I think, assumed that they would join together at some point down the road and just go from there, whatever, whatever the course of war took them, wherever the course of war took them. Varina and her party had made some plans to escape through Florida, that, i.e., taking a boat for Cuba and perhaps for Europe. Davis's party, the official party, seemed to be looking more toward crossing the Mississippi River and joining the remnants of the Confederate army in the west and perhaps trying to establish a new government across the river.

Speaker 1: They were multiple letters back and forth between Varina and Jefferson Davis during his imprisonment –

Crist: Mm hmm.

Other Speaker: Can I interrupt?

Speaker 1: Sure.

Other Speaker: There also was letters while they were on the run –

Crist: Mm hmm.

Other Speaker: We talked about that.

Crist: We did that.

Speaker 1: Yeah.
Other Speaker: You’ve seen that.

Speaker 1: We already did that.

Other Speaker: **** –

Crist: Before.

Speaker 1: Before –

Other Speaker: ****.

Speaker 1: – the only thing I forgot, was I forgot to ask about the plan, so I went back –

Other Speaker: ****.

Speaker 1: – ****, okay. **** –

Other Speaker: Yeah, why I don't remember –

Crist: It's okay, not that he's only heard about it five times from other people –

Other Speaker: **** pre-Diet Coke –

Other Speaker: Pre-Diet Coke **** –

Speaker 1: ****.

Other Speaker: I remember nothing.
Speaker 1: During the multiple letters there were, there was much recitation of health maladies and health issues, um, they became the focal points between the two. Would you discuss the threat of health and illness as it was woven through the marriage of Davis and Jefferson Davis and Varina Davis?

Crist: Davis's health was a concern to his family, always. He was never really in great physical health, never really robust health, he was a rather frail person, and I think in the prison years, it was of particular concern, because many in the South especially felt that the North really had no vested interest in keeping him alive. It'd be fine with them if he died in prison, and the prison conditions were very harsh. He of course was exhausted, as you might imagine, by the end of the war, he was living in a very dark and dank prison cell, with light on constantly, very hard for him to sleep, he had very, um, had a lot of trouble with the prison food, which was kind of rough, and mainly just soldier fare. He had trouble with his digestion, he had trouble with his eyes, he had had eye surgery before the war and his eyes were never very strong. So Varina, I think, was very worried about him in the postwar period. She also was not there, so she could imagine the worst and a lot of the newspapers were telling her the worst, wrongly, as it turned out, because he was in fairly good health, and was being taken care of by army physicians. But bad health was a fact of life in the 19th century. People had a lot of illnesses and almost everyone's letter had some chronicle of either that writer's illness or the illness of the spouse or the illness of the children, it's just a constant theme in almost every letter.

Speaker 1: Could you explain to us please how Varina, uh, garnered her public attention for him –

Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: – and because of his health, being in prison.

Crist: A lot of people think that the prison years really show Varina Davis in her finest hour. She was her husband's greatest defender, she was willing to go anywhere to beg for his release or to at least beg for better conditions for him in prison. She wrote to old friends in Washington, she
was willing to go to Washington, speak to the president herself, send friends to speak to the president, she was very concerned about Jefferson Davis's health and well-being, and, of course, during this period, Jefferson and Varina thought they might never see each other again. He had been indicted for treason, he could have been hanged for treason, and they may never have been together again as a family, so they were very concerned about each other and the future of the children and there was a lot, there were a lot of letters where they talked about the future and what he hoped for them and what she hoped, which of course was that they would be together again to raise their children and go on.

Speaker 1: How were the letters referred to, used, in Dr. Craven's book?

Crist: I don't know anything much about Dr. Craven's book.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Crist: I really don't.

Other Speaker: Would you talk about the religiosity … ?

Speaker 1: All right.

Other Speaker: _****_

Speaker 1: Yes. Yes, thank you for the reminder.

Crist: Jefferson Davis was not known as a particularly religious person before the war, although he was a vestryman at the Church of the Epiphany in Washington in the 1850s and his children were baptized there. He was baptized himself during the war and embraced the Episcopal faith and was a very dedicated member of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Richmond, and in fact the record of the church was one of his closest friends, Dr. Minnigerode, who also was allowed to visit him in prison, and Davis found that a great solace. One of the few books he was allowed to
have in prison was the Bible. He was very good about quoting the Bible and referring to it frequently in that correspondence and later, also. I think he really did become quite, um, religious during the war, devout, much more devout than he had been, although even during the war, people wrote and expressed their gratitude that they were members of the Christian nation with a Christian gentleman at the helm, because Lincoln, of course, was not known for being religious, so people who had a religious bent found that Davis was far preferable to Lincoln in his devotions.

Speaker 1: Mm. Writing from Canada on July 6, 1868 to Howell Cobb, Davis discussed what he would do after the war, and specifically the quest for employment –

Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: – uh, how successful was he at obtaining employment or starting a new career after the war?

Crist: Davis really lost everything in the war. His plantation had been abandoned and then seized by the Union army, which continued to occupy it and lease it. He had no means of livelihood, he had no savings account that he could draw on, what money he had had been Confederate money, which of course was worthless. He had to find a job to support himself and his family, relatively young family, all of whom needed to be educated, clothed and fed, and he searched around for various ways to get employment, including going abroad. He considered living abroad and getting employment. He finally was offered the presidency of a life insurance company in Memphis and because it guaranteed a steady income and was in the South, he took that and was president of an insurance company for awhile. When the Panic of 1873 dissolved that company, he then became involved in emigration societies, very popular bringing emigrants from Europe to the south to replace the southern labor force, which, many of which who vanished. And, after that he really had no other regular job. He tried to regain control of his plantation, hoping he could farm and make a living from the proceeds of the plantation, and then eventually retired to the coast and wrote his memoirs, but he was never wealthy after the war, never. Just kind of got by.
Speaker 1: Would you discuss, uh, you know, of course that he was offered the presidency of Texas A&M? Would you just mention that?

Crist: He was offered the presidency of several southern universities, or professorships or some jobs with various groups like that, but they had very little money. The salaries were very, very small, and some of them were located in very small, out-of-the-way communities. Varina Davis really was a city person, she loved living in cities and being around people and having a social life, and she really was not keen to go off to the frontier again and start all over in a small town, plus the educational advantages for their children had to be considered. So there were several jobs he was offered that just didn't seem a good fit for him.

Speaker 1: Did he ever write about Brierfield, af, after the war?

Crist: He, of course, knew that Brierfield had been sold to some ex-slaves of Joseph B. Davis's and that they were trying to make a living from it and, of course, they were supposed to pay for these plantations and Davis would have supposedly reaped some financial benefit, but they were never able to make, really make a go of it on the plantations. And, uh, he often said that he could really sympathize with other Confederates who had lost everything and he said that he too had lost everything and was willing to lose everything for, except for his wife and children, for the cause, but he really had lost Brierfield and never thought of recovering it until it became clear that the ex-slaves would not be able to make, make the payments, so he tried to recover it for his own use, hoping he could farm and make a living.

Speaker 1: Would you name them? I don't know if anyone's named them –

Crist: Oh, the Ben Montgomery [family]. Jeff, uh, Joseph Davis sold Hurricane plantation, his own home and Brierfield, the adjoining plantation of Jefferson Davis, to Benjamin Montgomery, um, an educated slave of his, of Joseph Davis's. Joseph Davis had perceived the promise of this young slave very early on, he was quite literate, he was in fact allowed to have his own business on Hurricane plantation, before the war, he and his family were all well-educated and obviously
very capable. So Joseph was hoping that Benjamin Montgomery, by owning the plantations would not only be able to make it, a go of it, in a business sense, but also would be able to attract back some of the slaves who had lived there before the war as the labor force, to keep the places going that Benjamin Montgomery's standing in the slave community was quite high and he hoped that would help attract blacks back to the area, labor force.

Speaker 1: Why did that not [work]?

Crist: For various reasons the Montgomery had a terrible time trying to run the two plantations. In 1867 the biggest reason probably was that they had been cut off by the Mississippi River. The two plantations became an island, so access was quite difficult, steamboat landings changed, there were devastating floods of the Mississippi River, there were caterpillar assaults and all the other natural enemies of cotton plants and corn plants, and they never really had a labor force sufficient to bring the plantations back to the pre-war levels. And I think some people would say they, they really hadn't had the experience of running a plantation. Yes, they had lived there, and yes, Benjamin Montgomery had run a store on the place, but he never had had the experience of really being an overseer even, or certainly running a big business on his own. It was just too much.

Speaker 1: While in Memphis –

Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: He was doing well, he was at the insurance company, uh, Jefferson Davis wrote to A. Beresford Hope, a former pro-Confederate –

Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: Parliament member, in May of 1873, and in the letter he states, “the political condition of this country grows worse.” After the war, how active **** –
Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: – **** discuss –

Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: – **** he wasn't active in politics –

Crist: No he wasn't, couldn't be.

Speaker 1: – **** –

Crist: Didn't wanna be –

Speaker 1: – Let's discuss, uh, The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government in light of its readability as a Civil War memoir –

Crist: It's lack of readability –

Speaker 1: – uh, versus, verses U.S. Grant’s autobiography –

Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: – to compare and contrast those, why one stands, stands the test of time –

Crist: Yes. There's a real industry after the war on war memoirs. They started almost immediately and some of them were very good and some of them were not very good. Joseph B. Johnston was one of the first of the major Confederate leaders to write his narrative of the war. Robert E. Lee had planned to, but, of course, died in 1870 and never did write his own accounts, which would have been quite wonderful, I'm sure. U.S. Grant wrote his memoirs, which were fabulously successful. Not only because Grant was Grant, but because he also just turned out to
be a born writer, the same terse and to-the-point orders that he had written during the war
translated very well into a longer length study and people bought them like hotcakes, and Davis,
of course, observed this along with everyone else and thought, ah ha, here's a way to make some
money, 'cause Grant's memoirs have been so successful. So he decided, after long delay--people
had urged him to write after the war, almost immediately after he got out of prison, people urged
him to write his history of the war--but what he ended up writing was a rather dry constitutional
treatise. He did not really reveal much in the way of his own personal feelings, his own personal
actions, his motivations, his goals. It simply was a, a very dry political monograph that did not
prove terribly successful. He made a little money from it, but nothing like he had envisioned.

Speaker 1: Would you discuss his move to [Beauvoir], uh, or his friendship with Sarah, Sarah
Dorsey and the route to Beauvoir, his final home?

Crist: In the 1870s, when he was basically out of work and looking for employment and had
decided to write his memoirs, hoping that would provide a source of money for his children, a
long-time admirer in Mississippi, a woman who was an author herself, Sarah Dorsey, had written
several biographies and other works of fiction, had a plantation on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.
She had admired Davis, she was a very strong Confederate, and had admired, admired Davis for
years and had known Varina Davis in fact, in Natchez, when they were both school girls, she
offered Davis a cottage on her plantation on the Mississippi Coast, free for his use to use while
he wrote his memoirs, to live in and to use as an office while he wrote his memoirs, and he took
her up on the offer. She then observed, a few years later, how much he loved the coast and loved
living there, and made arrangements to sell Beauvoir (the name of her house), Beauvoir to him.
Then she contracted cancer and died at a relatively young age and the, by the terms of her will,
she left Beauvoir to Jefferson Davis, so he came into possession of Beauvoir and lived there the
rest of his life until he died in 1889.

Speaker 1: Would you discuss my favorite person, Oscar Wilde, who came to visit **** –

Crist: This tells me how to answer. Oscar Wilde, oh!
Crist: Ask about what?

Other Speaker: Was there, uh, is there any evidence of an illicit affair between Sarah and –

Crist: Not between Davis or anybody. I think Jefferson Davis was, was a straight arrow, I mean, he never would have done anything like that, just it would just have been so totally, totally out of character, I'd find it –

Other Speaker: Could you –

Crist: – I find it very hard to believe.

Other Speaker: – could you include her in your answer?

Crist: Oh, there were rumors that Davis had a, a more than passing interest in Sarah Dorsey, and also in Virginia Clay, who was the wife of his fellow prisoner at Fort Monroe. And the Clays and the Davises had been very close friends in the 1850s in Washington, and Clement Clay and Jefferson Davis were intimate friends, very, very close friends, even before they ended up in prison together, suffering together. And I think Davis found Virginia Clay absolutely beguiling and fun, which she was, and she was really kind of a soulmate. They really unburdened themselves to each other, but purely platonicly. I'm sure they were very close friends, but that's all there was to it, and I think the same is true for Sarah Dorsey. It didn't look very good that Davis was living on Sarah Dorsey's property; she was a widow and he was basically a single,
living on his own at that point because Varina was in Europe, so I think a lot of people leaped, leapt to the wrong conclusion, but I think no there's no, absolutely no evidence on either side that there was anything romantic. She admired him a great deal, he was very grateful to her, they were friends, they were fellow writers, they were both interested in the same goal, getting his memoirs written, but I think that's as far as it went.

Speaker 1: When did Varina finally succumb to the, to the coast?

Crist: I'm not sure that Varina Davis ever actually liked living at Beauvoir. She really would have preferred, I think, to live in New Orleans or in Washington or some other city, and after a not very decent interval after his death she did move to New York City to pursue her own career as a writer. She also found the constant interruption from visitors just pretty wearing, I think. She was, she was ready to retire, I think, from that point, from being the wife of Jefferson Davis, and it just was not possible.

Speaker 1: Could you discuss –

Other Speaker: Hold on one second. In terms of Rise and Fall, there's, um, some people take the opinion that he did not write a lot of that, um, that he had ghost writers or –

Crist: They didn't do very good job, did they?

Other Speaker: –****–

Speaker 1: ****.

Other Speaker: So could you kinda discuss in terms of –

Crist: Should have hired Mickey Herskowitz [sports/ghost writer] –
Other Speaker: in terms of the, the books that are attributed to Davis's authorship, and what is, **** accepted as his percentage, of what he wrote?

Crist: You know, I really don't know what percentage he wrote. I, it'd be hard for me to answer that, but it's very legalistic, it's very much in keeping with his own style, both The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government and the Short History of the Confederate States. A lot of the phraseology really sounds like a lot of things we've heard from his earlier speeches and his state papers, and, in fact, he lifted portions from those public messages and deposited them into The Rise and Fall. There were people who helped him with the writing; I'm sure they helped shape up some of the chapters and helped incorporate material that he was sent by other people, but I would say that he did write most of it. That would be my opinion. I really don't have his manuscript pages to prove that, but just from the syntax and the phraseology I would say that it's pretty much Jefferson Davis's words, and he certainly had the say-so on whether it went in or it didn't.

Speaker 1: Now can she please discuss, would you talk about possibly Varina's favorite visitor to Beauvoir—Oscar Wilde?

Crist: I don't know that much about that. I'd like to have been there, that's for sure. I can kind of imagine the scene when Oscar Wilde arrived at Beauvoir. I'm sure Davis found him just totally unbelievable, probably like, where did this person come from? So totally unlike most of the other visitors who came there and I'm sure also that he was very polite and courteous to Wilde, no matter how wild and crazy Oscar Wilde became. I think Varina undoubtedly was fascinated. She loved literary people and was very keen to be in their company and hear what they had to say and exchange conversation with them. Davis was, too, really, in England; they both had a lot of very cultivated friends who were on the literary side, so, they, they could hold their own in conversations, but I'm sure Davis found Oscar Wilde pretty strange.

Other Speaker: Can I jump in?

Speaker 1: There are no writings?
Crist: There are some things. I don't think Davis ever actually wrote about it. I think Wilde did. I think he did say something. I probably have something back in the file. I know someone who knows everything about that so I have not paid that much attention to it.

Speaker 1: We're also looking for a photograph, and I can't find.

Crist: A photograph of?

Speaker 1: If, if there was a photograph taken when Oscar, when Oscar Wilde ****

Crist: Not that I've ever seen. But I can put you in touch with the man who knows everything about Oscar Wilde and Jefferson Davis.

Other Speaker: If I can interrupt for one second? Wh, where pretty dead on postwar Davis, some of it. If you can, could you give us a sense of how Jefferson Davis was feeling about his difficulties in the postwar period? I, I, I think there are letters.

Crist: Mm, hmm. Oh, there are.

Other Speaker: Yeah, does he talk about his frustrations?

Crist: Yes.

Other Speaker: So really feel free to, you know, flesh that out as much as you can.

Crist: Yeah, there are, there're a lot of letters that you can quote very nicely in the, in the postwar period. I think probably--this is an amateur psychologist talking here--I would say Jefferson Davis was depressed, and he uses that word occasionally when he writes to Varina, saying things are very dark. I can see no light. Everything is bad. I feel bad physically. I'm worn out emotionally and mentally. And he just was very unhappy. It was not a good time for
him. Nothing was sure. He wasn't positive about what was going to happen next, if he would find a job, where he would find a job, where they would live. They were living in a hotel for awhile. They lived in rented houses. People offered them boarding houses. People offered them furniture. It was very, no one would be happy in that kind of situation, especially when you had been accustomed to having a job and providing for your family on your own. It would be very difficult to go back to living in a boarding house after you'd lived in your own house. I think it was a very sad time, difficult.

Other Speaker: How did he feel specifically about the Caroline Life Insurance job? I understand there were some letters **** I thought he thought that job was beneath him but he took it for the money.

Crist: Well, he did take it for the money, yeah.

Other Speaker: Right, so if you wanna talk about that job, how he felt about it?

Crist: When he was offered the life insurance company presidency, he was very skeptical because he realized he had no experience in that line of work. He really had never been in business, had never been in sales, which is a large part of what that job was, was being the figurehead and trying to sell your product to the public. However, it was in a southern city, it was a southern company, and it provided a steady income. He would have a salary. His salary would not be dependent on sales. As the president he had a regular salary that he could count on, so he could keep himself in food and housing for himself and others. He, a lot of Confederate generals, had the same problem, Confederate officials. They went to work for railroad companies or tried to farm or just tried anything. Many of them did become professors at small schools or schoolteachers or just whatever there was to be done. They had to.

Other Speaker: What about letters from his days in Europe, his attempts to find work in Europe?
Crist: Mm, hmm. His trips to Europe were, some were for employment. I think a couple of the trips were surely for making connections, to network. He hoped that he might get a job as a commission merchant in Liverpool, for example. I think he liked Liverpool a lot. He went there several times and there were a lot of Confederates, ex-Confederates, who lived in Liverpool and had businesses there. He loved traveling in Europe. He writes some beautiful letters about seeing all the tourist spots and picking up flowers from various historic places and, of course, he was a big fan of Sir Walter Scott, as most southerners were, so made the pilgrimage to all the Scott locations. And he made the acquaintance of a lot of English nobility, many of whom had supported the Confederacy, and he was glad to tell them how much he appreciated that and he was obviously with like-minded folks when he was in their company. But they [the Davises] had a terrible time keeping up socially when they were in England. They simply didn't have the money to buy the dresses and entertain and live in the nice places where they could mix as equals with the nobility of England or even the upper classes. So, it was good and bad, bittersweet experience, I would say, for the most part.

Other Speaker: Does, um, the eulogy for Lee survive?

Crist: The eulogy of Lee. There are a couple of speeches, uh, by Davis on Lee, [for example,] the Lee Monument Association speech in the Southern Historical Society. He was always very quick to praise Lee as the embodiment of the ideal Confederate general. Of course, Lee and Davis worked together incredible well, extremely well. Very few disagreements.

Speaker 1: Would you, could we go back to the war just for a moment?

Crist: Mm, hmm.

Speaker 1: Let's talk very, talk briefly about how it was that Lee, why Lee and Davis shone and the other generals and Davis did not? What did they have?

Crist: Lee knew that Davis was the commander in chief and respected Davis's military education and his opinions. Lee also realized that if he respected those opinions that Davis
would respect his opinions, and that Davis soon grew to realize he could trust Lee to do as he would have preferred if he had been the general on the field. Lee was willing to take some chances. Lee was willing to advance. Everything didn't have to be just perfect before he tried something daring, so it wasn't always a question of just holding the capital. Lee was really willing to go out and meet the Union army before they got there and I think Davis really respected that, and Lee was a masterful commander of his own generals as well, and Davis knew that's what it took. He respected Lee's ability as a commander in the field and a commander of the other generals.

Other Speaker: Going back to–

Speaker 1: Could we go right back to Europe?

Other Speaker: About what?

Speaker 1: That when, how long it took for the family to go, to get back. I mean people forget that, it wasn't just a matter of putting little Winnie on a plane and then getting to Scotland or wherever they were. Um, can you talk about how, do you know the details?

Crist: Which are you talking about? The late, when they have her in school over there or what?

Speaker 1: How long it took, uh, postwar for the family, and post-imprisonment, for the family to be a family together in the same place?

Crist: Oh, they became a family almost immediately after he was released from prison because the children had been living in Canada since 1866, the older children, and Varina and Varina Anne, the youngest child, came to live at Fort Monroe during the last year that Davis was imprisoned there. They were allowed to come and live there. So as soon as Davis was released from prison, they all went immediately to Canada and were reunited with the older children, who were in school there and with Varina's mother and her sister, who had been living in Canada with the children. So that was, he just made a beeline right from Richmond through New York to
Canada.  He hardly stopped before he got back to his family.  He was a very devoted family man and devoted father.

Other Speaker:  Speaking of Winnie [Varina Anne’s nickname], um, what can you tell us about the courtship of Winnie by the Union officer?

Crist:  I don't know that much about Alfred (“Fred”) Wilkinson.  I don't know that much about it.  I've even forgotten where they met exactly.

Other Speaker:  They met through the Pulitzer family.

Crist:  Ah, okay.  That's right.  That's right.

Other Speaker:  Was, is there any indication that Davis was opposed to that, uh, union?  What happened?  Why **** and **** did he write about that?

Crist:  No, I don't.  Jefferson Davis I don't think wrote very much at all about the romance of Varina Anne and Fred Wilkinson.  Varina Davis, the mother, was much more concerned about Wilkinson's financial status and whether he would be able to take care of Winnie.  I'm, I'm sure Davis would have been worried about anyone who courted his youngest child.  That was his last daughter at home and I'm sure he felt very protective of her and worried about her future as he would about any of his children, but more so about hers, I guess, because she had lived with them for so long.  But, I think he did.  He was reconciled to it and gave his consent to their getting engaged.  There was an outcry in the South because people didn't want the “Daughter of the Confederacy,” as she was known, to marry a Yankee, as simple as that, and a Yankee who was aligned with an abolitionist family [Samuel J. May], and I think they were very much in love and did plan to be married.

Other Speaker:  What survives of the, um, the defense of Davis by Greeley and Vanderbilt, um, in, in terms of court records, the different court appearances that, that Davis, you know, had.
Crist: There's a lot, a lot.

Other Speaker: **** Is there anything of note though that we can pull out of all of, all of that court activities, all of the charges back and forth, the lack of the formal trial, you know, from those documents?

Crist: Mm, hmm. I don't know that there's very much. Unfortunately, we are missing virtually all of Jefferson Davis's letters to his attorney Charles O'Conor. We have most of O'Conor's letters to Jefferson Davis, including in prison, the prison letters, but we have virtually nothing of Davis's responses, so we don't really know what he thought about the strategy that O'Conor was using. He seemed to have simply trusted O'Conor to do the best that he could. O'Conor was a very skilled trial lawyer and Davis of course was ultimately released. So, it all worked out very well but Davis, I think, mainly let O'Conor have his head in that whole situation and just simply, occasionally, he would recommend other attorneys that he thought would be helpful to O'Conor, people in Richmond who had known Davis and knew the Richmond court system and knew the judges involved, so O'Conor, O'Conor had some local people to help him out. But otherwise, I think O'Conor handled the legal side of it pretty much on his own.

Other Speaker: In terms of the legal system and the judges, did, did anyone, did any of the Supreme Court justices write opinions, uh, regarding the Davis incarceration, was there any official, any additional documents, have they survived to kind of give us an indication? A lot of people have speculation and they said, well they didn't do it because they didn't want to put secession on trial, they didn't want to put, but is there anything that is left in the words of, of the justices, the, the legal system, the politicians of the time that, that give us something concrete about, you know, the, the handling of Jefferson Davis postwar in those first 2 years?

Crist: Officially, after the war it was a problem of jurisdiction, whether Davis would be tried in Virginia or not, and if he were tried in Virginia in a district court--I believe that's correct--then he would have had a mostly black jury and of course, southerners were appalled by this. The Republican party was in such disarray right after the war, and there were so many factions that I think they were reluctant to put Davis on trial because they feared an uprising from southern
supporters. Some Republicans believed that he should never have been charged with treason anyway, that he simply was following the dictates of his conscience, and some of them in fact believed that secession was authorized by the Constitution, so they saw the trial as a no-win situation really. I mean, what would be gained by putting Davis on trial or even executing him? It would just make him a martyr, more of a martyr, to the South and the point was to try to get the southerners back on board, not to alienate them even further. It just became such a hot political topic that I think they were more than willing to find a nice legalism to let him go and hopefully be seen no more.

Speaker 1: Is that the reason you think that the, uh, the **** writings that state that is the reason that they ****

Crist: There probably are but I can't, I can't tell you what they, what they would be. I think it was mainly in the interests of reuniting the country that a lot of northerners signed his bail bond, to just try to get this, this whole incident shunted off to the side and, and hoping that it would just kind of go away so they could get about the business of returning to government, returning to business, and going on with the reunited country without having this divisive symbol sitting there in prison and as a possible little, little minefield, I guess you'd say.

Other Speaker: Is there any evidence that Jefferson Davis was involved or aware of the conditions of Andersonville?

Crist: Davis was aware of the conditions at Andersonville but the conditions at Andersonville were pretty much the conditions across the South by then. Nobody had very much to eat and the Andersonville prisoners had what the southern soldiers had, which was just not very much of anything. It was incredibly difficult to get supplies in. It was overcrowded. There's no doubt about that. So were most northern prisons. Northern prisons were just about as despicable in conditions as the southern prisons were, although they had a little more to eat, I guess, than they did in the South, but yes, he was aware that Andersonville was a terrible situation, but he really always said that he had no way to ameliorate it. If he could have he would have, but there was no
way to get to it. There was no way to supply it and the prisoners were no worse off than the Confederates all around them.

Other Speaker: What about Davis’s desire to exchange prisoners with the North and there was a barrier or rejection of those pleas as a way to ameliorate the conditions of human prisoners in the South?

Crist: Well Grant took a pretty hardheaded line on all that. Grand did not want to exchange prisoners because he simply did not want to put southern soldiers back in the ranks and he had enough soldiers. He never said he did for, you know, really he was always wanting more soldiers to enlist and certainly believed in the draft, but he saw no point in releasing southern soldiers who would immediately pick up their arms and return to the front lines of Lee’s army.

Speaker 1: If you wanna go next.

Other Speaker: Yeah, I have some after you ****.

Speaker 1: Oh, that's right. Okay.

Crist: Yes?

Speaker 1: **** get some water if you need it. Ah, Davis gave his final public address.

Crist: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: In Mississippi City in 1888 [Aug. 18, 1866, not his last speech]. The one, “The past is dead; let it bury its dead.” Can you discuss the significance of that speech and do you think he came to terms with the Union?

Crist: By the 1880s, Jefferson Davis and everybody else saw that the country was well on its way to being reunited and that the South was making some real gains politically and
economically. Reconstruction had been a terrible time for the South, no doubts about that, for whites and blacks. The Democratic party was coming back to life in most southern states, there was a two-party system, it was alive and well. The government was functioning. Things were a lot more prosperous for everybody on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line. People were settling in the west. So I think he did see that the future looked much brighter. And he wanted the Union to survive and to go forward and to flourish. Um, its, its, there aren't that many speeches on this theme in Davis's later life, so that's a very important one, the Mississippi City speech, where he urges everyone to work for a reunited country, not think of the past all the time, to remember the past, honor the people who died for their causes, but you had to go forward.

Speaker 1: By the end of his life, ****.

Other Speaker: This is the last question.

Speaker 1: Yeah, I **** just answered everything. Both Jefferson Davis and Varina –

Other Speaker: No, no, no, the one right about that.

Speaker 1: Oh, we didn't talk about that?

Other Speaker: No.

Speaker 1: Oh. There is no mention of holding onto the lost cause in his speech. Did, ah, Davis perpetuate the notion of the lost cause at all ever after the war?

Crist: Davis certainly venerated the cause for which he had fought and lost so much. I'm not sure he ever used that phrase, “the lost cause.” He spoke of “the cause.” He spoke of the Confederacy. He spoke of all the brave people who had suffered and bled and lost their lives for what they believed in. I'm not sure that he would have used that phrase, the lost cause. He really thought it was a very valiant effort and a valiant cause. He certainly never rejected it or denied it, denied his part in it. But, he accepted that it had failed. Life had to go on.
Speaker 1: Okay. **** there's this one.

[more indistinct conversation]

Other Speaker: The Animal Planet version of ****.

Crist: We haven't talked about a single horse.

Speaker 1: Davis and Varina wrote about the relationship, their relationship in letters to each other and –

Other Speaker: We covered that first part.

Speaker 1: Yes we have. I'm reading ****.

Crist: Is this the “girdled tree” quote.

Speaker 1: Yeah, yeah.

Crist: I don't remember when she wrote that letter. Does it say on there?

Other Speaker: Yeah, I don’t have an exact date on it [to William H. Morgan, c1890], Davis Collection, Library of Congress.

Crist: I think it was –

Speaker 1: I love that.

Crist: In was '70s I think, or something, when they were really having one of their really bad spells.
Speaker 1: Do you wanna paraphrase Varina, talk about how she cautioned the young woman?

Crist: Yeah, that would make a big difference, though, about when it was written. You really need to know that, because, you know, in the '70s when they were living apart and she was just unhappy in general and menopausal and whatever else was going on with her, in the '70s. She was pretty bitter about a lot of things. I don't think she, you know, would've –

Other Speaker: If you can take your hand away –

Crist: Yeah, I'm just trying to think right now what would be the best way to say that. She did write the letter, there's no doubt about that. I think she realized that she was not Jefferson Davis's first love. That was obvious since he'd been married to Sarah Taylor. And she was not the love of his youth and I think she was counseling the niece when she said, beware of, you know, marrying someone who is like a girdled tree, which, of course, means a tree that is not getting, not growing anymore, it's not getting any more nutrients or any more life force in it. I think she was just saying, you know, beware of someone who's had, you know, a life before you came along, that there's gonna be some baggage there, is what we would say today. That there are just things you have to think about when you marry someone who’s older, who’s been married before, has had tragedies or had another life, and whatever situation would be. I don't think she's saying, you know, don't marry somebody older, but just be aware that they're problems, problems can come up.

Speaker 1: **** say Varina ****.

Crist: Do what?

Speaker 1: Let's just mention Varina instead of she.

Crist: Oh, okay. Varina was counseling this young relative, not necessarily not to marry, but just to be aware that if she married someone older or someone who'd been married before, that
there were bound to be some issues in that person's life that would color their, their own life together, as it had hers.

Other Speaker: Um two, um, one question on an anecdote and kind of a general question, for, on the anecdote is Davis received a letter very, very late in his life from a woman who had somehow recaptured letters of Sarah Knox.

Crist: Mm hmm.

Other Speaker: And he was deeply impacted by the actual thought that he might be able to get those letters back.

Crist: Mm hmm.

Other Speaker: Are you familiar with that story?

Crist: I vaguely remember it. There were also letters from his parents that somebody had said they captured in Mississippi which he was very keen to get back.

Other Speaker: Okay, well, that's, that's, that's probably ****.

Crist: I mean, he had lost all his private correspondence so naturally I think he was, would've been thrilled to get anything back.

Other Speaker: A general question towards, at the end, we've asked similar questions to other people. Um, you spent a significant part of your life culling together the works of Jefferson Davis and you've lived with this topic for quite some time, devoted a large part of your life, how do you feel about, ah, individuals and groups who are bent on removing Davis's name, bent on tearing down statues, ah, expunging him from the public record. How do you feel about those movements?
Crist: I think it's very difficult to erase history and Jefferson Davis is simply part of our nation's history, as much as George Washington or Abraham Lincoln or Theodore Roosevelt or Franklin Roosevelt, all of whom probably did some things that we don't agree with today. I think it's also very difficult to judge someone in 2000-whatever for things that they did in 19-whatever. We simply can't empathize properly with someone who lived a century or more before we did.

Other Speaker: You said again, you said 19.

Crist: Mm hmm. 18, yes.

Other Speaker: You say the exact same thing again.

Crist: I don't think I can say the exact same thing.

Other Speaker: Just a very **** you know.

Crist: It's, it's dangerous and it's impossible to judge from this vantage point of –

Other Speaker: Hold. I, I was still speaking.

Crist: Oh, it's very difficult and in fact it's wrong to judge from our vantage point the motivations and the milieu that someone had to live in, in the 19th century. It's impossible to know what life was like really for Jefferson Davis or anyone, and you cannot judge from what we know now what was done then. You can't say that you would not have done something similar or the same or worse than any of these historical figures. Likewise, I think it is very dangerous to try to psychoanalyze historical figures without a paper trail to follow. If you had some evidence that they suffered from depression or schizophrenia or something, that would be a different thing. But, we simply don't have those records and there’s no way to get inside someone's mind who has been dead for over a hundred years.

Other Speaker: Along those lines –
Crist: Jack Davis [William C. Davis, Jefferson Davis biographer], I think, does a lot of, too much of that.

Other Speaker: Along those lines what would you say is, ah, the legacy?

Crist: He [Jack Davis] may be right, but I think it's a very dangerous thing to do.

Other Speaker: What would you say is the legacy of Jefferson Davis, and what I mean by that is, including what lessons can 21st-century Americans learn from this 19th-century leader? Why gather 15 volumes on Jefferson Davis?

Crist: Hmmm. That's a good question. Jefferson Davis's life spanned the 19th century. He was in public life for most of his life, had public trust, offices of public trust. What he did and thought had a lot of to do with what this nation did in the years right before the Civil War, and I think his, his life as a person is almost as interesting, because he was so devoted to the ideas of duty and honor and integrity and honesty in public life. He's a good role model for just about any politician, whether you believe his principles or not, but the way he went about living his life and saying what he believed and believing what he said, I think, are a good example to just about anybody, anytime.

Other Speaker: Um, Mr. Davis had his citizenship restored in 1978. Um, how do you think he would feel about that?

Crist: Jefferson Davis never asked for his citizenship to be restored because he never believed he had lost it. He never applied for a pardon. He didn't want anyone to apply for a pardon in his name. His citizenship was restored to him in the 20th century, but that was mainly because members of his family wished it to be done.

Other Speaker: Um, please give us a sense, and feel free to use the number of decades you've worked here, when you say it.
Crist: Mm hmm.

Other Speaker: You know, what are your personal views? I mean, kind of give us your sense, you know, please describe for us what you have done in your job.

Crist: Mm hmm.

Other Speaker: What your job has entailed.

Crist: Mm hmm.

Other Speaker: Feel free to say you started in college and you, give us a real sense of you, what you've done and what you learned.

Crist: I'm not very comfortable doing that but I can –

Other Speaker: To the extent you are comfortable.

Crist: Yeah. Yeah. I'd say the Jefferson Davis Project exists to collect and edit and publish the papers of Jefferson Davis. We can't obviously publish all the papers of Jefferson Davis. We have about a hundred thousand documents here at this project. We do publish letters to and from Jefferson Davis, also, many of his speeches and other documents of various kinds. The documents have been gathered from repositories and private owners all over the country and indeed the world. His personal library was pillaged during the Civil War, so he lost a lot of his pre-war material. Never saw it again. A lot of it was collected by Union forces here and there. Some of it was bought by the Library of Congress after the war from a Confederate official [“the Pickett papers,” now CSA Collection]. So we have simply tried to reconstruct the paper record of Jefferson Davis's life, to give people an idea of who he was and why he acted as he did, to illuminate his own feelings and relationships and philosophy and his opinions. Of course, the Civil War was such a momentous event in the life of this country that I think it's important to
realize what was going on on both sides of the line. And Davis as the spokesman and exemplar of the Confederate cause is kind of the perfect person to examine. And his public life was spent mostly in the service of the United States. It was only four years that he was president of the Confederate States. So there's a good bit of material on the pre-war efforts that he made on behalf of the Union that are important to know as well.

Other Speaker: That being said, a hundred thousand pages? I don't know how many people that would have a hundred thousand pages, you know, public official or not.

Crist: Yeah. Mm hmm.

Other Speaker: How did all those pages survive for all these years, you know, through the pillaging that you reference …

Crist: Yeah, well, that was just his private stuff. A lot of his papers are of a public nature because he was in public life. He was a cabinet officer for four years and president for four years. So there, there's just a lot of paperwork involved in, in holding a public trust. Even today, there still would be a lot of paperwork--a lot of reports, a lot of communications, official communications, a lot of documents that he signed, and, of course, he made a lot of speeches. Those are reported in the newspapers, various versions, depending on the partisan bent of the newspaper. His private correspondence, some of which has been lost. Just a hundred thousand documents is really not that much if you're a public official.

Other Speaker: What about his private correspondence? How did those survive ****? You have, you know, a good amount of letters going between husband and wife.

Crist: Mm hmm. A lot of the private correspondence though is dated from the war and after because he did lose so much of the pre-war material when his library was pillaged in Mississippi. There are probably just a few hundred letters, really, that remain of private letters that remain, pre-war. A lot of his pre-war speeches and letters exist because he was a public person and there were file clerks making copies of his outgoing letters. And there were people filing his letters in
government offices that remained in Washington, so, of course, they have survived. They live in the National Archives and the Library of Congress, for the most part, his official correspondence. He and his wife saved their correspondence for the most part after the war. Some chunks of it are missing. We're not sure exactly why. Whether it was destroyed on purpose or whether they just discarded things when they moved. It's hard to know that. But we do have quite a bit after the war, public and private.

Other Speaker: Could you describe the process that the papers went through to collect those hundred thousand pages?

Crist: When the project was started, the editor then—Haskell Monroe was the first editor, and Jim Macintosh was the second. The editors sent out questionnaires to every library and historical society in the United States, asking about their Jefferson Davis holdings, then made extensive research trips to the big libraries to make copies. Some libraries didn't even have Xerox machines back then. So occasionally we had to rent a Xerox machine and take it to the library and have the copies made, and we have a lot of things on microfilm. So, almost everything we have here is a copy. We have a few original documents, but not very many. And there are still documents remaining to be discovered. Many of them are still out in the marketplace. Many are owned by individuals who just don't know we exist and maybe don't want to give us a copy if we do know they exist. We'll never have everything. It's, it's an impossible dream to think you'll ever have every piece of paper written to or from Jefferson Davis. Or Varina Davis. We've always collected hers as well as his.

Other Speaker: How did the Jefferson Davis Papers [the project] come into existence?

Crist: In the early 1960s, during the Civil War Centennial Commission, Frank Vandiver, who was a professor of history at Rice University, was working at the Huntington Library in California and discovered a number of letters that he didn't remember having read before, either in a previous edition of Jefferson Davis's papers, which was published in 1923 in Mississippi, an excellent ten-volume edition, or in an official records compilation that was put out by the U.S. government around the turn of the 20th century. And he consulted those editions and realized
there were several key documents that were missing. So he decided to start an edition, kind of a supplement to the old 1923 edition. But it soon became apparent when he began to really search that there were hundreds, maybe thousands, of documents that just weren't found by the 1920s editor [Dunbar Rowland], who did a marvelous job, considering there was no Xerox machine and very little facility of any sort for copying things. It's amazing what he was able to do. But there was just lots of letters out there that had never been seen by scholars. So he [Vandiver] eventually decided that a full edition was necessary, a new edition of Jefferson Davis's papers.

Other Speaker: And keep going. So what did he do?

Crist: Well, then he assembled a small staff and they began questioning historical societies and libraries about the Davis holdings and secured copies of them and permission to publish them, and then put them all back in chronological order. This giant jigsaw puzzle. Someone described it as a big jigsaw puzzle where you don't have the picture on the box and you don't have all the pieces, but you have to do the best you can with fitting them all back together to make a chronological procession of facts and events in Davis's life.

Other Speaker: And what year did the papers begin their, um, their trek?

Crist: Yeah, the first volume was published in 1971. The Jefferson Davis Association was incorporated in 1963 and the offices were opened at Rice in 1964. So it was about seven years before the first volume came out and then we have published 11 volumes to date, plus three revised editions of earlier volumes. So really 14 volumes since 1971, and three volumes remain to be published.

Other Speaker: And when do you expect those volumes to be published and concluded?

Crist: Yes. We, we expect to finish the edition in about ten years. The end of Volume 14 [2015]. Then we will have one additional volume, of comprehensive index and bibliography and addenda and mistakes, errors of omission and commission in the last volume [never published]. That's the plan.
Other Speaker: Would you be willing to tell us what it's been like for you to engage in such an amazingly historically significant event? Can you **** amazingly historical event.

Crist: Well, it's really gratifying to be part of something really big and lasting. I think that's the main thing you really, you know that you were preparing something that is really useful to scholars and indeed even to general readers who are just keen to know about Davis or the South or U.S. politics or any number of topics in the 19th century. So it's, it's very gratifying to know how many people use our books and are interested in them and interested in Davis. And it's something that’s permanent. I don't think an edition like this will ever be done again, so it's very nice to have your name associated with something that's going to be on the library shelves, we hope, for a hundred years to come, if not longer. And even if it turns into an electronic medium of some sort, it's still, you know, very nice to know that you're involved in something that has a permanent effect.

[more indistinct conversation]

Other Speaker: We have two minutes. Actually **** um, arguably Lincoln would be remembered for the Gettysburg Address.

Crist: Mm hmm.

Other Speaker: Is there one document speech, etc., that you can point to in Davis's life that would be a similar statement?

Crist: I don't know if there is any one. The farewell [to the Senate] speech is probably the most often quoted single document that we have. And I think that's because it is so revealing of Davis's personal feelings, as well as his political stand. It was just at the cusp of the war, when everything was going down the tubes, but he was still so torn between his loyalty to the Union and, and the who-knows-what that was going to happen after he left Washington.
Other Speaker: Okay ****. A favorite anecdote or … Let’s change the tape.

PART 4

Other Speaker: **** stuffed animals.

Other Speaker: ****.

Other Speaker: All right.

Crist: Well, Davis really loved animals and he and his children always had pets and there are many descriptions of the various puppies and kittens that accompanied them in their travels and, including a little dog that was brought to him from Japan in the 1850s and presented to him when he lived in Washington. People, everyone knew he loved pets and animals and he was particularly known as a fine horseman and an expert on horseflesh and had very fine riding horses all his life, and when they were retired from riding they lived out their lives very happily at Brierfield and remained part of the family. He was even sent a very fine Arabian stallion during the war from Egypt. The horse had to be brought in through the blockade; the ship on which it was brought almost was attacked by Union forces because the horse whinnied at a very inappropriate time, when the boat was trying to make it into the shore. So, people on the boat were not very fond of this horse because it had almost cost them their lives, but the horse did eventually make its way to Richmond. It was a beautiful white horse. There's even a portrait of Davis on this horse, whose name I can't tell you. It was an Egyptian name. They just called him the Arabian stallion and, according to the testimony of others, he was so mean and evil-tempered that only Davis could handle him. He hated everyone else, the horse did, bit people, snapped at them, but Davis thought he was fabulous because he just was a beautiful piece of horseflesh and he and Davis got along famously and Davis used him on his rides around Richmond during the war and out to the battlefronts and so forth, and the horse was sent to South Carolina for
safekeeping when Richmond was endangered and, unfortunately, the horse was discovered by the Union troops and carried away, so they, we have no idea what happened to the beautiful Arabian stallion, but he's probably the best-known of Davis' horses. He had a couple of Mexican War horses that he mentions in his letters as being back home in Mississippi. Of course, they had carriage horses for the carriages in Richmond. Uh, he always had lots of animals around and loved having pets.

Next Speaker: What about the whole crown of thorns issue? Is that, I mean, what kind of **** I mean the crown of thorns sent by the pope. Do you subscribe to that?

Crist: No. I don't. I don't think that happened.

Next Speaker: **** stuff.

Next Speaker: Yeah.

Next Speaker: We can stop ****.

Crist: I mean the crown of thorns that's at Beauvoir, I don't think is real.

Next Speaker: **** the ones that, uh [dictation ends here]

[film showing Jefferson Davis portrait in the project office]