

# JEFFERSON DAVIS FUTCH

August 2, 1996

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Richard Weaver,  
interviewer

**Weaver:** Starting off here, my name is Richard Weaver. I'm here today on August 2, 1996, interviewing Dr. Jefferson Davis Futch, III, of the history department at Washington and Lee. Thank you for agreeing to meet me for the interview.

**Futch:** Thank you inviting the incarnation of history.

**Weaver:** You've been here for a very long time and you've seen a lot of—

**Futch:** Practically 150 years.

**Weaver:** What stands out for you as a very impressionable moment, when someone has come on campus?

**Futch:** When someone came onto campus. Well, I suppose that moment would be when Kurt Von Shushnig [phonetic], the dictator of Austria—not at the time—the ex-dictator of Austria, whom Hitler had overthrown in 1938, and his coming to the campus in 1965 was certainly a memorable and wonderful moment for me, because, of course, I teach that period of history, and had never expected to meet anybody of such importance. He had been, as many people who studied the period know, incarcerated by the Nazis. He was a dictator for four years, then had been overthrown by Hitler when the Third Reich annexed poor little helpless, defenseless, Austria; one may add, also, pro-Nazi Austria. So the Austrians didn't have to be tugged very hard into that.

Von Shushnig, the ruler of the country, the chancellor, or the equivalent of the prime minister, of course, did want to keep his job, so he was not pro-Nazi. The Germans moved in a space of a couple of days, and Shushnig was thrown into several concentration camps for the remaining seven years of Hitler's rule, and spent most of his time at Dachau, and at the end of the war was to have been murdered, had Hitler's orders been carried out. He and other VIPs were to be slaughtered as the Third Reich came crashing down. The SS realized that they themselves might get in hot water if they did that a week before the war ended. So the lives of Shushnig and other VIPs were saved.

However, the allies wouldn't let the former dictator re-enter political life. They left him free. He could have lived in Austria as a private citizen, but they said, no, no, he did not rule a democracy, he ruled a dictatorship, so he is ineligible for life in resuscitated Austria. So he must have said, in polite terms, I'm sure, "The hell with that," and left the country, came to the United States, became an American citizen and a professor of politics in St. Louis, at Washington University.

So after fifteen or sixteen years after when he first arrived here, he must have gotten a furlough from Washington University, and made a tour of Virginia colleges and universities in October of 1965, and he spoke here. Washington and Lee was on his itinerary, nationally, this being the real University of Virginia.

So he spoke here in Lee Chapel one night in October of '65, and I was invited by Professor Crenshaw, who was then the head of the history department, a memorable man, too, and a marvelous, an admirable, praiseworthy man. He invited me to make the introduction. It was the first, and I believe it was only the first of two times, that I have done that in Lee Chapel. It was very intimidating to a young teacher to stand in front of the chapel, which was packed, not entirely with students, mostly with old codgers and coots of Lexington, who remembered the rise of Hitler and the pre-World War II days. So there were a lot of blue-haired ladies

and tottering old gentlemen on walking sticks in the audience, and then some of the students, a lot of my students. It was intimidating to stand up at the podium in Lee Chapel and introduce one of the most famous names in history. We can safely assume that 100 years from now, Shushnig's name will be still in the history books, or history computers, or whatever the medium of chronicling is at that time.

I was very disappointed, though dared not tell him, that he didn't talk about the Nazi period, but I suppose he had overdosed on that. So what he talked about was NATO and the relations between Britain and General [Charles] DeGaulle of France, and the 1960s contemporary matters, which, frankly, were not terribly interesting. So I just sat and stared at him and I thought, "This man was Hitler's prisoner. This man was in concentration camps. This man was the dictator of Austria." But the speech was rather unmemorable.

Then afterwards there was a reception given at the home of one of the history professors, Professor Moger, who still lives here in Lexington. Then the following day, Shushnig was not to leave town for his next engagement until noon, so I had him for the morning, had to find things to do with him. Instead of taking him to the sauna or whatever place of relaxation we had at the time, I asked him what he would like to do. I thought perhaps he would like to explore the Lee Chapel Museum. But he had the honesty to say, "No, I would rather," with his light German accent, "I would rather go to the military school next door. I was reading about that in the hotel," the Robert E. Lee Hotel, which is today, of course, a welfare shelter, but at that time was the best that Lexington had for a visiting former chancellor. So he had read about the VMI military museum and wanted to go to that. So I, of course acquiesced and said I would be honored to accompany him to VMI-land and to the Kleigs [phonetic] museum, the war museum of VMI.

He remarked on the way. He said two things on the way that stuck in my mind. One was that his father, General Von Shushnig of the Austrian Army, and it

may be added that is not one of the great military bodies of European history, but his father, at any rate, was a general, and had attended the Austrian equivalent of West Point, called the Maria Theresia [phonetic] Military Academy, and maybe that was already a bad sign. So he assumed that VMI was the nearest thing that Lexington had to the Maria Theresia Military Academy.

So we went there, and he was lucky enough, we were both lucky enough to arrive when there was a World War II exhibit. The European phase of World War II was highlighted. In one of the glass cases, one of the items in the exhibit was a letter-sized sheet of paper signed by all of the Nuremberg war criminals in 1945, at the time of the famous trial. One of the guards, who had been probably an officer in charge of the guards, had been a VMI grad, and went around to all of these great celebrities in their prison cells and asked them to sign their autographs, and they all did. So Shushnig was fascinated to run down the list, and as he and I stood at the last case, he said, "Here's Hermann Buring's [phonetic] name, I knew him. Here is Von Vigentrop [phonetic], of course I knew him. Here is Field Marshal Kairo [phonetic], I met him. A terrible man." All along he would say, "Well, here is so and so, I never did know him. Here's so and so from [unclear], I knew him."

It was amazing to stand here in little boondockian Lexville, listening to this man who had rubbed shoulders with the great celebrities, and who had spoken in Lee Chapel only the night before. So eventually and unfortunately, his limo appeared, and he zoomed out of Lexington, never to return, and died in his homeland. He went back to Austria on vacation in the 1970s and died at a very advanced age.

Now, another visit whom I remember very well, was equally famous, but in a different field, W.H. Ogden, who spoke in Lee Chapel. I'll let Richard check on the date, but I believe it was 1972. Surely the *Ring-tum Phi* file will have this on page three or four.

Ogden, the poet, who was close to death, if I'm correct, about '72, he died a year later, simply from, I think, booze, drugs, and depression, but he was in his sixties, was the most renowned, the most venerated poet in the English language at that time. He came here, possibly under the auspices of the English department, or maybe through contract. But he came and, I was told, had dinner—I was not invited to dine with him, but he had dinner at Professor Duvall's house, since Professor Duvall was then the head of the department, and then he went to Lee Chapel and spoke for an hour perhaps. I think he read more poetry than lectured.

But I'll never forget two things about this appearance, and one was that the students showed up in enormous numbers, and if Lee Chapel had had chandeliers, we would say that the kids were hanging off the chandeliers. They were packed up in the galleries and on the ground floor, unlike any other time except one, that I'll mention in a moment. Shushnig, unfortunately, did not have them packed in like sardines, but the poet, Ogden, did. I suppose that the English faculty must have gotten vigorously behind this and compelled a large and seemingly enthusiastic turnout. So the enormous audience was one thing that struck me about the evening.

Another was that Ogden was wearing clothes that must have come from a dumpster, and not a dumpster behind a good hotel, a dumpster behind the Fleabag Arms, I suppose, and was wearing bedroom slippers and socks, remarkably. Sort of droopy socks, but socks, and bedroom slippers that had obviously seen their better decades. So here was this man who looked more like a derelict than most derelicts would dare look, standing at the podium in Lee Chapel, with skin that had gone completely to the dogs. He used to say in his old age that his face looked like a wedding cake that had been left out in the rain. This was very accurate.

So here was this human wreck, who was only a year away from death, quite believably. His death did not amaze me, certainly. Standing up at the podium

where generally people look rather presentable, William Buckley and types like that, of course, always rather grand and stately, but not the poet Ogden. Then he was taken, after the literary performance at Lee Chapel, over to the Alumni House, which the students can't pronounce and call the Aluminum House. He sat in the living room as you enter the front door. He sat in the living room to the left, and though I was rather unhappy about that, but it was on the left anyway. He was sort of collapsed on a small sofa, indeed like a wedding cake that was about to be thrown out, and people were bringing him refreshments, and he barely reacted at all. He took the refreshments, but he seemed almost inanimate as he devoured them. People came up to him with books of his to autograph. The bookstore had been very assiduous about laying in copies, hardbound editions of his book. So he signed in this almost illegible—I'll admit I joined the crowd of autograph hounds—he signed an almost illegible autograph, and I have sometimes wondered whether it's worth anything, because he went from campus to campus probably signing too many autographs, and it may be that these are not collectors' items, particularly nowadays. But I never go into the Alumni House without thinking of this bag of bones and grey flesh, putrefying grey flesh, on the sofa, in that left-hand living room. The vision of the purported greatest poet of the century in English comes back to me.

Now, do you want to hear about Truman Capote?

**Weaver:** Sure, that would be great.

**Futch:** Maybe I can do a Truman Capote imitation. He was quite unforgettable, and had this and that in common, certainly, with Ogden.

Capote's visit would have been perhaps four or five years later, by which time the new gymnasium, the Warner Center, had opened up. Most of the students would say the Athletic Center named after Elizabeth Taylor's ex, one of her ex-husbands, but named after, of course, Tuscaloosa Jack Warner. But this was a new

athletic facility, in a very suitably vast room for the appearance of a celebrity. So Capote, to my knowledge, never spoke in Lee Chapel, but he did speak in the Warner Center.

There was a very peculiar theatricality to his appearance, to the *mise en scène*, shall we say, the setting, of this. What happened was, and you knew this was all very carefully planned and plotted, what happened on that occasion was that he did not appear until the audience had been seated on the bleachers, again in vast numbers. There was a little podium with a microphone on it in the very middle of the floor, and the athletic floor otherwise empty. But there was this little stand in the middle of the floor. Then at a certain point, probably a few minutes later, I would think, but the place was plunged into total darkness. Then a beam of lavender light came down from one corner of the room to the diagonally opposite corner of the room, and the lower—of course, one was up at the ceiling, and then the beam of light came down to a doorway. What it turned out to be was this: Capote was in an all-white suit, but the searchlight up at the top of the room had a piece of lavender cellophane in front of it, or a lens perhaps. So it appeared to be and, in fact, had become a purple beam that came down and caught the white suit he was wearing. [Mimicking Capote] In his little purple suit, he walked across the floor in the tiny baby steps, and the searchlight followed him very, very slowly across the floor, and he came to the podium in the very middle of the room. He clambered—not without difficulty—he clambered up on the podium, and began feeling the microphone, sort of jiggling and adjusting it, and making little noises, little murmuring, little chipmunk noise. [Mimicking Capote]. Like this.

Then when he had gotten the mike to the height that he wanted, he said, "We are [unclear]." Then he said, "Well, I thought instead of a lecture, you might prefer if I would read from some of my writings here," which, of course, meant that he had had to do no preparation at all. He simply opened a couple of books. So he

opened up *A Christmas Memory* and he read that. Then he read a story that he had brought with him. I forget whether it was in book or typescript, but he claimed it was true, and I will believe almost anything I'm told, so I believed it was true. In later years I heard that he made this up, about a dog that threw himself, with fatal results, from a window in the Dakota Hotel where John Lennon and other trash lived on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. [Unclear], "It was a very effective story when Truman Capote told it, and I thoroughly enjoyed it, not knowing he had made it up."

But it did have the ring, unjustifiably, it had the ring of believability about it. Then the follow-up to that was a reception at the Sigma Chi House, which, as we know today, is an administrative building, but the Sigma Chi House across from the Robert E. Lee Church at the time. They had been chosen by the IFC, I suppose, maybe on a rotating basis, to entertain celebrities, and so a post-lecture party.

Truman was totally exhausted from his exertions in the Warren Center, and so he sat on a couch and allowed Betty Monger [phonetic], who in those days was the head of the bookstore, to feed him. I will never forget seeing Betty Monger on her knees, beside a low couch where Truman Capote was seated, sort of feeding him the way a mother would feed pabulum to a baby in a high chair, only this was a low seat, not a high chair. Again, this is one of the things one thinks about when driving by the old Sigma Chi House, Truman Capote being spoonfed by a paragon of virtue, whereas he himself was anything but that.

So this was around 1976, and then again, the *Ring-tum Phi* undoubtedly had a write-up. Within ten years, he had died from the multiplicity of vices that he had so carefully nurtured over the years.

Now, let's see. Barry Goldwater came here twice and spoke. One time, at least, maybe both, but certainly the first time he came in the 1970s. Saw him in Lee Chapel. There is a rather indelicate story about this that I won't tell at all, but—



**Weaver:** Why not?

**Futch:** Where he took his leak?

**Weaver:** Please. Well, they parked. He was driven to that parking lot between the memorial of World War I and the memorial gates, you know. There was sort of a parking area there, so he was let out of the car there, and was going to walk up, and did, in fact, walk up that sort of curved sidewalk up to the front door of the chapel. But he said to the students who escorted him, he said, "Hey, I'd better take a leak before I go into this place." So he stopped. There's a little place where one goes from the parking area to a sidewalk through an opening in the hedge. There's that hedge that's higher than a person's head. So he stopped there in sort of a little corner of the shrubbery there, and let go. Again, it's a place that one always thinks of Barry Goldwater answering the call of nature, right there in the parking area.

Then he went up to Lee Chapel, and that was the other occasion I spoke of, when the chapel was jam-packed. One never saw so many students in one place at one time. It would have been a fire disaster if a fire had broken out. It would have been terrible.

The kids, of course, were just hysterically devoted to him, even though this was probably ten, eleven, twelve years after he ran for president. They came from conservative families, as I trust they still do, and they were intoxicated with delight at having Barry Goldwater there.

I don't remember if any faculty attended. I may have been the only one. But had the faculty members been there, they would have been grinding their teeth, and pulling their hair, and doing other biblically angry things. What is it, rending garments, beating breasts, tearing hair, and gnashing teeth. They would have been doing all four of these things at the sight of the student enthusiasm and the student numbers to hail the defeated hero of 1964. I thought, "Good, good, good. I hope the faculty hears about this." So I was very pleased at that.

Then Barry came, I think, probably once again in the 1980s, but I don't remember where he spoke on that occasion.

Then you want to hear about a once great name who was here even before my time, which is saying something? Count Schwartza [phonetic] of Italy, the leading anti-fascist, in exile, during all of the Mussolini years, who had been ambassador in Paris in 1922, regarded Mussolini as a thug, instantly resigned the embassy in October of '22, was given to understand that he was not welcome back in fascist Italy, and so he spent a bit over twenty years wandering from pillar to post like Dante, in exile, and, like Dante, having no money, and had to accept hospitality here and there where people would welcome him.

His wanderings, during the early 1940s, brought him to Lexington. Please realize I was in grade school during that—not graduate school, grade school during this time. So I heard about this only as second-hand from Professor Crenshaw, the department head in the sixties. Professor Crenshaw said that Count Schwartza spoke in Lee Chapel also about the post-World War, and Italy will rejoin the democracies, and that Mussolini has been an aberration in Italian history, and that Italy should not be viewed as an enemy but as a country captured by the forces of evil, and spoke up for the country. But, in particular, was hungry, and that he was put up by one of the faculty members, Professor Latture, who died recently, of course, and practically ate the Lattures out of house and home, because the noble exile did not always get enough to eat during the years of exile. So the Lattures' pantry was thoroughly cleaned out by this distinguished but unfortunate guest, whom they put up for a day or two.

Then, of course, the capstone of the story is that Mussolini was overthrown a short time later, the war ended, Italy rejoined the democracies, he went back, Count Schwartza, not Professor Latture—Count Schwartza went back to Italy, became foreign minister of the country, probably with a nice dining hall in the foreign

ministry building, that private dining room, and he was the one who came to Washington in '49 to sign the NATO treaty. So I remember him. When I was a young man I remember seeing the newsreels and newspaper and magazine stories and photos about the NATO treaty, and there was County Schwartz with his little white goatee, and rather pompous appearance.

Many years later I found, yeah, but back in your Lexington days, you weren't doing too well, and you were quite willing to take advantage of the Lattures' hospitality, very glad to do so. But there was another Lee Chapel visitor of considerable distinction.

Was there anybody else whom I—

**Weaver:** I was wondering about Mock Convention. Did any particular politician stand out who came to visit over the years?

**Futch:** I am told that [Harry S.] Truman stood out. I was not here in 1960. I was leaving our country's military service in that time. But Truman came here, and apparently he made an impression of down-to-earth decency and affability, but not saccharine sweetness. He was never saccharine sweet. But he made a very favorable impression among everyone here—all the people here, I should say, in 1960. The ones who I remember seeing were—the only one I remember seeing, and he made a great impression on me, was Richard Nixon, who spoke, I guess, in '64-'68, in the old gymnasium. It was a very crowded sort of accommodation. Richard, do you remember, was that '68?

**Weaver:** I believe it was '68, yes.

**Futch:** He was later nominated, as the students would say, in true fact—in real fact a few months later. But the Mock Convention at that time would have been what, in late January, perhaps?

**Weaver:** Perhaps, yes.

**Futch:** Later on, of course, it's come up that the Mock Convention was [unclear]. The Mock Convention has gone backwards, hasn't it?

**Weaver:** I'm not sure. I think it changes. It's changed in the decades.

**Futch:** From time to time. We can look up in the *Ring-tum Phi* file when Nixon appears, but I never saw Richard Nixon anywhere at all in my life, not in hotels. I saw JFK [John F. Kennedy] once in a hotel lobby in New York, and saw Truman at his inauguration, but the only ex or future president whom I have seen on the W&L campus was Nixon, whom the faculty, of course, hated. The faculty had the weird idea that Nixon was a conservative, instead of being just a wheeler-dealer like [Robert] Dole. He was not conservative, not liberal, just clawing his way up the ladder. So the faculty despised Nixon, and went wild with anger at having him on the campus, as though the campus has been soiled.

**Weaver:** What happened with the faculty? Did they not attend the speech?

**Futch:** Oh, no. I think curiosity—I don't believe I was the only faculty member there. I think curiosity drew them. And there was no organized boycott of Nixon, but I remember hearing faculty conversations shortly before his appearance and shortly after. A great deal of resentment that this conservative (question mark) was on the campus. Then, of course, they were considerably antagonized a short time later when he was actually elected. Many of the faculty regarded that as the end of civilization as we know it, in November of '68. He is the only president whom I recall seeing.

Actually, the Mock Conventions are very crowded affairs, so I have not been to a great many of them. I would certainly have gone to the one in 1988, at which my name was put in nomination.

**Weaver:** I was going to ask you about that.

**Futch:** Oh, yes. I had nothing to do with that. If I had had anything to do with it, I would have stayed in town to push it, to work the crowd and shake hands, because I

think it would have been a riot to have [Michael] Dukakis and myself teamed up. But that never happened, and I simply left town that weekend. I thought, "I certainly don't want to hear any of these turkeys." I think that was the year [Bill] Clinton spoke.

**Weaver:** That's right.

**Futch:** So I had no desire for that, and if a student had told me, "By the way, sir, some of us we put your name in nomination just for grins, I would have stayed around." But I knew nothing about it, so I returned from a wicked weekend in D.C. All weekends in D.C. are wicked.

**Weaver:** Do you remember what the vote was?

**Futch:** I must have read it in the file at the time, though I don't remember. But undoubtedly, some of the conductors of the Mock Convention must have run around saying, "No, we can't do this. We can't do this, the world press is here, and we can't have newspapers in Singapore and Stockholm reporting that this unknown mental case has been nominated to run with Dukakis." So I'm sure it was torpedoed in one way or another. But I don't remember the figures.

**Weaver:** Speaking of unlikely unions, I remember, I believe it was my freshman year, your marriage, to Dean Schroer-Lamont.

**Futch:** I have a copy of that. Have you had a copy of that?

**Weaver:** I need to find one. I think in the archives I can get a copy.

**Futch:** It was April Fool's of '93. I made about 10,000 photocopies, at my own expense, by the way, off campus, and sent those to every alumnus whom I keep in touch with, saying that I just narrowly missed a trip to the altar. It was wonderful. It was the second best *Ring-tum Phi* April Fool' ploy. As you said, an unlikely union. But it was very well done, I thought. She and I would be married in Lee Chapel, I in a grey Confederate uniform, and my blushing and dainty and friendly bride was going to be wearing sort of a Scarlett O'Hara, or Melanie Hamilton Wilkes

wedding gown. Perhaps we could have been married at Twelve Oaks. That would have been wonderful. So that was very successful.

Now, the other great April Fool's issue, a stroke of genius, came around '87 or '88, before you hit this place. You're very recent.

**Weaver:** Yes, '92.

**Futch:** This was in the late eighties. I don't think any allusions of this come clear in the school history, but the *Ring-tum Phi* got a photograph of cadets on their athletic field, doing some sort of very odd calisthenics that resemble, shall we say, carnal knowledge, two by two, carnal knowledge of one cadet by another, but the whole field was filled with cadets doing this calisthenic exercise. The caption that the W&L *Ring-tum Phi* just put under the photo was, "VMI cadets are taught safe sex." So I think among April Fool's strokes of brilliance, that that was numero uno, but my wedding to the delightful dean, that was a very close runner-up in 1992. So that was the April Fool's of your freshmen year, and if you cannot find that, I will—perhaps, who knows, the FBI might have come and clipped it out with scissors, so I have a copy of that, with a photo of yours truly in one column, and a photo of the delightful bride in the other column.

**Weaver:** Would you consider yourself famous on campus?

**Futch:** Infamous, perhaps.

**Weaver:** Infamous.

**Futch:** Notorious. Notorious is probably more the word. Yes.

Now, I wonder if there are any more celebs in Lee Chapel. David Brednoy [phonetic], of course. Do you recognize that name?

**Weaver:** No, I don't.

**Futch:** He was in the odd position—as I mentioned to you, this was the other introduction that I made in Lee Chapel—of being the head of the Massachusetts Conservative Party, and if you can think of a group that could meet in a phone

booth, let's say, in a VW Beetle, since phone booths don't exist anymore, the Massachusetts Conservative Party would have to be it. So today David Brednoy is a very, very famous talk host, has his own radio station that reaches thirty-eight states, he says, "And all of Canada," as he puts it, below the caribou line. So he's one of the most famous talkmeisters in the country, and a very dear personal friend of mine, and he spoke at Lee Chapel. But I don't think that the student body regarded him as being in a class with Barry Goldwater or Ogden or even the chancellor of Austria.

**Weaver:** You say the students have always been very conservative, and you allude to the faculty being very liberal and kind of upset with the conservatives.

**Futch:** Those are both understatements. Yes.

**Weaver:** I understand. How would you describe, I guess, the faculty thought during your years? Has it gotten more liberal, do you think?

**Futch:** Oh, yes. Yes. You see, because when I arrived, the faculty members of the sixties were FDR [Franklin Delano Roosevelt] liberals. They still thought of FDR and Eleanor [Roosevelt] as being cutting-edge [unclear], and JFK as being the, as the French say, *le dernier cri*, the latest thing, the bright young man of liberalism. Amusingly enough today, JFK is not regarded as particularly liberal, but the faculty of the mid-sixties just burned candles. At the very mention they would rush for a handful of candles at the mention of JFK's name. But then, of course, those who were undergraduate and graduate students in the sixties became faculty members in the seventies, eighties, and nineties, and a very high percentage of those are, how shall we say, informed—one wants to be delicate here—their political emotions, they don't have thoughts, but they have political emotions, and those sentiments are pervaded by what is summed up in a big bundle as the sixties—the ideals, the obsessions, and the fetishes of the 1960s.

So, yes, the faculty is very sixties now. [Laughter] It's only thirty years out of date. And in the sixties it was thirty years out of date because of the New Deal. Franklin, Eleanor, my little dog Fallah, and the new deal, were where the faculty was in the 1960s.

**Weaver:** Can you envision the faculty becoming more conservative over the next couple of years?

**Futch:** No more than I can envision a flight of small flying saucers landing in formation on the White House south lawn. I think that a conservative faculty is so far-fetched as to make the movie "Independence Day" look like just plain everyday news items. I would hardly think so.

**Weaver:** Do you think that the students will change over the years to match the faculty? A lot of students envision the faculty as sort of leading Washington & Lee down the wrong path to becoming just like every other institution that's out there. Do you think that's necessarily a certainty?

**Futch:** Well, to get back to your earlier question, I think it's impossible to predict whether students will become more or less liberal. Now, for example, the students I think have in the last thirty years become very liberal about sex. They'll go to bed with anything that moves, and with regard to abortion, I think—it's not a topic I talk about with students—but I have the impression that the students, male or female, are glad to have legalized abortions there as something to fall back on, as it were. So if you define conservatism according to Pat Robertson, then I would say the students are not particularly conservative and are not likely to become more so in the future. But if you are talking about economics, about massive government regulation, high taxes, bureaucratic harassment of the population, I think the students are quite conservative about those matters, and I assume that they will stay the same way. Again, the gift of prophecy is given to few of us, right?



**Weaver:** Do you think women coming here have changed the political outlook of the faculty and of the students?

**Futch:** Well, I think the faculty just gets its politics from the Sunday *New York Times*. The coming of anybody to Lexington hardly matters zip. I have heard it said by many male students that a lot of the female students are not radical, and that the faculty has been very chagrined, very let down by that. It seems to have a ring of truth to it. I don't talk politics with students unless they bring it up. If a student engages me in a political conversation, then I don't say, as my elementary school teachers used to say, "Oh, no, we can't talk about that." Or any public school teacher fifty years ago would just recoil like Dracula in front of a crucifix, if a student tried to talk to a school teacher fifty years ago about politics. So I don't recoil in horror if a student brings it up, but I don't engage students in those conversations. So I sort of feel without much ability to footnote this, that the students are probably correct in saying that most of the females have the same political views that their brothers have, and that the advent of coeds has not radicalized the school.

But the faculty, and I can well believe this, the faculty would be terribly let down by that, and would have hoped that all the female students would be flaming fanatics. I'm trying to think of some flaming fanatics. Germaine Greer, I guess, is sort of out of date. Kate Millet, all of the loonies that I can think of are of the 1970s. Camille Palia of today is such an anti-feminist. She's wonderful, but she's an anti-feminist, so we can't call her—she's sort of a flaming oddball, but I think she's not a flaming left-wing fanatic at all. But I think the faculty would have been very, very glad to have some New York City-style feminist nutcakes here. As far as I can tell, that has not happened to any appreciable extent.

**Weaver:** Over the years, have you altered your teaching style at all to sort of acknowledge the sort of changing wind of what academia is in terms of its politics?

**Futch:** Well, there are certain anecdotes about the kings and queens of bygone days. There was an awful lot of bed-hopping among bedrooms perambulating among monarchs. So if I am talking about Napoleon, for example, I don't talk about his love life. So, yeah, one has to drop any sort of thing like that. One can, I suppose, obliquely refer to the fact that when Napoleon was away from Josephine, he covered a lot of terrain. One can use a line of that sort, but one can't get explicit.

Now, a story that I cannot tell the class, absolutely cannot, would not, never will tell a class is the following. But if this was still [unclear] school, I would be able to use this in class, and the kiddies would remember it, too, that Napoleon had his own ideas about female [unclear], and that once he sent a message, presumably by a horseback courier on ahead to Paris, when he was returning from one of his campaigns, his message to Josephine was, "I'm coming home. Don't bathe." So I think that in today's atmosphere it would be impossible to tell that in a classroom.

**Weaver:** There's a story about you that has circulated for many years.

**Futch:** Oh, yes. About behind and in front?

**Weaver:** Yes.

**Futch:** I'm very thankful that you brought that up. Not only did I not tell that, I can't conceive that any professor would have told that in the coed period. The origin of that story is traceable, as far as I know, to Dr. Shillington [phonetic], whom you, Richard, won't remember, because he died in a state of paralysis about a month after you came. You came in September of—

**Weaver:** September '92.

**Futch:** '92, and he died in October of '92. I don't know that he was in a hospital, but he had had a stroke, and he hadn't talked since January of '90. But he was a campus character of the fifties, sixties, seventies, and eighties. A very gross man. Anything that you hear about Shillington is believable. It may not be true, but if it's gross, vile, and shocking, it is plausible at least.

So soon after I arrived, I heard that story about "some like it in the back, some like it in the front," about Shillington. I remember thinking at the time, that this could be unwise, because on Saturdays in the 1960s, the boys would bring, very often, their dates.

**Weaver:** One second. I have to flip the tape.

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

**Futch:** ... that I heard in '62, '63, '64, somewhere in there. You'll be glad to know I didn't keep a diary, so I can't check this out. But it was very soon after I arrived, and I thought, "This is not really very smart of him." I believed it, because after a short exposure to him, I saw that he was both crazy and very gross, very—how can I say? His mind was never [unclear]. So there was no reason to doubt the story.

But I thought when the boys bring their dates from Hollins and Sweet Briar and such places on Saturday mornings to classes, which was one of the traditions, [unclear] Friday night, then the girl would get up and come with the boy to class on Saturday morning, I thought any of these girls could be the niece or the granddaughter or the daughter of a W&L trustee, or the niece or daughter or granddaughter of somebody's who's about to give a million dollars to W&L, and for a faculty member to say something extremely offensive like that in class, and especially offensive to women, that this is very unwise, but it's his problem. I didn't dwell on this.

Then twenty-five years later, by the late 1980s and early '90s, the story was being told about me. I thought, well, since that is untrue, I may be stupid, but I'm not suicidal, since that was untrue, maybe Shillington never told that. I wonder if it was something that was invented in a frat house basement in the 1950s or early '60s, was laid at Shillington's door in those days, and now a quarter of a century later, it's being dropped in my lap, and the answer is, no, I never told that. And now I'm sort of skeptical as to whether he ever did that, because even for him, there might have

been limits, and to say something that would upset the family of a trustee or a major fat cat donor, this would not be too smart. So that is all I know about that.

**Weaver:** Do you resent stories like that if they pop up, or do you dismiss them?

**Futch:** Yes. Both. Yes. I resent them, but what can you do? I can't conduct a Clintonian FBI investigation as to who is spreading this. So there's nothing you can do. For example, there was a story that came to my attention about Professor Boatwright, who was a piece of filth, who taught here in the sixties, seventies, and eighties, died of AIDS in 1988, having gone on terminal medical leave in '87. He and I, to say the least, were not buddy-buddy. In fact, we're, I suppose, known by some people to be mortal enemies.

So the story got spread in the eighties, I guess both before and after his death, that he and I had had a huge, hair-pulling cat fight in the lobby of the library, with verbal, very nasty verbal exchanges. I resented that very much because it was not only untrue, it was implausible. I think students at this school, at least, I mean, this is not that state college in northern New Jersey where Ahmed Amid Kadul [phonetic] gives wild speeches. I mean, at Washington and Lee, professors never have fights in front of students. I've never heard of any sort of blow-up between two professors in a place where students would see it or hear it. So I resented that very much. Secondly, it never happened. What happened was that we were off speaking terms. We did not have angry exchanges. We didn't speak. So, yeah, I resented that. The fact that it was untrue and the fact that it was a very unpleasant story, I resented that very much, but you have to develop a rhinoceros-like hide and just sort of shrug your shoulders and say, "What the hell. What can I do about it?"

**Weaver:** Do you think that professors, in general, are more civil towards each other than the students are towards one another?

**Futch:** Well, I don't know how civil or uncivil the students are towards one another. In my presence, the students are always very nice to one another.

However, one also hears stories about frat houses on Saturday nights and two students are drunk. Yeah, I guess there are bad moments among students.

To my knowledge, the faculty is cordial. Not only can I not imagine a faculty run-in within earshot of students, I can't imagine a faculty run-in in the hearing of other faculty members. I guess it is possible behind closed doors, two professors might say something harsh. I mean, how can we exclude that possibility? I don't know. But I think in front of other people, professors are quite courteous with one another. I will say that professors, who are very far from seeing eye to eye, are polite when they meet in hallways, or meet at [unclear] or someplace like that. I would say faculty relations are superficially quite cordial.

**Weaver:** With the exception of Boatwright, you found that you've gotten along well?

**Futch:** Yes. He was a man who resented my politics. He describes himself as a Marxist. He used to say, "My dear." He addressed men as, "My dear." "My dear, I'm a revolutionary Marxist." As opposed to being a Marxist revolutionary, because that would imply going down to Nicaragua or El Salvador and carrying weapons [unclear] or something of the sort, maybe torturing conservatives to death. So he called himself a revolutionary Marxist, as though to say, in parentheses, armchair variety. "I sit in an armchair and contemplate the glories of Marxism." So my Goldwaterite, Reaganite views not only offended him, I mean, my views offend 98 percent of the faculty, he regarded this as a moral failing, as if I burned down orphanages, or eviscerated the homeless, went through the streets of Washington and disemboweled those derelicts you see sleeping on heating grates in Washington. He regarded me as satanic, as demonic, and so speaking terms didn't seem to be feasible. But we never had a scratching, clawing fit, either behind closed doors or in front of other people.

And getting back to your question, I resented that falsehood very much. But again, I think it was probably innocently intended, and that some drunks in a frat house basement probably said, "Hey, if those two met in the library, imagine the two of the meeting in the library lobby. Mr. Boatwright would say something, and Dr. Futch would probably reply so and so." I assume that's how it started, so I don't lie awake nights worrying about these things.

**Weaver:** From my impression, you've always been very popular with the students.

**Futch:** I hope so. I hope you're right. I'm devoted to them. I would love to think so.

**Weaver:** One story I heard my freshmen year is that you came into—actually it was Sigma Nu, my fraternity, and you came to the basement and had some gin, and sort of held court with the students. Do you ever go down to the fraternity houses and socialize like that, or is that false?

**Futch:** Some. Not very often, as I get old and tired. You [unclear] how tired one is at the end of the day. But I do it less and less, but I have been in the basement of the Sigma Nu house since the rehab. I guess it was rededicated about 1990 or so, wasn't it?

**Weaver:** Yes, 1991.

**Futch:** '91. So since the rehabbing of it, the students did invite me, the brothers of the lodge did invite me down there, and somebody might have given me something, some refreshment or other, that's quite possible. So I have been to a number of the houses since the rehab. Yeah, I tremendously enjoy those things, but I enjoy them more on Saturday nights, when I haven't been in school all day.

**Weaver:** Do you find that the antics of the fraternities are reformed at all now that they have new houses?

**Futch:** Antiques?

**Weaver:** Antics.

**Futch:** Antics. The antics of the fraternities. Again, I don't know, because they didn't indulge in antics in front of a professor. For the whole thirty-four years I've been here, in front of me there were no antics. The antics were probably postponed until after the faculty left. But what I gather is that there are monitors who go through the frat houses to look for nicks in the wall, or the paint may have been marred by something, or glasses been broken, or a chair leg has been damaged in some way, and so I assume that the antics are impossible most of the time, because there are people who check on the physical condition of the houses.

Now, speaking of antics, I remember once before the Fraternity Renaissance, maybe 1980, perhaps, I don't know, driving back from, again, one of those wicked weekends in D.C., coming down Highway 11 at twilight, I suppose, and seeing a huge column of smoke rising from Lexington. I, of course, thought of World War II and the bombing of Berlin and things like that, but what this turned out to be was something less. It seemed when I got into town, I got very close to the campus, I saw the smoke was rising, in fact, from Red Square, and Sigma Nu, you'll be happy to know, in fact, that the Sigma were not involved. But your neighbors, Phi Delta, Theta, and Pica, had apparently, all of them, contributed vast amounts of furniture which had been mangled amid antics in recent weeks, and a huge mountain, or a funeral pyre of furniture, had been put in that open space shared by the backyards of—

**Weaver:** Beta and Phi Delta and Pica.

**Futch:** Beta, Phi Delta and Pica. They had just made a gigantic heap of debris previously called furniture, and it produced a tremendous fire. I imagine that both the administration and the police department would go berserk if a huge fire were built by three fraternities in an antic mood. So, yeah, I think things like that have undoubtedly quieted down. But what may happen in frat house basements at midnight, I have no way of knowing. So young boys being young boys, I imagine

the antics still go on somewhere, somehow, but probably more carefully orchestrated than once upon a time.

**Weaver:** Do you remember what year that was that took place?

**Futch:** Let's say around 1980. I'm quite sure it was before John B. Wilson, because I think that even before the Fraternity Renaissance, the kiddies got a pretty clear idea by 1983, when he embarked on his duties in January of '83, I think they understood that an iron hand had descended, and I doubt that they would have done that after January of '83. So I would say in the very early eighties. And I don't think that would be in the *Ring-tum Phi*, because none of the fraternity houses caught fire. So there's no reason for that to have been recorded. But it sticks in my memory, certainly, because a gigantic column of smoke was an unexpected sight upon returning to Hillbilly Heaven.

**Weaver:** Does Fancy Dress bring back any memories for you over the years?

**Futch:** No, I never learned how to dance in my youth, point A. Point B is that I don't like tuxedos. Someone gave me a tuxedo, a faculty member, the late Professor Rob Stewart. As his waistline expanded about 1964, he gave me a tuxedo that he could no longer wear. I went to something or other. I can't remember why I wore it. But now my waistline has expanded to the point where if I could find this ancient thing, I should give it to someone else. But I hate tuxedos, and I would look like an idiot if I tried to dance. So I've never been to a fancy dress. But I have sometimes been invited by the guys who fix up the gymnasium with a certain motif. I have often been there, and they want me to see what they have done to duplicate Paris or Vienna, or—I don't know if the Vatican—has there ever been a Vatican motif for Fancy Dress? [Laughter]

**Weaver:** I imagine the papacy is the thing.

**Futch:** The papacy would be wonderful, because Pope Alexander VI, the [unclear] Pope, had held many dances in the Vatican. He turned it into sort of a



bordello/dance hall/banquet hall. So I think that the Renaissance Vatican would be a great theme for Fancy Dress some year soon.

**Weaver:** But do you have any curiosity at all about going in the future?

**Futch:** No. It's just people dancing, isn't it?

**Weaver:** The people dancing, and the music playing, and the orchestra.

**Futch:** No, I have no curiosity at all, people dancing and music playing. Now, if the music were all Mozart quartets, I might go for the music. But, no, dancing is so far away from anything I've ever done. I've done a lot of weird things in my life, but dancing is not one of them.

**Weaver:** Is there something about Lexington or Washington and Lee that you think that we don't know that we should know about? Some neat quirk or nook or cranny?

**Futch:** All of the scandals, *la cronique des scandals!* What I always tell people is that it's time for a truly bombshell novel to be written, because the novels that have been written over the last sixty years, of which there are three or four, I think are pretty tame stuff, and that a novel, that it would be like a novel by Brit Easton Ellis [phonetic]. You know the name.

**Weaver:** Yes, the *American Psycho* author.

**Futch:** Yes. [Laughter] Also, his first novel was called *Less Than Zero*, and then, yes, *American Psycho* came next. So I think Brit Easton Ellis ought to do a Lexington/W&L/VMI novel. After all, VMI is no den of puritans, after all. It and W&L and kinky little Lexburg, altogether, would make a wonderful novel.

**Weaver:** Give me a little hint to what might be in this novel.

**Futch:** Oh, my goodness. How can I give a hint without being fired? What on earth—I mean, alcoholism is so tame that there's hardly even any—the drunken old Episcopalian dowagers of Lexington who sometimes would send their servants to BD to get alcohol, and Presbyterian alcohol, if that is not a contradiction in terms,

old Presbyterian dowagers used to, even more, used to have to send out for booze from BD. Then the old dowagers of Episcopal and Presby high society—that is high society, there is no other high society around here—those old blue-hairs over the decades had some extremely odd disciples from W&L. So I think, yes, a novel is in order. If you, Richard, would stay here for five years and just—

**Weaver:** Perhaps I might see.

**Futch:** —talk to people and talk to me with no electronic recordings anywhere near. It's not the bland little milquetoast town—lukewarm, milquetoast town as it appears to be.

**Weaver:** Speaking of society, would you say that being a W&L faculty member automatically puts you into the height of Lexington society, or do you have to sort of make it in a different way to be part of that Presbyterian—

**Futch:** Episci—

**Weaver:** Yes, the Episci and—

**Futch:** Episci-Presbyterian, or vice versa.

**Weaver:** Right.

**Futch:** It's a toss-up. Ever since Robert E. Lee's day, it's been a toss-up as to which of the two, the Episcis or the Presbys, which of the two is the king of the hill. I think at one time, probably not true today at all, but I think that when I came, that to be a W&L faculty member, and maybe to be a VMI faculty member, meant that one was 80 or 90 percent of the way to high society membership. If one refused to socialize, and acquired the reputation of a surly recluse, then, of course, nothing would happen. But one got an enormous head start, and the old ladies of boozie high society—well, all that's sort of redundant—were very interested to sort of draw me as a young man. I was described, "Oh, he's so courtly." They were very interested to draw me into this sort of utopia of blue hair, booze, and gossip. But I regarded the scene as amusing for two or three years, and went to a lot of these blue-hair

receptions—not receptions, cocktail parties, I guess they would have been called. But after several years it got old. As kids would say today, "Man, got old." So I sort of tapered off. I didn't declare war on them, but I just quit answering phones. I found that that's a way to control, to minimize one's social life.

**Weaver:** And you still don't answer phones, do you?

**Futch:** Oh, less than ever. Do I do it now? One of the few advantages, and among the quirks of old age, you do a lot of things. Being inaccessible is certainly one of the few pleasures of old age. But I would say that you're on to something, and that there was an extraordinarily close tie-in, once upon a time, between the faculty cocktail circuit and the Episci-Presby, blue hair, cocktail circuit. I think if a faculty member came across it being low rent, tacky, that that would have been a handicap. But of course, people who were tacky and low rent weren't hired, for the most part. So that was not really an obstacle. But as the years passed, this whole scene has altered. I was about to say something I won't say.

May I tell you a story? Do we have enough room on the tape for this?

**Weaver:** Oh, sure. Definitely. Definitely.

**Futch:** To show you the importance of the tie-in between school and altar, once upon a time—remember in Europe they talked about throne and altar in M\_\_\_\_\_ 's day. Well, this was school and altar: the faculty and the churchy high society of Lexville. When I was hired, there were two or three days of interviews, meeting the president, meeting the dean, meeting some senior faculty in a social setting, and, of course, the department members, with the exception of one, who was, how shall we say, put on the shelf and kept out of sight. They didn't want him to meet interviewees, because he was so zany. They thought no interviewee will ever come here if the interviewees meet him. So that's a whole different story, though. As the students would say, a whole nother story.

But after several days of these various interviews, I was taken to the bus station. Remember Lexington didn't have passenger train service, and I was much too poor to have a car in 1962. So the way I got down here for the interview and got back was to go by train from Baltimore to Washington to Staunton, and then take the Hound, the Greyhound, from Staunton to teeny, tiny Lexville. What is now that railroad station connected to the Lenfest Center, the 1883 former railway station that is right smack up against the Lenfest Center, that had been the passenger station until 1942, I think. Then it became the Greyhound station.

So the department head drove me in his 1940 Packard. He had a twenty-two-year-old Packard sedan. He and I drove down in the Packard, which was known as the getaway car, because it looked like something Al Capone would have used in a Chicago bank robbery.

**Weaver:** Who was the chairman?

**Futch:** Professor Crenshaw, who wrote the book, *General Lee's [unclear]*.

So Ollie Crenshaw, in his 1940 Packard, drove me to the bus terminal, maybe half an hour before the bus was due, which I didn't attach any importance to for the moment, but he wanted discuss something with me, that got me somewhat discombobulated for a while. He said, "Well, I hope you have enjoyed your visit here, and we will be contacting you about—" meaning yea or nay, thumbs up or thumbs down. "We will be contacting you very soon, and it has been the greatest pleasure meeting you."

I said, "Well, thank you, I've enjoyed every moment, and it's a great pleasure to meet you." I thought that was it.

So he said, "However, there is one question which I am compelled to put to you."

I said, "Oh, of course, please. Go ahead."

He said, "Now, please keep in mind, this is not my idea and certainly not my desire," with this Deep South accent of his, the southern accent [unclear]. He said, "This is a question that I would never, never ask, if it were up to me, but it is not up to me. The trustees require that this question be asked."

I was getting a little unsettled. The bowels were getting a little loose at this point. I said, "Oh, well, please go ahead. Whatever." As Bob Dole says, "Whatever."

He said, "Now, this is not the president's idea, this is not the dean's desire, this comes from the trustees." He said, "It is a deeply embarrassing and distressing thing for me to have to ask you, but I must."

My God, what kind of [unclear] is about to be dropped on me? I said, "Oh, well, please, do feel free."

He said, "This is so distressing." He went on and on about how embarrassed he was and how distressing this was. Finally, he said, "I must ask you, in the name of the trustees of the Washington and Lee, what is your religious affiliation?"

I thought, "Oh, thank God. Praise God from whom all blessings flow," because I had something quite different in mind. I said, "Well, as a small child I was sent to a Presbyterian Sunday school," which was a way of saying, "In recent years I haven't set foot inside any place."

Quoting Gilbert and Sullivan, he said, "Nothing could possibly be more satisfactory," because the Presbyterian ascendancy in Lexington was even older than the Episcopalian one. So he was pleased to be able to tell the trustees, "His roots appear to be Presbyterian, or are, in fact, Presbyterian."

The trustees consisted, in those days, of a bunch of Presbyterian bankers from Lynchburg, so I'm sure they were satisfied, and I was relieved beyond words to have so innocent a question put to me. [Laughter]

**Weaver:** Is there some even morsel of a story you can tell me?

**Futch:** Even more what?

**Weaver:** A morsel of a story of the intrigue.

**Futch:** Well, I don't know, with the microphone hanging on my necktie. I don't know. Of course, there are some absolutely outlandish stories about the time between W&L and Lexington, but I don't know if there's anything, really, as a morsel that I would want to have on a tape recording.

**Weaver:** Well, I guess we'll move onto another question, then.

**Futch:** Yes.

**Weaver:** In the relationship between Lexington and Washington and Lee, which is the more dominant group?

**Futch:** Well, I don't know. It may be that, like [unclear] and Mars, they're very close together, but I don't know that either one affects, or rather dominates the effect. I wouldn't say either one dominates the other. I assume that the city council and the city manager and the mayors, one after another, are all aware that Lexington would become simply a depopulated place, such as BD is turning into, without Washington and Lee and VMI.

I suppose you could say, now that I think about it—you kind of caught me off guard with that question—I guess the schools are dominant, in a sense, in that there wouldn't be a Lexington any longer. There wouldn't be any economic life here. Not enough people come to see the grave of Stonewall Jackson to keep the town going. And just as lovely Buena Vista is dying before our very eyes, and not a moment too soon, I suppose Lexington would also expire—of course, as the locals would say, "expar"—if it were not for the two schools. So the two schools must be aware that they have the upper hand in a way. Yet Lexington could probably make life unpleasant for the administrators of the two schools if they chose to do so.

**Weaver:** Do you think that Washington and Lee uses its upper hand appropriately in dealing with the town?

**Futch:** I have no way of knowing. This question is so far beyond the things that I know about or hear about, I really don't know. I don't know of any case where either the school or the town has abused the other. You're always hearing about drug abuse, and self-abuse, and this abuse, and child abuse. So I don't know that W&L has abused Lexington or vice versa. I assume that the town and the school coexist cordially, if not affectionately.

**Weaver:** Would you say the school has been good to you over the years?

**Futch:** Oh, indeed, yes. Yes, yes. I have often blessed the day that I came here. When I came here, the only thing I knew about it was that Lee was buried here, and that it had been on a postage stamp. Of course, in youth, I collected stamps ardently, and still pay some attention to them, though I can't afford to collect them anymore. But I have a huge stamp collection from youth, and that blue three-cent stamp of 1949, of course, I remember when I was in high school and collected it, never dreaming, looking at the Colonnade on the stamp, I never dreamed that I would set foot there more than a few times. So, yeah, I would say the school has been very good to me. I certainly cannot complain about that.

**Weaver:** Well, that's perfect.

[End of interview]

Date: Fri, 6 Dec 1996 11:31:22 -0500 (EST)  
From: RICHARD WEAVER <rweaver@liberty.uc.wlu.edu>  
To: Mame <mwarren@liberty.uc.wlu.edu>

Success.

MLK received the invitation and declined it in February 1967. Reasons were listed in the article.

See you and Henry this afternoon!

richard