Edward K. Eckert interview regarding Jefferson Davis, for documentary "Jefferson Davis: an American President" 2008, by Flying Chaucer Films
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Interview forms part of Rice University Jefferson Davis Association records, 1963-2015, UA 018, Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice University

PART 1

Start of tape is film of exterior of Fort Monroe.

Interview begins at 15:31.

Interviewer: Camera, and speak.

Next speaker: Would you please state your full name and where you’d like to be listed–credited?

Eckert: My name is Edward K. Eckert. I am a Board of Trustees professor of history at St. Bonaventure University.

Speaker: In your book you talk about two metamorphoses that Davis went through in his life. Briefly, can you describe each one?

Eckert: Jefferson Davis went through two significant changes in his life, when he lived in a somewhat different manner before and he comes out of it with different views and different acts. The first of these was following his first wife’s death. His first wife was Sarah Knox Taylor. She was the daughter of the commanding officer at Fort Crawford, where Davis served. Her
father, Zachary Taylor, later would go on to be a general and president of the United States, did not favor Knox—as everyone called Sarah Knox Taylor—did not favor Knox marrying Davis. Davis and she were madly in love and were very strong-willed and Knox made it very clear to her parents that she was going to marry the young man, with or without her father and mother’s approval. Davis willingly resigned from the military in order to marry Knox because that was one of Colonel Taylor’s, uh, complaints about Davis, that he want, did not want his daughter to marry a professional soldier because the life was too difficult. He resigned and decided he would become a planter, and still, her father and mother weren’t sure. But after the several years, actually, uh, of courting and trying to get together, they decided they were going to marry, and Colonel and Mrs. Taylor give their approval. They marry and then take a honeymoon down to New Orleans on a steamer on the Mississippi River. Along the way, Jefferson stopped at several plantations that were, belonging to relatives of his in Mississippi. And at one of them, three months after their marriage, they both contracted malaria. Tragically, the young Sarah Knox Taylor Davis dies of the disease. Jefferson, of course, survives, but he was shattered. He was totally shattered. He didn’t know what to do. With his brother—his oldest brother Joseph was 23 years older than he—he decided to change his focus from being in the military to being a planter, and a politician, a leader of the southern planter-politician southern hierarchy in the nineteenth century. So he goes to his brother’s plantation, which was called Hurricane, and his brother gave him land, which he called Brierfield, and he has to buy slaves, he has to take a virgin land that had not been farmed before. The trees had to be taken down, houses, huts had to be built, the crops planted. While this was going on, Davis—Jefferson Davis—was with his brother
Joseph and for ten years, almost, nine, actually, they discussed issues. They discussed issues that were important to the nineteenth, antebellum war southern leaders. They discussed political issues, they discussed social issues, they discussed economic issues. During this period of time, Davis goes from being—one would have to call him a hellion as a youth. Davis was the tenth and youngest child of his parents. He apparently was pretty much spoiled, by not only his parents, but by his sisters and his oldest brother as well. Davis was given a good education, an excellent education. He was sent away to school for a couple of years, at a Catholic boys’ school in Kentucky, then he went to schooling in Mississippi, and then he was sent to Transylvania Uni, College. And Transylvania College was an excellent liberal arts college in the nineteenth century, one of the best in the, in the South. During that time, those three years he was there, he thoroughly enjoyed himself. And for some reason—it’s not clear to me why—his brother got him an appointment to West Point. It was not something that he sought, it was something that was given to him through his brother. And he didn’t even want to go, but to please his brother, who had been so good to his family, he decided to go. While he was at West Point, he was not your model cadet. He was almost thrown out of West Point three times: for inebriation, for, uh, being involved in the infamous eggnog riot of 1826, when the boys became so drunk they harassed the officers, they threw, they threw vegetables and punch on top of their officers, and a sizable number of cadets were thrown out. The only thing that saved Jefferson Davis was that he was no inebriated before the party that he never participated in the party. He got out of being thrown out of West Point another time on, on technicalities. He argued very minor technicalities so that the demerits would be removed. Now, this is a man who enjoys his
youth, who enjoys his friends, he goes out in the west, uh, he’s well-known as a partier among other officers. He going to come out of the first change, the first nine years following Knox’s death, as an entirely different man. And he’s going to come out as the Jefferson Davis who we normally picture, a man who is extremely dignified, a, a man who has a lofty view of, of life, a man who honor and obedience, and duty particularly, are so important to. He’s changed. He’s changed, he’s read a number of books—we don’t know what all of them are—but there’s certainly Eliot’s Debates. Eliot’s Debates were the debates over the state ratification of the United States Constitution in 1788-89. There’s a lot of grist in there on how the government was made. Was it a compact among separate and equal states or was it done by “we the people” of the United States collectively to form a new nation? He read, he read biographies, uh, he particularly, he particularly

Other speaker: ****

Eckert: Among the books that he read were the states’ debates by Jonathan Eliot, called the debates over the ratification of the Constitution. And in those there was lively debate in the thirteen states over what the Constitution was all about. Was it a compact among thirteen states to give up limited power to create a nation or was it “we the people” of the United States agreeing as a group of people to establish a new nation with sovereignty, issues concerning that, Jefferson’s and Madison’s Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions, which looked at the agreements made and the powers of the national government. His brother, you see, had been more prominently involved in Natchez and he had decided to get married and to move to the plantation that he owned, and he wanted to bring up his brother, 23 years
younger than he, to be a political leader, to be a public figure. Jefferson Davis never liked farming, by the way. He tells that story on himself later in life. He never liked the plantation life, and certainly, his, his, well, that’s a different issue. Ah, he never liked plantation life, but he would learn how to be a planter-politician-leader. All are hyphenated, all are the same type, the same society of leaders in the antebellum South, the men who counted in the South. That’s what his brother was teaching him to be, because to be a planter is more than to grow cotton or to own slaves. It is to be a leader of the society, the economy, the political structure of the antebellum South. That’s what he was being bred to be. So at the end of nine years, he comes out and he runs for Congress. This is his only popular election that he wins. In that election, there’s only about 1,100 votes cast for the entire congressional district. So you can imagine that very few people, obviously white, obviously male of a certain age, could vote at that time. Most people were excluded. But he was representing a class; that’s what he had been taught. He comes out a different figure. He’s no longer the hellion that he was at West Point and prior, the spoiled child. Now he is a man of great dignity, representing a certain class of people, the leaders of the antebellum South. That’s what he was in that transition following his first wife’s death. The second transformation that happens to Davis is during his imprisonment. For two years he’s held in prison at Fort Monroe, Virginia. During that time, before that time, he was seen as an, an inadequate leader, a man who possessed many possibilities and many traits of leadership, but was unable to, to win. I mean that’s what it boiled down to. Despite his background, despite his military training, despite his training as an executive officer as, as secretary of war, despite his legislative experience in the Congress of the United
States and the Senate, he doesn’t meet the criteria that’s necessary to win the Civil War. So he’s a defeated rebel at the end of four years. Many southerners accused Davis of prolonging the war. Had he moved earlier, he could have found another solution perhaps. To be fair to Davis, he was willing to try that, but the sine qua non that could not be compromised was that the Confederacy was an independent nation, when the North, of course, the Lincoln government, could not accept that. And so they never could come at all close to an agreement to end the war peacefully. But the war had ended. Robert E. Lee had surrendered. Davis is heading south, he’s maintaining a government. He’s going somewhere. Davis hoped to get beyond the Mississippi River somehow and to continue a government in Texas and, and somehow come back. It was never clear. I don’t know that it was clear in his mind, because the last army to surrender was Edmund Kirby Smith’s army in the Trans-Mississippi area. But this never worked out. So Davis, captured, doesn’t surrender, he’s captured by Union troopers, he’s sent to Fort Monroe to be punished as a traitor. He’s charged with treason and suddenly people’s view of Davis begins to change. Davis is no longer the uncompromising politician, he’s no longer the, the, the mean-spirited man who will not allow a, uh, an agreement to be made between the sides. Instead, he becomes a sufferer, he becomes a scapegoat for the South, a man who takes upon himself punishment for all the collective “sins” of the South, the rebellion as a whole. By his being punished, he prevents his people from being punished more. And he sees it very clear, very clear

Other speaker: **** just so you know, we’re going to have to stop the tape in about three minutes.
Eckert: People’s opinion of their leader had changed. Rather than being the obstinate person who prevented a better end to the war, he became the person who personified the punishment of the North upon the South following the war. He became the sacrificial lamb, the scapegoat for the South and he recognizes very early, as did his wife, that by being in prison he is accepting guilt for, if there is guilt, for what his people had done. The scapegoat myth is a very old myth in, in cultures. The scapegoat in Hebrew times, was a, a goat that was chosen and the sins were ceremonially placed upon that goat, and that goat would be sent out into exile. Davis is the same. He’s exiled by being in prison. He is accepting all the sins. He’s the only one who’s really going to be charged in this thing, the only civilian charged for treason based upon the Civil War. And consequently, during that time, if people see him in prison, they recognize, too, that he’s suffering for us. And he comes out of prison cherished—if not loved, cherished by his own people. That’s something that Jefferson Davis was never able to accomplish during the war. Lee could do, Lincoln could do it, but Jefferson Davis couldn’t. Jefferson Davis was a man of, of stone, he just kind of stood there. His speeches were very difficult to understand. They’re very legalistic. He did not speak to the people. He really wasn’t a politician the way Abraham Lincoln was a politician. He represented a class and it was that class that put him in office. It wasn’t the people who put him in office. Now the people of the South are cherishing him. His imprisonment did that. So he’s changed. He’s changed the way people view him, as the first time, and he’s changed in his own perception of himself as well.

PART 2
****, 'kay. But this question that you've touched on it, I think we can really identify the [motivation?].

Next Speaker: Because we're not assuming that the people who watch this are gonna know.

Next Speaker: Right.

Next Speaker: Okay.

Eckert: We've got a voice in the background.

Next Speaker: Um, this, they're carrying more so that way.

Eckert: Okay. Okay.

Next Speaker: Okay. We're all right? Examine the life if you will, uh, describe exactly what it meant to be a southern planter-politician.

Next Speaker: And, and more so in, in comparison and contrast to what the northern version of that would be. **** North.

Next Speaker: Great.

Eckert: Okay. Let me begin someplace.

Next Speaker: Yeah.

Eckert: Western civilization in the 19th century was on the merge of redefining what it meant by moving toward a freer and open political structure. As the middle class grew, more and more of them wanted to participate in government. The United States, of course, is the great example of the ability of a people to govern themselves. The question, however, was how many people, or
which people, do you allow to be “of the people” to govern themselves. Clearly not children. Clearly not women at that time. Clearly not black people at that time or people of color of the time, so who are you left with and how do you distinguish those who are truly able to govern themselves in some sort of, of a, of a, uh, let me think about this, who are able to govern themselves in a responsible way, because the problem always feared and the example of not only the American Revolution, the French Revolution, that there's too much violence and it gets carried away. So you have two types of interpretation coming into the western world at this very time, this antebellum time, that's growing. On the one hand is the liberalism, such as John Stuart Mill, the right of every person to speak out and to have a say in government, and to Mill and his wife Harriet, they meant every person. Persons of color, both genders, all, uh, of all classes. On the other hand, the Edmund Burke idea of conservatism was that a certain class is trained, educated to be leaders, by means of birth in the case of Europe, but in America by education, by a certain background and by a certain profession. The South had chosen, or was forced or fell into being a plantation, an agricultural South. To, in order to succeed in the South a man had to be a planter and represent those plantation leaders. So when they chose, when they went to election in Mississippi as in, as in Jefferson Davis's only real election which, which was in, in 1845 to Congress, that, that he won, by that I mean a Senate election was actually an appointment in the 19th century. By that I mean he wasn't elected president, he was chosen to be president. So the only election that he wins is, is the 1845, uh, election, and there's only about eleven hundred people who vote for a representative. He's representing these eleven hundred people, sure, he's representing the women and the children and the people of color, but he's really representing those people who are voting, and those people who are voting are people of wealth and position and generally in agriculture. That's what the planter-, uh, politician leader in the South was like. And consequently what he was defending was a lifestyle, a society, a social order. It wasn't just slavery, and it wasn't state's rights, it's the whole social system in the broadest context in the South, which they, which, which was being defended by the planter-politician leader of, of the South.

Next Speaker: Just a second.
Next Speaker: Describe if you will, Davis' imprisonment at Fort Monroe, uh, was he in manacles? I'm sorry, why was he in manacles and why was he under a constant light [that you read them]?]

Eckert: When Jefferson Davis was captured by federal soldiers in Irwinville, Georgia, in May 1865 [looking and gesturing off-camera] I'm finding that

Next Speaker: Yeah.

Eckert: – distracting. Just before Richmond fell to the Union forces, Robert E. Lee warned Jefferson Davis that the end was near. Davis knew that the end was probable but he wasn't expecting it quite so soon. He had made arrangements, having gotten his family, uh, allowing his family to flee ahead of them, uh, to, to go south from Richmond, he very quickly moved what was remaining of his cabinet and a small military force and $25,000 in gold that was in the Confederate treasury, and they began heading out of Richmond. They went to Dansville, Virginia, the hope was by being in that part of southwestern Virginia, the Lee’s forces and Johnston's forces in North Carrollina could somehow gather around the president and what remained of his government. Lee, however, surrendered totally and conse, that, that came as a surprise to Davis, and there was less and less places to flee, and as he continued to go south because Danville, Virginia, was no longer safe, he began losing more and more of his cabinet, his guard, until finally there was very little left of his government. He ran into Varina, his wife, and four, their four children, and they traveled together for a couple of days, and the plan was for Varina to head toward the, the coast, someplace probably in Florida, get on board a ship with the family and to go someplace safe, perhaps Bermuda or Nassau or, or, or someplace.

Next Speaker: What was ****?

Eckert: Its cabinet officers and military support were with him. He and Varina and their children were together, uh, and he planned on sending Varina to the coast. Now, if she could get to the coast, she could get a ship perhaps to Bermuda or, or Nassau or someplace to escape. He always hoped to go west. He hoped to go beyond the Mississippi. There was still a Confederate
army there under Ed, Ed, Ed, Edmund Kirby Smith and to join with them and perhaps fight from Texas. It never was –

Next Speaker: ****.

Eckert: – it was hoped that Varina could, could, uh, get to the coast and from the coast get a steamer which would take her to Bermuda or Nassau or, or someplace of, of safety in the western hemisphere. Davis himself helped, hoped to go beyond the Mississippi and to join Edmund Kirby Smith's army, and continue to fight the war from that part of the United States, particularly Texas, but all of this changed on that May morning, uh, early in the morning when cavalry, uh, Union cavalry, suddenly appeared at their camp. Interestingly, the cavalry did not know who was, who they were capturing at the beginning. They ran into each other and fired shots into each other's ranks, causing casualties, uh, to each other. Uh, among them, uh, was Jefferson Davis. Davis, when he heard the cavalry coming, grabbed a raincoat. The raincoat was a raglan-sleeved, uh, outer coat that would be worn by either men or women. If you went and bought raincoat today and it was a London Fog or Burberry coat, and, uh, a man and a woman bought a trench coat, as we call 'em, they look pretty much the same. He grabbed the coat and put it on and Varina, seeing him going out there in the rain, threw a shawl over his head. It wasn't unusual for men to use shawls or, uh, Abraham Lincoln frequently used a shawl, and indeed had a shawl with him when he was assassinated, uh, at Ford's Theater. Davis went out, uh, Varina sent a servant along with a milk pail so they looked like they were on an errand, uh, when a trooper saw them, noticed the boots under the raincoat that Davis was wearing, told him to halt, and Davis claimed he was going to attack the troopers, he was going to throw 'em off the horse. At that point Varina came, hugged Davis and asked the trooper not to harm her husband. Jefferson Davis was captured. He was a man with a reward of $100,000.00 on his head. He was, he was implicated in the assassination of President Lincoln by the Johnson Administration. Now we know that's a fallacy, that isn't so. However, at that time, there was nothing but confusion, and unlike most other assassinations the Lincoln assassination really was a conspiracy, more than one person doing it but a group of people doing it. So how far did that group go? They charged the, the idea was, uh, they believed that Davis had participated to some degree, possibly in the assassination of the president. Lincoln had, had remarked late in the war that when asked what
would he do if he caught Jefferson Davis. He said the best thing that could happen is if Davis could escape unbeknown to me, because obviously he would have to do something when he got, when he got Jefferson Davis, but what do you do? Do you just free him? Do you arrest him? Do you execute him? What do you do? No one knew. With the assassination of Lincoln, this changed the whole parameters. Now you have the possibility that this fugitive really was a fugitive from justice and assassination/murder. Davis was taken to the general's office in Macon, uh, headquarters in, in Macon, Georgia, and General James Wilson treated him and his cabinet as important guests. They ate dinner together, they chatted as men, uh, as men, and then Davis was sent from Macon to Savannah, both by train and by steamer, and along the way he was, he was well-treated. There was a guard but he wasn't placed in any sort of shackles or, or, or that, to, to restrain him. He and his family, along with others, were put on the, uh, steamer, the Clyde, which went from Savannah north, but they didn't know where they were going at this time. They picked up other fugitives. Clement Clay for instance, a senator from Alabama, uh, and they picked up the vice president of the Confederacy, Alexander Stephens. They got outside Fort Monroe, which was one of the largest forts in the United States at the time, although it's at the end of the peninsula of the York and the James River in Virginia, the Union managed to maintain control over this important, uh, fort throughout the war. He was held on the Clyde for a couple of days while the U.S. government tried to figure out what to do with this man whom they saw as the arch-villain, the man and personna who caused this whole civil war, or if he hadn't caused it, had, had not ended it more quickly.

Next Speaker: ****.

Next Speaker: So he's being held –

Eckert: Oh, okay.

Next Speaker: – on the Clyde.

Eckert: Okay. While Davis was being transported, uh, to Fort Monroe, the government, particularly the War Department, does not know what to do with this prisoner, is trying to decide
what to do with this prisoner. He's going to be held by the military, not by civilian, courts and the secretary of war, Edwin Stanton, is very much involved in what's going to happen. Indeed, he appoints a new commander of the post, a young man only in his mid-20s who is a brigadier general, a man named Nelson Miles. Nelson Miles is a, will be a career soldier, but he's a martinet. He was a man who, who, who not only wanted to obey every letter of his orders, he was a man who almost created new ways of being more military than was expected. Miles was sent down along with the assistant secretary of war, Charles Dana, and a general, General, uh, Hallock, who would be like the chief of staff of the army today. He didn't have that title, that, that position didn't exist, but that's kind of the role. He wasn't a combat fighting general, he was the one who, who interpreted what was going on.

Next Speaker: Positive? ****.

Next Speaker: That's fine.

Next Speaker: Yeah. ****.

Eckert: The three men, uh, Assistant Secretary Dana, General Hallock and General Miles decided that Davis would be kept in a portion of the fort's outer wall called the casemate. The casemate was divided into several, many rooms, and the rooms were used for a variety of purposes. Initially, the casemate would be where you would have cannon to fire from the fort, but by 1865 the cannon were put on top of the casemates and the casemate, uh, uh, cells themselves, or I should say rooms themselves, were used for a variety of purposes; the one into which they were going to place Jefferson Davis housed a officer and his family, and these people had to be removed from that casemate before Davis could be put into it. He was held on board the ship and while he was held on board the ship the, the, the men discussed what else they should do with Davis. Clearly, as they determined, he was a prisoner of the state. He was the most important prisoner ever held by the United States government. Now what are the possibilities? Well, again, you have that assassination conspiracy in the background, so it's not a calm time, it's not the typical time. And so they were afraid that there might be a group of Confederates that tried to free the president, the ex-president.
Next Speaker: I wanna just have you say that sentence again, I'm gonna **** over.

Eckert:  It was possible that there were a number of supporters who would try and free and their ex-president.  It was also possible that the man became so depressed at the loss of the war and the Confederacy and what happened, that he might commit suicide.  Neither of those things were true, but they didn't know that at the time.  Miles, always looking to extend his authority a little bit more, requested perhaps the permission to put the prisoner in shackles if it were necessary.  General Hallock objected to that idea.  However, Charles Dana agreed that if necessary the, uh, General Miles could constrain Davis and Clay, who was also to be held here with manacles.  Davis was finally, uh, the, the, um, Miles goes to the boat along [pause] let me start that over.  Finally, it's decided to transfer the prisoners to Fort Monroe.  Uh, soldiers go on board, rowboats, to the Clyde, Davis is removed, along with Clay, and the two men are brought to a wharf here at, at Fort Monroe.  Davis walks in and Dana claimed he showed a haughty attitude.  He was a man of dignity.  He, he was 56 years old.  He was a man in relatively good health and a man now who was going to be imprisoned by the United States government as a possible participant in the assassination and certainly for treason.  They brought him in and they placed him in a casemate.  The casemate had recently been converted into a cell.  To do that they had to bar the windows on the outside, on the moat side, and they, they whitewashed it so he could be seen and they had to move out the, the officer's family's goods and move in certain goods for, uh, certain things for Davis, a bed, a table, a chair, a commode, for instance.  Very fundamental, very basic.  It was also decided that this prisoner was of such importance that the guard level would be extraordinary.  There would be a light burning constantly in his cell.  There would be a sentinel who would be in his cell, standing in the cell.  Outside the cell would be two more sentinels who were armed, plus an officer who would observe Davis and his every movement every 15 minutes.  Davis had no privacy whatsoever.  He had no way to screen himself during his most personal moments.  He was always on view of his captors.  And this bothered him terribly, as did the light, as did the sentinels who were changed every 2 hours.  The casemate on each side of Davis had guards in it, and the guards would come in every 2 hours, they would report in, they, they would go through whatever guards go through and it would waken him up.  He couldn't sleep.  The light was there and that bothered him.  He suffered from
neuralgia, he suffered from some sort of an eye disease and I'm not sure what it was, eventually going blind in one eye. He suffered from a series of things, rheumatism, neuralgia, uh, St. Anthony's Fire, which is, which is a, a strep, uh, uh, rash on the face, it's very painful, it could be deadly in those days before antibiotics. So while he wasn't sickly, he wasn't totally well, but we always have to remember he's going to live a quarter-century beyond his confinement, uh, and, and the war, almost a quarter-century. They take him in, they put him in, in, in the prison cell. We have to accept what Dana says is probably true. He did have a haughty attitude. He was the president of the Confederate States of America, and as such –

Next Speaker: Hold on one second.

Eckert: – yeah, do you hear a chirping in the back? [pigeons at the window]

Next Speaker: Had to be **** had to be painted, and bars had to go up.

Eckert: Yeah, okay, I gotcha. ****.

Eckert: Charles Dana remarked that Davis had a haughty attitude when he left the, uh, the rowboat and stepped onto, onto the wharf. The cell that he's going to be placed in, that is the casemate, uh, room that had been an apartment for an officer and his family had to be whitewashed, had to be prepared for the prisoner of state it was to have. The, the outside window was, bars were placed on it, before there really nothing on it but the window facing the moat. Uh, the pe, the, uh, family's belongings had to be moved elsewhere on the post and Davis received a hospital bed, a chair and a table. Uh, there was a shelf and a commode in, in his cell. There was nothing that offered him privacy whatsoever. There would be a sentinel in that cell with him at all times. There would be a light burning at all times. There would be two armed sentinels just outside his door. By the way the, the, the, uh, initially the doors were just that, doors that were barred, they were not prison cell grated doors. Uh, an officer had to look at him, uh, every 15 minutes and report to it. No one was to talk to him. There would be a changing of the guard every 2 hours. They would do whatever sentinels do, marching in, changing guards, making noise or, accouterments would, would be scraping and bouncing and noise would be
made, disturbing, uh, the prisoners. Miles, for no real apparent reason, one can only say to humiliate Davis, decided a couple of days after Davis is in Fort Monroe to put manacles on his feet. Davis makes it very clear in his own writing that he, he opposed the manacling of his person, but he did it in a dignified way. He didn't throw men down, he didn't fight men off. He made it clear that the manacles were unnecessary, that he opposed them, would prefer not to have them, but they were placed on him anyway. Word of that got out very quickly. We, we don't really know how but it went through some sort of a grapevine and 3 days later there an article in the Philadelphia paper saying that Davis had been manacled. Two days later it had reached the New York papers and 2 days later, New York, uh, northern leaders were wiring the War Department, saying, Did you really manacle Jefferson Davis? Was it necessary to do so? Edwin Stanton particularly felt pressure from the important Republic politician in New York, Thurlow Weed, who said you know, this isn't necessary. This is going too far. You, you're humiliating. Why are you doing this? So, so Stanton telegraphed, uh, General Miles and said are there manacles on Davis? If there are manacles on Davis, remove them. Miles responded saying there were manacles on Davis but they have been removed, so Davis was manacled 5 days. The supposed reason why it was necessary to manacle Davis were the doors were replaced with grated doors with bars on the doors in that 5-day period. But as Clement Clay also a prisoner in, in the fort casemate makes clear, he was never manacled. It was done to embarrass Davis, to show him that he was under the control of an equally arrogant man in Nelson Miles, and Nelson Miles was really controlling the situation. Actually, living in the casemate wasn't that bad for summer in Tidewater Virginia and he lived in the casemate for a little more than 3 months, when at the suggestion of his physician John J. Craven, he was removed to another officer's quarters called Carroll Hall, which was a brick building, two-story, he was, his cell was placed on the second story, he was given a few more items for his, for his cell, but basically he still had a light burning, he still had the sentinels guarding him, uh, he was distracted by the noise and the light. and he wasn't really able to communicate at that point outside the fort. The only person he could speak to was his doctor. Finally, shortly after he was allowed to move to Carroll Hall, he is given permission to write to his wife and his wife to write to him. All their letters however were censored by the authorities, the authorities being in Washington, D.C., Edwin Stanton, as well as the judge advocate general of the U.S. Army, they read all the letters both ways and at times were told, were sent back to the writer. An instance is Mrs. Davis writes
to Davis and said, tell me about your new quarters in Carroll Hall. Davis writes four pages to her about it. They're all forbidden. I guess the idea was perhaps the description was too graphic--people trying to free Davis--there weren't any, but if there were, would have a description of where he's being held, so for those reasons they were censored from the letter. Mrs. Davis complains and Davis says I've tried to tell you, but I can't. So you, so you have a constant going on. Much of his letters dealt with his love for his wife and his children. Much of her letters dealt, uh, dealt with dealing with him, loving him and being there. Mrs. Davis actually is being held in a, oh, I'd like to say under house arrest, but she's under city arrest. She's in the city of Savannah and she cannot leave without, uh, the approval of the military. So consequently she is being watched. She sends her, three of her children, or three oldest remaining children to Canada with her mother so that they be educated, keeping only the youngest with her. She found that her children were being harassed at times, although most people were kind to them, people were harassing them, and they taught, they taught, uh, the two old, uh, the two boys, William and Jefferson Jr., uh, “We’ll hang Jeff Davis from the Sour Apple Tree,” which is the “glory, glory, hallelujah” and, and this, she had to get them out. She had to get them into, to a different environment. And the best environment she could get them to was in Canada. She herself is not permitted to, to leave Savannah for almost 6 months. When she is permitted to leave, then she works very hard at getting Davis out of prison because even though he's in Carroll Hall and, and the conditions are better, he's still a prisoner. And if she can't get him out of prison, at least she can ameliorate the conditions within the prison. And how to do that? To do it on his innocence would be a difficult charge to argue, so she turns to health--his health. And suddenly he becomes a very sick, very feeble, very fragile man, he's only 56 years old, uh, at 60 I can't consider that a feeble old man, uh, she, uh, she concentrates on sickness. Illness had always been very important in their relationship, because Davis, uh, had been married before, and when he married Varina, Varina always claimed that, that she married an oak tree, but the oak tree had been girdled. The romance, the blossoms of life had been removed. The love had, had been removed. So apparently there wasn't that romance that a young girl pictured coming from marriage; after all, Davis is old enough to be her father as well. But what she found there was a very strong man and rather they, they tended in their relationship, both before the war and after the war, to use illness as a time when each other could show affection that they couldn't show, that they found difficulty showing to each other, uh, when they were well. So both will use
illness throughout their lives as a way of getting attention, a way of, of fulfilling their love. She turns to his illness as, she turns to his physical condition as a way to ameliorate his condition. She has an assistant in Davis's physicians. First there is John J. Craven and then there is General George Cooper. I'm not sure about Cooper's first name, but then there is Dr. Cooper, and Dr. Cooper is equally a supporter, uh, he's equally sympathetic to Davis and his family. They take excellent care of him. He's fed from the beginning from the hospital, uh, at Fort Monroe. He does not receive soldiers' rations. He receives hospital rations, which are supposed to be more nourishing and healthful than not. Davis himself never complains. He complains about the light and he complains about the sound. His other complaints are rheumatism, neuralgia, things and getting old, which he would have had anyway. Mrs. Davis, however, makes disease, makes her reports so hysterical that the army sends down the surgeon general to see what Davis's conditions are really like. He has a letter from Dr. Cooper saying that Davis is in terrible shape and can't be responsible if something happens to him in the summer of 1866, a year after his capture, when he's still here. The surgeon general goes down and says, hey, he's not in bad shape for a man who's 57. He's got some problems but he's as strong and as healthy as a man would be, uh, at that age, and again we always remember that he doesn't die 'til 1889. We're not talking about a man who, who is so, uh, worn out by his imprisonment that he's barely going to get out the door and die. He's going to live another quarter-century beyond his imprisonment. Uh, so, she uses this. Varina Davis is a politician. She knows how to use public relations. She outmaneuvers General Nelson Miles, the commandant. Miles knows what she's doing. He writes to, to Washington, D.C., and says, can't we get reporters in here? Can't we get people in here to tell us what's actually happening in Fort Monroe? The, they, they see that he's being treated fairly, that he's being treated well in their turf. No, the War Department said, no, nobody can go in. So there's no objective view of what was happening to Davis in prison. There was his wife's hysteria and there was a book called The Prison Life of Jefferson Davis.

Next Speaker: Let's pause there so we can ****.

Next Speaker: Yeah. All right.

PART 3
Eckert: Okay. Mrs. Davis's, uh, campaign, uh, public relations campaign to free her husband was helped enormously by the publication of a book called *Prison Life of Jefferson Davis*. It was reputedly written by Davis's first, uh, physician at, at the prison, John J. Craven. Craven was a, uh, military surgeon. Uh, he was a man who was really self-trained as a physician. Uh, indeed the New Jersey, uh, Medical Association protested to the War Department that he was not qualified to be a physician. But he passed some tests and, and was made a surgeon and he just happened to be the surgeon here. He served Davis well, he was, he was one of the few men that Davis could talk to, General Miles, the chaplain, occasional visits from, uh, Davis' pastor from Richmond, Virginia. Uh, and he, he tried to treat Davis as well as, as he could. He was a Democrat, uh, which meant that he believed in strong states' rights, a weaker national government, and now that the war was over, like other Democrats he was worried about what was happening in the South. A very close friend of his was an, was a newspaperman and a poet, a writer of amusing tales, named Charles G. Halpine. Halpine was an immigrant from Ireland. His father was a priest in the Protestant Irish church, uh, but he identified himself with the Irish immigrants. Uh, he, and during his service in the Civil War, he was an officer and served as an aide to General Hunter in both South Carolina and the Shenandoah Valley. He had written a series of stories, uh, supposedly written by Private Miles O'Reilly, uh, about military life and he had an idea when he found out that his former friend, or when he found out his friend, uh, was the physician to Davis in prison. He proposed that Craven gather notes and that Halpine would write a book based on these notes about Davis's imprisonment. He was like O'Meara's account of Napoleon at St. Helena, which was a, which was a popular account, an accurate account of the emperor's last years. But Halpine's intentions were different. What Halpine was trying to do was help the Democratic party defeat the Republican party in the congressional elections of 1866. That was the sole purpose. Halpine didn't care a whit about Jefferson Davis. Jefferson Davis was just a convenience to use in describing how unfair, how, how barbaric the treatment of people could be by Republicans once they got in power. So consequently, Craven writes a book which shows a Jefferson Davis that isn't true, a Jefferson Davis who, who's a very loving, kind, gentle man, really a Christ being imprisoned here for, for no reason by, by a, a government that is too strong. The book was an immediate success. It was a success in the money it earned for the authors Craven and Halpine. It was a success in gaining sympathy for Jefferson Davis, which was extremely important. But it wasn't a success in winning the election
of 1866. But *The Prison Life* did transform Davis. *The Prison Life of Jefferson Davis* made him the man he always wanted to be, the loving, gentle, kind soul, the man who, who had no hard feelings toward anyone. General Hunter, who Davis hated because Hunter came from one of the first families of Virginia only to burn the Shenandoah Valley. Stonewall Jackson. Davis didn't like Stonewall Jackson due to a complicated but, but very proper reason. He didn't like Jackson. There were a lot of inaccuracies, so much, so many inaccuracies that Jefferson drew a 180 marks in his book, marginalia, said this is “fiction distorting fact,” this isn't true. But the book had changed him. Now southerners saw that their leader was suffering for their supposed sins. His position in the southern people's mind changed and it also changed in northerners' minds. Two years after, this comes out a year after the war's over, why are we still punishing this man? The war is over. What are we going to do with him? Are you really going to try him? Are you going to, to execute him? Why is he still in prison? He would be in prison another year, almost another year, after the book appeared, but the book was of great importance in changing first, the severity of the, of the punishment he received, because following the book's appearance, Mrs. Davis and her family was really allowed to move in with Jefferson Davis. Not only, not only was Mrs. Davis and their youngest child Winnie Ann with them, but so too was Mrs. Davis' sister Margaret and a servant or two were with them. So they lived in genteel poverty in prison, in Carroll Hall in the final, in the final months of his imprisonment. Uh, that book helped change that, and that book then becomes an important part of who Davis is. Davis is the scapegoat of the South. He's the martyr to the cause and consequently Davis found himself cherished and celebrated by his people the way he had never felt them before the war. Davis and, uh, and his wife Varina never attacked the book. How do you attack a book that makes you a better person than you are? Do you say, hey, I'm really not that nice? You really don't have me as I am. No, of course not, you let it sit. But Davis always disliked some parts of it, and he particularly disliked Craven for revealing the private letters which Craven copied between Varina and himself. A gentleman wouldn't do that, re, reveal the private thoughts of a husband and wife to one another. Craven wasn't a gentleman. Craven was a New Jersey physician, politician, sort of a, sort of a gadfly of types. He, he doesn't stay in medicine, he tries to invent different things later in life. He runs for Congress as a Democratic, uh, candidate from, from New York later in life. So he tries a, a bunch of things but the book itself is, is of great importance. [looking to the side] I know. Okay?
Other Speaker: Yeah.

Speaker 1: **** wake up ****.

[camera and Eckert move to the plaque entitled “The Jefferson Davis Casemate,” in the room where Davis was held]

Other Speaker: Give it a shot. Okay. Camera ****. Go ahead.

Eckert: This is casemate, room number 2. This is the room in the casemate, which is simply the interior of a fort that held Jefferson Davis for the 3 months that he was, uh, in prison. That's all inaccurate. Let me start over.

Other Speaker: Do you see that?

Eckert: What? Didn't work right?

Other Speaker: No, no, no.

Eckert: I got my glasses on too. [gesturing off-camera:] Linda?

Other Speaker: **** this way.

Eckert: Linda?

Other Speaker: **** okay, any time.

Eckert: This is casemate number 2, part of the inner structure of Fort Monroe. There were many rooms like this under the fort. The fort used these rooms for a variety of purposes. Indeed, this very room was used by an officer and his family before Jefferson Davis would be put into it. It's only during the first 3 months of his imprisonment that Jefferson Davis will be in
the casemate. After that he's moved to a two-story brick building in the interior grounds of the fort. Let's take a look at what Davis was permitted to have when he was first put into this room. There was a bed, the bed was a hospital bed, that was moved in here. The bed stand and, and the mattress, a small pillow. He was given a table and a chair, a King James Bible, a light which had to be kept burning all the time and a, a pitcher and a glass. Davis complained that what he really missed was his Book of Common Prayer, the Episcopal, uh, prayer book that he was so accustomed to using. What isn't shown here--I guess out of, out of modesty for modern taste--is what he called the stool closet or what we would call a commode. Davis of course wasn't able to go outside of his cell to, to, uh, take care of his bodily functions, he had to do so here. While he was in this cell, there was always a sentinel within this room with him and the light burned all night. Just outside the doors were more sentinels and an officer who looked in on Jefferson Davis constantly. Davis was permitted relatively few items in this phase of his imprisonment. Once he gets to Carroll Hall and once it becomes obvious that he's not involved in the assassination of Lincoln, he's not going to kill himself, there isn't going to be a plot to free him, friends send him books, they send him cigars and pipe tobacco, and they send him liquors of various type. Indeed, the bishop of Montreal sends him bottles of green Chartreuse, which is a, a, a type of liqueur, which Varina Davis claimed help calm his nerves. Davis writes to Varina of a typical day in his life. When he gets up, he takes care of his, of his bodily needs, and then spends a time reading the Book of Common Prayer. After doing that, if possible, he might read a newspaper. He was given newspapers to read, but he never had a choice of which newspapers he would see. He was also permitted to use the post library. Although he complained that most of the books were more appealing to a military man than he, in truth he did read some of the military books and he particularly was fond on Bancroft's *History of the United States* and Macaulay's *History of England*. He would read, he would be allowed initially 1 hour of exercise after the first few weeks in this, in the casemate. He was under guard during that time and General Miles himself would often accompany him on his walk on the ramparts just above us, above the casemate.

Other Speaker: ****. Again. Okay, and any time.
Eckert: This is casemate 2, the actual room that held Jefferson Davis during 3 months, the first 3 months of his 2-years imprisonment, at Fort Monroe. The room has been refurbished with furniture that is similar to what would have been found during Davis' 3 months here. It includes a hospital bed and a cover and a pillow, a table and a chair, a lamp which burned at all times. It shows a pitcher and a glass and a Bible, which Davis was allowed to have from the start. For the first couple of days of his imprisonment, he was not allowed to have anything more and he greatly missed the Episcopalian Book of Common Prayer and after a few days from his own personal belongings which he kept in, in, in a piece of luggage, this was taken out and he was allowed to use it. You can see that the view outside the prison was at the moat and the was at a moat. What isn't shown here is what he called a stool closet or what we would call a, a commode today, uh, for his use. He was not allowed to go out of this room or cell for any purpose, uh, and so therefore he had to take care of all his bodily functions here. Within the cell with him was a member of the guard, a sentinel, and just outside the cell's two doors were two more sentinels, enlisted men, plus an officer. The officer was charged with looking at Davis every 15 minutes. Davis particularly minded the lamp which was kept lit all night and the marching of the sentinels back and forth outside his door and particularly the changing of the guard that would happen every 2 hours. In the rooms on either side of Davis, the guards were kept so there would be noise coming from these rooms as well. The idea was to have Davis isolated into this one room, guards in the room, outside the room, on either side, so there was no possibility of an attempt for escape or of suicide. Davis' life here in the cell was very boring for him. He described it in later on in a letter to his wife. He described how he got up each morning, took care of his bodily needs, then read a portion of the Book of Common Prayer. He would read some Bible, uh, some parts of the Bible, and then, if lucky, would have been given a newspaper that day. Davis had no choice of newspapers. Occasionally a newspaper would be given to him. He wasn't allowed to talk to the sentinels or the officers. Very few people were allowed to converse with him. In addition to the fortress commander General Nelson Miles was the doctor, John Craven, who took care of him, as well as the chaplain, the regiment's chaplain of the guards, and occasionally, about twice a month, his pastor from Richmond, uh, Father Minnigerode would come down here and meet with, uh, Jefferson Davis. Davis would read books, he was allowed to use the prison library. He complained that the books were mostly books that would concern a military man, books on forts and drill and so forth, that he wasn't
interested in, but he was fond of Macaulay's *History of England* and Bancroft's *History of the United States*, both of which he read while in prison. After the first few weeks he was allowed to go for a walk, to exercise. Usually it was 1-hour exercise, a walk around the, uh, parapet, uh, above, and he had to take that often with the commanding general, Nelson Miles. It's interesting that the two men apparently never developed a relationship. Perhaps they would have developed a relationship had not Varina come in and used Nelson Miles as such an arch-villain in the treatment of her husband, because clearly it was Miles's idea to humiliate Davis by placing the shackles on, on him. There was no real necessity to do that. That's it. Okay?

Other Speaker: ****

Eckert: Can you see the bars good?

Other Speaker: Oh, yeah.

Eckert: Yeah? Okay.

Other Speaker: **** whenever you're ready, go ahead.

Eckert: Davis was held in, in this room, always under the constant view of the guards. It was humiliating for him to have to use the toilet, to have to dress in front of other people. It was like you were in a cage. The, the doors were, were barred and there were constant people looking at you. Indeed, some claim that Miles gave permission to those with whom he was connected to allow them to come and view the prisoner during his walk along the parapet. But constant people staring at you, a guard in the room, two guards just outside, an officer as well out there, and all around him are people just staring at him.

Other Speaker: Can you talk about how they had to document his mental state ****.

Eckert: Well, uh, okay. They don't document his mental state. They want, had to come out and look into the cell to ensure that Davis was still alive and well, and every 2 hours, the
guards would be changed, new guards would come in. There would be noise, even though there, even though it was supposed to be done quietly and there was straw put on the floor to hold down the noise, there's that constant shuffling. These men had, had, had, uh, rifles with them, they had the other accoutrements of a soldier. They were young men and, and initially one can imagine they obeyed the orders strictly but, you know, 2 hours on guard duty is a long time and certainly remarks must have been passed. Davis suffered, if you would, the, the torture of sleeplessness. It wasn't designed that way, it wasn't done to force him to reveal some sort of information, but it was done because it was a means of ensuring that Jefferson Davis would not be free and Jefferson Davis would not be hurt or hurt himself.

Other Speaker: That's great.

Eckert: Okay.

Other Speaker: I think we got it.

[at 21:11 to 33:15, end of tape: more film of the room, indistinct conversation between interviewer and cameraman, and more silent film, mostly of the view from window, i.e., the water-filled moat, and more of interior of room, portrait of Davis and Craven in the room]

Other Speaker: Yeah ****.

Other Speaker: **** they've definitely taken that **** maybe.

Other Speaker: Okay. Well, I have a purple heart ceremony tomorrow ****

Other Speaker: ****

Other Speaker: And then, uh, we still have another 7 weeks of shooting ****.

Other Speaker: Oh, that's right, you said ****
Other Speaker: Um, we **** but I think that we've been successful now **** West Point Museum in getting **** I don't think we need to go to ****. There's really **** and, uh, so I would say the likelihood ****

Other Speaker: We can't get **** the Civil War ****

Other Speaker: Oh, the, the ****

Other Speaker: **** the movie The Lords and Generals.

Other Speaker: No ****

Other Speaker: ****

Other Speaker: And what did you think, I've heard mixed things. I haven't seen it.

Other Speaker: Well, it's, it's a little stuffy **** I think **** realistic ****.

Other Speaker: Now, is it mainly the, uh –

Other Speaker: **** I was tired after watching the battle. I was perspiring ****.

Other Speaker: **** 5,000 people killed **** wounded ****