William C. (Jack) Davis interview regarding Jefferson Davis, for documentary "Jefferson Davis: an American President" 2008, by Flying Chaucer Films
Filmed in Blacksburg, VA, 2008

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William C. (Jack) Davis

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PART 1

Speaker 1: There's been a lot of effort to remove Davis's name from a public memorials, buildings, um, highways. Move his statues from public space. Even been attempts at Transylvania University, which is a private institution, to pressure them to remove **** Davis-Clay Hall.

Jack Davis: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: To actually have the names removed ****. They actually did remove a painting. So this is not just public.

Jack Davis: Yeah.

Speaker 1: This is actually a private space. What is your reaction to those types of efforts?

Jack Davis: That, if anyone wants proof that the Civil War is still with us and is still being fought in some quarters today, it’s certainly to be found in the continuing controversies up to this moment about places in the South--communities, highways, bridges and whatnot named after one-time Confederate heroes, portraits or statues of Confederate leaders in public places, etc. This is certainly evidenced in the reaction to Jefferson Davis's name and visage in a variety of places. Interestingly enough, it's not the first time it's happened. During the Civil War, of

course, Davis's name was taken off of the Cabin John Parkway Bridge [also Union Arch] in Washington, which had been built under his supervision when he was secretary of war. And the name was put back on, back in the 1930's [1909]. So what goes away sometimes comes back. There are even these controversies over Union heroes as well. Recently, in Richmond, Virginia, there was an enormous controversy over the erection of a statue of Abraham Lincoln on United States property in what was the Confederate capital, the argument being that that was not appropriate. And yet a statue of Jefferson Davis stands in the Capitol Statuary Hall in the rotunda of the United States Capitol in Washington. Jefferson Davis's viewpoint on this I think is, would have been, and I think it's perhaps the right one. He was a localist. He believed in local sovereignty and communities deciding for themselves, or states deciding for themselves their institutions. In these cases they're mostly instances of people in a school board, or a school district, not wishing to have Jefferson Davis's name or Robert E. Lee's name on a school, or a bridge, or whatever else. Davis' attitude would have been if the majority of people who are willing to vote on that issue in that constituency want that name removed, then that would be their right. And it's kind of hard to argue with that. We can't remake history. And sometimes these things seem like attempts to rewrite history by writing heroes who are no longer acceptable out of our current culture. Heroes don't necessarily have to be eternal. Last generation's heroes may not be heroes to this generation, and so on. We can't write these men out of the history books, and certainly men like Davis and Lee and all the other Confederates will always be alive in history. They'll always be alive in human cultural memory, not just in the South, not just in the North, but actually universally. They're part of world culture now. The removal or not, non-removal of Davis's name from a public building or his portrait from a public hall, I think, is going to have very little impact on that. And if anyone thinks it is, they're, they're on a hiding to nothing, as the British like to say. It may be an interesting local exercise and an expression of opinion, but it's certainly not going to accomplish the diminution of anyone, northern or southern, white or black, east or west, whom some constituency wish to admire and who some body of people see, qualities to admire or to emulate. And that, I think, is exactly how Jefferson Davis would have dealt with that question himself: to leave it to the people to decide.

Speaker 1: There are several places where, not only is his statue, where it's just in the background, you know, and it seemed rather innocuous. People don't notice it.

Jack Davis: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: That seems to be more the case in the larger cities, but in the rural areas, you, everywhere from Kentucky, that massive monument to Jefferson Davis [Fairview].

Jack Davis: Oh yeah, near the birthplace, yeah.

Speaker 1: And to other places throughout where you're just as like to see, uh, the Stars and Bars still flying in someone's front yard.

Jack Davis: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: Is that the legacy of Jefferson Davis?

Jack Davis: Oh, boy.

Speaker 1: And if not, –

Jack Davis: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: – what, what is the legacy of Jefferson Davis?

Jack Davis: I'm not sure what Jefferson Davis himself would like to have thought his legacy would be. But certainly if, for instance, in the continuing debate over his statue being in places, or monuments being dedicated to him, or even in issues like the flying of the Confederate battle flag in some states, or host of these other contentious issues that are still with us, I have a feeling Davis probably would have been pleased that he had played a role in those debates still being, still continuing today. Because it would mean in some degree that the issues that were important enough to him and his generation to make enormous sacrifices, whether they are right or wrong, whether we agree with them or not, I think are immaterial. They were, we have to give them

credit, for being people who were willing to take enormous risk and to hazard tremendous sacrifice in the cause of something they believed in. And I think he perhaps would have been pleased that this kind of debate still continues. It means there are still people maybe arguing those issues, though all too often, the, the, the arguments that are heard in connection with these current controversies show, if anything, a woeful degree of ignorance about what Jefferson Davis and the Confederacy of the Civil War and all the rest of it was really about. He would have liked a better legacy than that. And I think that legacy is still with us. He showed an example of someone who risked all and sacrificed all for honor as he perceived it, for the right as he perceived it, for constitutional democratic government in America as he and his class perceived it. Again, whether they are right or wrong is another case. We don't necessarily have to approve of the cause in order to pay some homage to the dedication with which he and others pursued it. And he would be pleased, I think, if he left behind any legacy of, or as part of his legacy, humanity, kind treatment of the underdog, love of children, generosity and openheartedness, all of those things that it was so difficult for him to show publicly, yet which surely were there and evidenced in his relations with his children and with his family, and with his slaves. He was an example of a man who never gave up. In some ways that's the essence of the American spirit. He faced obstacle after obstacle. He was beaten down time and time again. He is a man who went from the top to see the very bottom of his life and he never quit and he died, I think, at peace with himself.

Speaker 1: Two questions left. One question, the first question is, the antebellum South which Jefferson Davis was a project, uh, product of, had very structured class, uh, excuse me, race system.

Jack Davis: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: And that, and very prescribed how the races were to interact with each other. Both during Reconstruction and now the legacy of, of the continued struggle between the races in this country, how did Jefferson Davis, while he was alive, view the race struggle post-[war], the very structured antebellum South, and how would he view the, the kind, the, the carryover from that era to today?

Jack Davis: It's difficult if not impossible accurately to estimate what Jefferson Davis's reactions would be to race relations in America today because we can't assume that Jefferson Davis today would be the same man that he was in the 1860s or the 1870s. We can only apply the way he felt then toward conditions as they are now. He would be dismayed. I think, he would say, among other things that they largely result – the continuing Civil Rights struggle, struggle of the entire 20th century -- I think he would say was a natural outgrowth of the fact that emancipation was pushed too quickly. As he said more than once, it was inevitable that one day blacks would be free, but only when they were ready for it. Well emancipation came suddenly, when there had been no preparation for it, so he would say, I think. And that as a result, blacks were not ready for emancipation, but more importantly, whites weren't ready for emancipation, and thus the conflict between the two ever since. He would be pleased, I think, that emancipation finally came. Jefferson Davis was, is not a man who thought the world was founded on slavery. It was simply one of the institutions of life as he knew it. I think he'd be pleased to see how well we have done, even though it has taken a century and a half to get to where we are today. But he could never entirely divorce himself from the man he had been before the war. I think Davis would always have had difficulty, if he were flushed into our environment today, having to meet a black man or woman on terms of equality, and having to deal with somebody who could talk back to him just as imperiously as he might speak to them. In short, he'd have had the same problem today with, with black men that he had with white men in his own time. And the slaves would no longer be the happy amiable children that he had known them to be.

Speaker 1: Last question. Much of the, many of the mores and folk ways of the 19th century are alien to modern America. In some ways they're anathema to, to modern America. What, if anything, can the modern American take from the life of Jefferson Davis?

Jack Davis: One thing we can learn here in the 21st century, from looking back at Jefferson Davis and the people he knew of the 19th century, is not to take ourselves absolutely seriously. Not to take our values and our mores, our social and cultural truths as eternal truths, because during the course of Jefferson Davis's life alone, three millennia of cultural truth were turned

upside down by the ending of slavery in America. Jefferson Davis showed, among other things, that even a man as stubborn as he was, as willful as he was, could confront change. And much as he might oppose it, he could still, in the end, acclimate himself to it, and if not embrace it openly and warmly, at least face the fact that this was the new order of the world, and it was not up to the world to satisfy him and the old ways. It was up to him to adapt to the new world ahead. Every generation faces that as every generation sees some of its values challenged by the ones to come. Jefferson Davis is a pretty good example of somebody who resisted harder than most that change, who still yet showed that at the end of the day, he could accommodate it and move on.

Speaker 1: Okay we have 30 seconds of room tone, starting now.

Steve: How's that?

Speaker 1: There we go.

Steve: All right. That's great. Good.

Speaker 1: Steve, um, I just want to make sure this is our understanding that you're allowing us to shoot the images here, uh, for use within the Jefferson Davis documentary project on his life, uh, in that project only. But you're giving us, um, unlimited use on these images for that project?

Steve: That is correct.

Speaker 1: Okay, thank you.

Steve: All right. No, in his entire life.

Speaker 1: Oh, he did, okay.

[video showing close-up of drawing of Buena Vista battlefield

Steve: Yeah, we focused on the, um, on, I would say the, um, the formation of the CSA, because he's written multiple books on that.

Speaker 1: That's too bad you don't have a budget to go to Fort Gibson in Oklahoma where, uh, he served in his early days –

Steve: He's still there.

Speaker 1: Oh yeah? At the Oklahoma store? I just got back from Oklahoma.

Steve: Really?

Speaker 1: Uh, our regiment, 7th Infantry Regiment, built that in 1824, and, uh, the Dragoons were there starting after '32.

Steve: So, go ahead. What's up?

Jack Davis: All I'm doing is sitting at the computer doing paperwork today. So, I'm pretty much at your disposal.

Steve: ****.

Jack Davis: A Union photograph of Davis' commission at the, uh, White House of the Confederacy.

Speaker 2: Yeah. Yeah.

Jack Davis: Of course, they don't tell you that the one that's on display is not real.

Speaker 2:	No, they did. They told us.

Speaker 1:	Oh, did they?

Speaker 2:	Yeah.

Jack Davis:	Okay, yeah, then it's, that, the original one is locked away somewhere, but they don't like to display that one, because I've got a Jackson commission up here, but it's for the Marines ****. You guys just holler when you're ready.

Speaker 2:	Okay.

Jack Davis:	I'm gonna go ahead and try to clear some things out up here while you're working.

Speaker 2:	Shit. Goddammit. Four.

[larger view of drawing is shown, then another close-up of V formation and other details, then a drawing of city plaza in Mexico, presumably Monterrey]

*********** [Remainder of transcription is not on video] ********************

[Jack Davis]:	All right, before we were married, um, she had seen that fight in the Army of Occupation, Corpus Christi, because it's one of his more famous lithographs, and she thought she would try to find them. She's got a lot of connections in the antique world. And, so, one day she calls me up in Texas and tells me that she has purchased the entire set of ****, and it told her she was nuts, because, I said only 24 sets were ever made, and there were only seven sets, uh, known in existence, and she had gone up to this antique dealer and she would always go up there and say, "Do you have any Mexican War things?" and he came up with, uh, just sittin' back there. So, they are, right, so they are very rare. So, now there are eight complete sets in the country.

Speaker 2:	So.

Jack Davis: So. Like I said, those things there, she said the only reason I married her was because of this.

Speaker 2: Ha, ha, ha. How long have you been married?

Jack Davis: Uh, 4 years. We got married in New Orleans, in the Beauregard Sky Center, and in 1840s full-dress military wedding.

Speaker 2: Oh, wow.

Jack Davis: It was pretty cool. I'm gonna go check somebody got an email from a guy that, I got to check my ****.

PART 2

Jack Davis: Jefferson Davis's years at Transylvania University were perhaps the happiest of his young, and I mean young manhood. It was opening to his intellect to encounter the distinguished staff at this western university. I think it was equally challenging to him and exciting to meet the other students who were going to be there because the sons of all of the best families west of the Appalachians, if they went to school, went to Transylvania University. So his horizons were enormously expanded--socially, intellectually. He had the kind of freedom that a young man in his mid to late teens could ever have at home, even though he lived under some supervision, and he had the intellectual stimulus that always excited Jefferson Davis, of being exposed to a whole world of new knowledge he'd not encountered

before. He seems to have fit into the local community rather well. Not only was he well-known and apparently well-liked by fellow students and professors, but he even achieved some degree of status in the community by being involved in local events, by being asked to make local speeches on political and social occasions. In short, he was finding a place for himself on his own, by his own achievement ,out from under the thumb of his family in Mississippi.

Jim: Did, uh, Samuel and, and, Jane, well, it was probably more Samuel, did he take that type of interest and investment in any of the other children?

Jack Davis: Most of the Davis – [cough] Jefferson Davis was not the only one of Samuel Davis' children to receive a good education. His oldest brother Joseph Davis, of course, was very well-educated [very little formal education], which equipped him for an excellent career as an attorney and as a planter. The Davis girls, as was typical of the time, got rather rudimentary education and certainly would not have been sent away to school. But of all the Davis boys, only Joseph, the eldest, and Jefferson, the youngest, would be the ones who would get the benefit of the kind of education that Transylvania University had to offer.

Jim: Is there any indication that Jefferson Davis appreciated this type of opportunity or was it just de rigueur for a, a, a young man of his station to receive this?

Jack Davis: It's difficult to say just how much Jefferson Davis genuinely appreciated the unusual nature of the opportunity he had at, at Transylvania University. Certainly, we know he did not want to leave when he was forced to leave. He wanted to stay there for the full term and take his degree at Transylvania. He was very unhappy when he wasn't able to do so. On the other hand, he also does seem to have appreciated what his father went through to keep him at Transylvania University. Samuel Davis was perpetually impecunious, struggling to pay his debts, struggling to take care of his family. Indeed, when he died he had – hell, I forgot where I was going with that. Might as well start that one again.

Jim: Okay.

Jack Davis: I think there's little doubt that Jefferson Davis appreciated the opportunity he had in being sent to Transylvania University. It got him away from home. It opened up the world to him. He also understood, I think, though how grateful he was at the time we don't know, that his father went to extraordinary lengths to be able to

keep him there. Samuel Davis was perpetually in economic trouble. He had trouble educating his sons. He had trouble may, paying the bills on the place in Woodville. Yet somehow he managed to keep sending enough money to Transylvania to keep Jefferson Davis in school. Most of all, I think, because he had an active and an inquiring mind, Davis understood that he was having placed before him this tremendous opportunity to expand his horizons far beyond what most of the young boys he knew back in Mississippi ever got a chance to experience.

Jim: Let's talk about, or why, why didn't, uh, Jefferson Davis graduate from Transylvania University?

Jack Davis: Circumstances conspired to make it impossible for Jefferson Davis to finish at Transylvania University. His father's heavy indebtedness followed by his father's untimely death meant that the family simply couldn't afford to keep him at Transylvania any longer. Fortuitously, his brother Joseph had managed to obtain for Jefferson Davis an appointment to the U.S. Military Academy, which meant a free education at government expense, and at least the promise of an honorable, if not profitable, career in the military to follow. The military was a career that was always the option for the second or third son in middleclass or well-to-do southern families. The oldest inherited the

plantation if there was one to inherit. The second oldest became an attorney and the third eldest usually was packed off to the army.

Jim: In relative terms, just as an anecdote, how much was, um, a year's worth or 4 years' worth of education at Transylvania in, in today's dollars?

Jack Davis: Oh Jim, I have no idea.

Jim: No idea? But it was something that it was a stress on the family, though.

Jack Davis: And you could probably find the answer to that question in one of the volumes of Jefferson Davis Papers--the first one. My recollection is there may be some receipts or something in there for the tuition, but I just don't remember what it was.

Jim: Okay. How is Jefferson Davis impacted by his father's death? You used the word “untimely.”

Jack Davis: When Samuel Davis died in 1824, it was unexpected by everyone, though perhaps he'd had some inklings himself that his health was not good. The last surviving letter we have that he wrote to his son

Jefferson Davis contained a number of hints that suggested that perhaps Samuel thought these might be the last words he would be passing on to his son. But, of course, no one expects the death of a parent when it actually happens. Jefferson Davis himself in after years, when he would look back on his father's death, often seemed ambivalent or uncertain. I suspect it's because he may never have understood fully how he felt about this father, who on the one hand could seem so distant and cool even aloof, yet on the other hand seemed to put him out so much to make every sacrifice he could for the benefit of his children. When he got the news of his father's death, Jefferson wrote a letter home, and in it he seemed strangely detached from the event, saying essentially this is sad news of my father's death, and then he passed on to discuss other matters that were taking place at Transylvania that summer. I suspect he was confused and uncertain, and really only years later in retrospect was he able to cast his mind back and try to sort out how he really felt about this father of whom he may never have felt very close, but who certainly had enormous impact in shaping the man that Jefferson Davis became.

Jim: It's been noted that Joseph Davis acted as a, a surrogate father, definitely later on. Immediately following Samuel Davis' death did Joseph step in as a paternal figure?

Jack Davis: Jo –

Jim: Just a second. Let this truck go by. Okay.

Jack Davis: – Joseph Davis will take over as a virtual father for Jefferson almost immediately upon their father's death. Joseph was 20 [23] years older. Young Jefferson no doubt has already looked up to him, admired him as the younger brother often admires the older brother. And Joseph Davis begins almost immediately making the decisions for Jefferson's life that the father had made before, and the first decision he makes is that Jefferson Davis will go to West Point.

Jim: Okay. Let's talk about the, the time at West Point. In terms of our discussion at West Point, um, let's first discuss Jefferson Davis as a student. How did he fit in with this style of, of academics versus what he had studied previously?

Jack Davis: Jefferson Davis and the U.S. Military Academy were not a perfect fit from the start. Davis came from a time, a place and an ethic in which young men were encouraged to be high-spirited, independent, willful perhaps. The idea of going into an academic environment in which discipline and obedience, unquestioning obedience, were the rule of the day did not necessarily come naturally to him. There was also a different focus, a different emphasis on the

subject matter, on the curriculum at West Point versus, say, Transylvania University. Jefferson would continue to do very well in the Greek and Latin, but he found he now had to contend with a species of mathematics he had never really understood very well. He would never do well in mathematics. He also had to take courses like engineering, which again were foreign to him and which he did not excel. Interestingly enough, though, art and music were also stressed at West Point. So Davis's would be an uneven performance. At the end of 4 years academically he's in the bottom third of his class. He'll graduate 23rd out of 33 students, so clearly he was not an academic standout at West Point.

Jim: Okay, okay. Let's discuss now how he socially fit in. You were saying before that he was embraced by the community at Transylvania University, so that's a social aspect. How did he fit in socially at West Point?

Jack Davis: Like almost every young man who matriculated to West Point, on first arriving Jefferson Davis was probably a little uneasy being thrown in amongst almost 200 complete strangers from all over the country. He seems to have been very much like most of the other young men from the South who grew up in the same atmosphere, the same climate he had. He seems to have shown the same attitudes towards honor, the same, uh, spritely spirit, the same quickness to take

offense. Yet, at the same time, he also appeared to have gotten on very well with the young cadets from the North as well. If there was a North/South divide at West Point at this time, it doesn't seem to have been so substantial that Davis couldn't socially interact with all of the young men there, though certainly he gravitated mostly toward other cadets from the South. His closest friends, or those whom he let afterward remember as being his closest friends, were older classmen. Like young men and I think young women in any college environment he tended to look up to the class leaders of the classes ahead of him. In his case, the beau ideal of most of the young cadets was a man 2 classes ahead of him, Albert Sidney Johnston, from Kentucky, and Davis tried to run with Albert Sidney Johnston's "set," as they were called, meaning his, his clique, his group. And in time in fact he was allowed to become one of Sidney Johnston's set, along with another young man, Leonidas Polk, who would be very important later on in Jefferson Davis's life. This made an enormous psychological impression on Davis. The thrill of being allowed to run with these older boys, especially Johnston, and he never forgot that. He carried that hero worship that he developed toward Johnston to a lesser degree toward another cadet at the time, Robert E. Lee, and toward Leonidas Polk through the rest of his life. He would always look back on those friendships formed at West Point as the best of his life.

Jim: What was his relationship like with the administration?

Jack Davis: Jefferson Davis had a rocky relationship with the administration at West Point, to say the least. Academically, he did all right. Unfortunately his deportment, his demeanor, his behavior didn't always meet West Point's standards. There is a famous institution called Benny Havens' Tavern off -post. Of course it was against the rules for the young men to leave the post and certainly against the rules for them to go out carousing at a local tavern, and Jefferson Davis seems to have been a fun-loving, enthusiastic, young college student, just like all college students in all eras. He probably had all the makings of a good frat boy by later, uh, definitions. And he would sneak off post to go to Benny Havens' and have eggnog and whiskey and cider and whatever else was there available along with other, with other, uh, students, and he got caught. He and others would be brought before a court-martial, charged with the offense of going off post and drinking at Benny Havens'. As was the custom at West Point, the cadets conducted their own defense. Davis conducted his own, and he showed an interesting facet of his personality there for the first time that would manifest itself again, again and again. He would never say he was wrong. Instead he tried to pettifog and dance around the issue and bring in legal technicalities: "Yes, I have been at Benny Havens' Tavern, but did you actually see me drink there?" And then he got into a whole debate with

the, the court-martial on the subject of what constituted alcoholic beverages. Was beer really alcohol? So if he was drinking beer, then he wasn't really breaking the rules. He lost his case and he's dismissed from the institution, though he was pardoned [sentence remitted for previous good conduct, but placed under arrest] and allowed to come back. A year, shortly afterward, he will actually be involved in the famous eggnog riot of 1826, when a whole barracks ran rampant in riot once they got drunk on eggnog. A couple of students threatened to go kill a professor. The riot was very difficult to contain. It was eventually contained. Fortunately, by that point Davis himself had already had too much to drink and was back being in his barracks room ill [discovered early and sent to his room, where he fell asleep], so that he wasn't charged with the more serious offenses that took place. Yet still he's brought upon reprimand when these court-martials take place. Nineteen students [70 arrested, 19 tried, 17 expelled] will be dismissed from West Point because of that, uh, which Davis managed to escape. And he'll have other near misses as well, partly as a result of his breaking the rules. This isn't to suggest he was a bad student or a bad young man. He was probably not untypical of West Point students. He simply got caught more often than the others.

Jim: As he's nearing graduation, is there any indication that Davis began to see himself as a career officer?

Jack Davis: Jefferson Davis throughout his life will be ambivalent very frequently about what he's doing, about the choices that face him, about what he should be doing. When he was at Transylvania University he thought he wanted to be an attorney; that he would make a good lawyer. When he went to West Point at first he embraced the idea of being a soldier, then for a time he thought he wouldn't make a good soldier and he would just as soon be an attorney again. By the time he's graduating from West Point, he's pretty much come to the conclusion that soldiering is about all he was good for. He doesn't seem to have been excited about a career in the military, but he felt that West Point had turned him into a man suitable to be an officer in the army. So if he didn't embark on his career after graduation with enthusiasm, certainly he at least had resignation that this was an honorable career for which he had been prepared and at which he could do well.

Jim: So upon graduation, uh, let's discuss his appointment, especially in relation to how others of his class were appoint, uh, were appointed.

Jack Davis: You mean his assignments?

Jim: His assignments. Yeah his first assignment at Fort Winnebago, his time at Jefferson Barracks, ****.

Jack Davis: Oh, okay. Like every other young graduate of West Point, Jefferson Davis graduated as a brevet second lieutenant. That is, he didn't even have full ranking or status as a second lieutenant. It was a brevet or honorary rank that had to await confirmation until a vacancy opened in the, in the regular officer ranks of the army. Because he didn't graduate in the first of his class, he didn't get to go into the engineers nor did he get to go into the artillery or the cavalry, the other more elite corps. Men like Davis who graduated in the bottom third of their class went into the infantry, and that became his lot and he was sent out as happened to all young cadets to those remote frontier outposts that gobbled up most of the United States Infantry in that era. He'd be sent first to Jefferson Barracks near St. Louis, Missouri, and eventually on up into the Michigan Territory that today is Wisconsin, and postings like Fort Crawford and others, there to try to, to guard the outposts of white settlement against the Indians.

Jim: Talk about those first assignments. Uh, what, what does Jefferson Davis, what was his mindset? How was he feeling when he was out there in obviously very different climates that he was used to growing up in?

Jack Davis: Davis didn't leave a lot behind to tell us how he felt about his early frontier postings in the army. We do know that he encountered boredom. There simply wasn't much to do in many of these army posts. We know that he encountered discomfort. It was cold in the winter, hot in the summers. The, the creature comforts that he had known at Rosemont were not in the army by any means. There was occasional danger from hostile Indians or from unruly frontierspeople. Mostly, however, it was a duty of boredom, of waiting for something to happen, of knowing that he might have to wait 10 or 11 years before he could expect … flublit. Most of all, it was a duty of boredom, of passing time waiting for something to happen, and knowing that professionally he could expect to wait 10 or 12 years before there would be another promotion that might see a better posting for him. For Davis, as for so many out on the frontier army, it was a case of going from one post to another, all of them very much alike.

Jim: In contrast to or in comparison to Grant – do you need a, a break?

Jack Davis: No I'm fine. Keep going.

Jim: Uh, who, in his early frontier life turned to alcohol in those times of boredom, Jefferson had some experience with alcohol early on and got into trouble. Did that fill the boredom void and, if not, what did?

Jack Davis: To his credit, Davis doesn't seem to have given in to the vices that all too many young officers succumb to out on the frontier service. Alcohol and problems of alcohol were prevalent. He seems to have had no trouble with this. He’d had an experience at West Point and he had presumably learned his lesson. Uh, other forms of vice were all too prevalent yet he seems to have eschewed, avoided those as well. Perhaps even at that early age Douglas had a sense – Jesus, Devis. Let me start that one again.

Jim: Sure.

Jack Davis: I'll begin with the front[ier]. The frontier service offered all sorts of temptations and vices to allow its young officers in the army to escape their boredom. Gambling never seems to have appealed to Jefferson Davis. Alcoholism likewise seems to have had no appeal. He'd had his experiences with alcohol at West Point and presumably had learned his lesson, though he was not a teetotaler by any means. Prostitution, other similar vices as that, if he gave into those, we know nothing about it. He seems to have had at that early age a sense of who he was. A sense that there was a degree or standard of behavior to which he had to conform as not only an officer in the army, but also as a man of his time and place as a southern gentlemen, of which he's also

very proud and already very conscious at this era. And so Davis will read on frontier duty. He'll be actively engaged in construction projects, uh, working with engineers to, to put up dams and sawmills and that sort of thing. He seems to have stayed busy enough that he did not have to run the risk of giving in to these other temptations that he had seen all too easily could ruin a man.

Jim: Let's discuss his appointment at Fort, at Fort Winnebago, and getting snowed in and, and the isolation. Or is that pretty much been cov[ered] –? During one of his assignments he came into contact with Black Hawk. Uh, could you describe the, the events surrounding that?

Jack Davis: Uh, Jefferson Davis will miss most of what is called the Black Hawk War, that is he'll miss active engagement in any of its battles, but he'll be present when Black Hawk himself, the great warrior, is forced to surrender, and as it happens, Black Hawk will surrender to Davis, who will convey Black Hawk to General Zachary Taylor to have what done with him is to be done [no], and Taylor seeing apparently that some kind of rapport has already grown up between Davis and Black Hawk he puts Davis in charge of conveying Black Hawk to prison in Rock Island, Illinois. We only have Davis's account of the event [no], and we don't have a lot from him even, but it appears that during that journey Davis acquired increasing, if not affection, at least respect, for

Black Hawk. Davis tended to view Indians as he viewed slaves, very much as he viewed children, as people who did not do well under heavy discipline, who needed to be allowed freedom and understanding. It was a, an enlightened view perhaps for his time. Black Hawk, of course, was to be sent east in chains. Davis got the chains taken off of him because he knew how they would humiliate a proud man like an Indian chief. He and Black Hawk conversed at length during the trip to Rock Island and Blackhawk himself later paid some tribute to Davis in thanks for the kindly and considerate treatment he received, and that perhaps is the greatest thing of all between Davis and Black Hawk. Davis understood how this proud man, once leader of his people, must have felt in this situation of abject humiliation. What Davis, of course, could knot know is that 30 years later he would be in exactly the same spot himself.

Jim: Can you pull **** Discuss the relationship that formed with Zachary, General Zachary Taylor.

Jack Davis: Zachary Taylor and Jefferson Davis first met, so far as we know, when Davis is assigned to Fort Crawford in the Michigan Territory and Taylor is there as commander. Frontier posts were very small universes, where the people were thrown in amongst themselves because there may have been no community on the outside to provide them entertainment and socialization, and for a young man like Jefferson

Davis in his late 20s, any unattached young woman on the post was going to be an object of interest. As it happens, Zachary Taylor had a daughter, Sarah Knox Taylor, and Davis and other young officers in the post, when being entertained at the Taylor home, met Sarah Taylor. We don't know anything about any previous romantic interests or liaisons by Jefferson Davis, but certainly we do know that some kind of bond of affection and interest began very quickly between he and Knoxie Taylor, and that it was mutual, and it would remain so despite the next couple of years of considerable difficulties, uh, impediments thrown in the road of romance. Zachary Taylor himself seems to have liked Davis. Certainly they got on well at first, until a breach developed between them as a result of a court-martial of another officer, and in the case of that court-martial, Davis, a member of the court, seemed to side against Zachary Taylor on a minor, minor manner of etiquette. Taylor was offended by this, and a breach developed between he and Jefferson Davis, and supposedly he told his daughter she was no longer to see Jefferson Davis, though in time, this objection would go away. Contrary to widespread mythology, Zachary Taylor never opposed Jefferson Davis personally as a man, as a suitor for his daughter. He didn't like the idea of any of his daughters marrying military men because he and his wife knew from their own experience how difficult it was on a marriage when the woman was at home, perhaps in the civilized East, and the husband might be scouring around anywhere on 200 military posts hundreds and

hundreds of miles away. The Taylors didn't want their daughters to go through what the daughters' mother had. So naturally, every Taylor daughter wound up marrying an army officer. If you ever want me to start and stop over if I've stumbled on a word or something, just say something.

Jim: Oh, I mean, uh, people talk; you know, it's natural. Um, why did, why did Davis leave the military?

Jack Davis: Several factors influenced Jefferson Davis' decision to leave the military, and I don't know which was, was paramount. He was tiring of the army life. He had already, at one point, looked into leaving the army to go home and try to get started in railroad-building in Mississippi. His brother Joseph dissuaded him from that. He had some fleeting pangs of trying the law yet again. Probably most important of all was his humiliation as a result of yet another court-martial. Stationed out in what is today Oklahoma, Fort Gibson, Davis got lax in his discipline. He was slow about obeying some of his commander's orders, and on one occasion he failed to appear for roll call and dress parade, as was standard procedure. He was upbraided by his commanding officer, and rather than simply accept his reprimand silently, Davis uttered the fatal syllable "hum." We don't know what he meant by that, but in any case, he said “hum” and turned around and went back to his tent, and on

that, he was brought up on charges of gross insubordination and conduct unbecoming an officer, showing this defiance to his commanding officer. In the ensuing court-martial, Davis would be acquitted of the specifications of the charge. He was not, uh, convicted of conduct unbecoming an officer, yet he was, of course, convicted on the basic charge of not appearing at roll call, as ordered, in full uniform. To a man like Davis – by this time, he's nearly 30 years old – it was enormously humiliating. He came out of a southern ethic in which you resented insults, in which you did not take someone reprimanding you to your face lightly. He had been embarrassed in front of his comrades and in front of his fellow officers, and that was enough, I think, for him to sour Jefferson Davis on the army. All these things were part of a mix, but so also was his love for Sarah Knox Taylor, with whom he had been corresponding for almost 2 years, though they hadn't been able to see each other. Her father had told her that if, after a period of 2 years, she and Davis still wished to be married, that he would not stand in the way of it, and at the end of that 2-year period, they still wished to be married, and she also told her father that by this time she was of age, and she would marry whomever she chose. So Davis had all these influences acting on him, disillusionment with the army, desire to become a planter, to set up on his own for something, some more, if not honorable, at least more remunerative and more, more prestigious station in life, and he had

a woman he wanted to marry. All of these things wrapped together made his decision for him to retire from the military.

Jim: Here's a question. Let's talk about honor.

Jack Davis: Even though Jefferson Davis didn't come from one of the more famous or more wealthy distinguished families of the South, still, he was a part of a social and cultural ethic of his generation, indeed of several generations in the early 19th century, that being the code of honor. There were certain ways it was socially acceptable, indeed expected, that a man was to behave, ways that to us, in our time, seem anachronistic at least and positively strange in many ways. Among other things, it was quite acceptable for a man to be boastful, to be bombastic, to attempt to be larger than life. Somehow they believed or felt that a man who proclaimed his greatness probably really was a great man. One never suffered an insult because it was, it was a mortal blow. It was like a slap in the face. Insults had to be resented, leading, of course, to the, the system of dueling. Interestingly, Jefferson Davis would almost be involved in duels on at least eight occasions we know of in his life. He never actually fights one, but he's definitely a part of the southern honor ethic that says one must resent, one must respond in kind, to any insult to your face. There were obligations of behavior and honor as well; a certain noblesse oblige was, was required. Some of it

may date back to the novels of Sir Walter Scott, all of which Jefferson Davis read, as did most people of his time, and the exaggerated notions of what chivalry had been like when knighthood was in flower. One had an obligation to treat the weak humanely. One, if a slaveholder had an obligation to treat one's slaves humanely. No gentleman mistreated his slaves, though of course, not a few did. One had to exalt women, place them on a pedestal as the fairest of the fair. One had an obligation to the community and to society at large to serve, to be honest, to be honorable, to be upright. One had an enormous sense of personal reputation, all bound up into these concepts of honor, and any erosion of that reputation from any direction served to undermine the whole, but nothing more so than what we would call an affront to the ego, a challenge to one's conceit, which is why the duel became so prevalent among upper-class white southern males in that era.

Jim: Okay.

Jack Davis: Does that cover it enough?

Jim: No, that's great. I'm gonna change tapes.

PART 3

Speaker 1: Let's discuss the marriage of, uh, Jefferson Davis and Knox Taylor.

Jack Davis: Probably no man was ever happier than Jefferson Davis when he finally got permission to marry Sarah Taylor. They were wed in Louisville, Kentucky at the home of, of a distant relation [her uncle], but he persuaded her very early to come onto his plantation now, in Warren County, Mississippi, because I think he simply could not wait to be home in a new planation his brother, Joseph, was setting him up with. He couldn't wait to have Sarah, now Davis, there with him to begin their lives, to begin families, to start the next chapter in, in the lives they were to have together. And he persuaded her, in fact, that it was perfectly healthy to do so, even though this was the summer, the time known as the malarial season of fevers in the lower Mississippi. It's interesting that when he was in the military himself, Davis would ask to have his furloughs po, postponed so that he would not have to go home in the summer because he knew how dangerous it was. Yet now, so full of enthusiasm and, and, and joy and anticipation for the life to come, he persuaded Sarah Taylor to do what he himself had once been afraid to do. And so she agreed and they would go south and set up their new life together on his new plantation, to be called Brierfield. And for a few, tragically few months, they were apparently very happy, until a mosquito bit them, perhaps both of them at the same time in the same night, and they came down with malaria.

Speaker 1: OK.

Jack Davis: That kinda went beyond what you.

Speaker 1: No, no, no, no. That's perfect. Let's, let's talk about that illness.

Jack Davis: She dies in September, doesn't she? Yeah.

Speaker 1: So let's talk about that. Where are they?

Jack Davis: I think they're at his plantation, but, you know, I've forgotten. No, they died at Locust Grove.

Speaker 1: Locust Grove?

Jack Davis: Er, she dies at Locust Grove.

Speaker 1: Right. So she's at his sister's?

Jack Davis: Right. Did she get sick there? I'm a long time away from all this.

Speaker 1: Well, that's kind of a question. Some people don't know whether she got sick there, if she got sick on the trip, you know, they're not quite sure when it was that they were, they contracted it. There, it's different ****.

Jack Davis: ****. And Locust Grove's not far from St. Francisville.

Speaker 1: It's basically in St. Francisville [no].

Jack Davis: Yeah.

Speaker 1: But that's where they –

Jack Davis: That's where they go ****.

Speaker 1: – ****.

Jack Davis: I'm sorry. Now, what was the question again?

Speaker 1: Let's talk about the illness. Um, where were they, you know, what was –

Jack Davis: Okay.

Speaker 1: – how close to death were they?

Jack Davis: We don't exactly know where Jefferson and Sarah Davis were when the deadly insect bit them that gave them both malaria. They may've been at his home in, near, near Vicksburg. They may have been on the road for a trip south to Locust Grove near St. Francisville. We simply don't know. What we do know is that she got much sicker much faster and as they settled in to go through their illness and they hoped convalescence at Locust Grove, perhaps because of her smaller constitution, Sarah much more quickly succumbed to the illness and in September 1835 she dies in a delirium, even while her husband, Jefferson, is in another room in the same house, himself almost delirious from the disease and hallucinating that he can hear her singing in the background.

Speaker 1: What was the impact of that illness on Davis? How long until he recovered, until he realized what had happened and 'til he was back on his feet?

Jack Davis: Uh, do you want to avoid things like I think or is that okay to say that?

Speaker 1: Sure, you can say you think.

Jack Davis: Okay.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Jack Davis: But, uh, Jefferson Davis [clears throat]. Let's start again. After Sarah's death, Jefferson Davis himself is still almost at death's door and it will be weeks before he begins what for him will be a long, slow, and never complete recovery from malaria. He will have recurrent bouts of it for the rest of his life. But at some point, well before he's able to get up and walk out of Locust Grove, he's already had to start dealing with the impact and the meaning of Sarah's death. I think it was probably the most traumatic event of his entire life. This was the love of his young manhood.

Speaker 1: Well, let's, let's take that again. ****.

Jack Davis: Okay.

Speaker 1: A big truck just drove by. ****.

Jack Davis: From the very beginning?

Speaker 1: No, no. Just the, uh –

Jack Davis: ****.

Speaker 1: – just when you're saying the impact.

Jack Davis: Oh, okay.

Speaker 1: Yeah. Go ahead.

Jack Davis: I think the death of Sarah Davis was the most traumatic event, uh. I think the death of Sarah Davis was the most traumatic event in Jefferson Davis's entire life. Not only was she the love of his young manhood, more than that, he had persuaded her that it was all right, that it was safe to go south with him that summer when he had known as well as anyone how unsafe it could be. Davis would not have been human if he did not feel some perhaps substantial degree of personal responsibility for Sarah's death. He had taken her in harm's path and it had cost him the young woman he loved. He will never be the same man again. The joyous, fun-loving, impish, sometimes miscreant-ish young man he'd been at West Point and even in the army disappears with Sarah Taylor's death, to be replaced by the more cool, the more austere, the aloof, the Jefferson Davis that people would come to know when he went into his public life. There's a tendency that many people have when they have made a very great mistake to be able to deal with it only by not admitting error in anything, and hereafter Jefferson Davis will almost never say I was wrong. I think he had to develop that attitude because to admit wrong, to admit error in even small things, might mean that he would have to open his mind to the enormous error he had made that had cost him his beloved Sarah.

Speaker 1: Okay. ****.

Jack Davis: ****.

Speaker 1: After her death, some people call what Davis went into a seclusion. Some people call it a metamorphosis. Some people call it he turned into a, a, a hermit. H, how would you describe the years, and it's close to a decade, that he kind of –

Jack Davis: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: – went into this other period of Davis's life. And, and he just, feel free to discuss, uh, his brother Joseph's influence on it, any other family members' influence on it, and, and what he was doing at the time.

Jack Davis: Evidence of how deeply Davis felt the loss of Sarah Taylor, and I think of how deeply he felt his own agency in her death, lies in the fact that for 2 years after her death, he becomes almost a –

Speaker 1: Can you pause 1 second? I, I need you to start that up again. I –

Jack Davis: Okay.

Speaker 1: – **** my fault. Okay, go ahead.

Jack Davis: Evidence of just how deeply the loss of Sarah hurt Davis, and I think as well evidence of just how much he felt his own agency in her death, is the fact that for the first 2 years after Sarah's passing, Jefferson Davis became almost a

total recluse. He traveled some, but mostly he buried himself in his brother's library. In years to come after that, he began to get out more and more, but still even into the early 1840s, Jefferson Davis is reclusive, quiet. He stays working on his own plantation, Brierfield. He devotes himself to reading and to study and very much stays apart from the interests or the ways of the outer world. It took him nearly a decade to cope with Sarah's loss and in the end, it was largely through the aid of his brother Joseph, who provided a plantation for Jefferson. Who provided the money he needed, who provided him his first slaves. It's Joseph who begins to force Jefferson Davis out of the walls that he's built around himself to deal with his grief.

Speaker 1: Let's discuss briefly here Joseph Davis. Uh, there's some odd circumstances surrounding Joseph Davis's life in terms of his familial environment. Is it a wife, very young wife, and, and were they married, and the children? Could you discuss, to the extent that you know, Joseph Davis?

Jack Davis: Yeah, which is a lot.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Jack Davis: In some ways, Joseph Davis is every bit as remarkable a man as his brother Jefferson. He valued learning tremendously. He seems to have been more able to show affection than did their father, Samuel. He is a man of wide-ranging interests and apparently a rather open mind, interested in everything from the works of classical literature to works of modern utopian scholarship. He became a follower of Robert Dale Owen, among others, very interested in social engineering and social experimentation. A man with, for his time and place, very enlightened

views about slavery and about the potential role of blacks in a white American society. There's no question he's also a bit manipulative. He is a man who will guide his adopted son, if you want to call Jefferson that, he will guide his brother's life, uh, rather, uh, uh, imperiously, often overriding and often managing to overslaugh Jefferson Davis's own objections to the decisions his brother makes for him. Joseph seems to have seen in Jefferson possibilities that may not have laid there for Joseph himself, but the doors to which Joseph could open for this younger sibling, whom he saw as being so talented and so full of potential. Joseph's own domestic life is not going to be a happy one. He has difficulty in his marriage. He has difficulty with children. He has difficulties with his plantation, but never in all their years does he ever seem to have waivered in his devotion to the interests of his brother Jefferson.

Speaker 1: OK. Discuss Davis's early involvement in Mississippi politics.

Jack Davis: Jefferson Davis doesn't **** too many of these things begin "Jefferson Davis this, Jefferson Davis that" ****. Politics, on the face of it, don't seem to have attracted young Davis's interest very much. That is to say, if they did, we have little evidence of him showing any particular interest in the affairs of the 1830s or early 1840s, when the, the sectional ferment is gradually building between North and South. It's not until the early 1840s, when Davis is almost dragooned into state politics in Mississippi by being appointed a delegate to a state Democratic convention. That does, at least, give us to know at this time he is more or less in the Democratic camp in the South. The Democratic party is the party of Andrew Jackson. It's the party that stands for localism against federalism. It is the party, of course, that is there to defend the rights of slavery and the other individual rights of sov, presumed sovereignty of the southern states. So that we know

Jefferson Davis' general views lay in that direction, but he's made no political manifestation of them until the early 1840s when, on a very limited scale, he'll begin to get involved in state politics as a delegate to a convention as one of many out canvassing his local counties in central Mississippi for Democratic candidates for the state legislature and finally, of course, when, to the surprise of many, including perhaps himself, he's asked to be a candidate for the United States Congress.

Speaker 1: ****. When did Jefferson ****? Discuss the relationship that started between Varina Howell and Jefferson Davis.

Jack Davis: Among the many aspects of his brother's life that Joseph Davis helped manipulate, one was Davis's future romantic life. It's Joseph Davis more than anyone else who has the responsibility for ensuring that Jefferson will be introduced to Varina Howell. When they first met, we don't exactly know what he felt about her. We do know that she had somewhat ambivalent feelings about him. She wrote a letter shortly after meeting him in which she said she thought he might be an older man, but then he might be a young man. He seemed to be both. He seemed pleasant and affable, yet on the other hand he seemed proud and aloof. She was not sure she liked him and yet Joseph continued the matchmaking. Jefferson Davis had come far enough out of his grief over Sarah Taylor that he could begin to, to look upon other women and through the good offices of friends and their own curiosity, I think, about each other—she, about this interesting and enigmatic older man, and he, about this clearly very intelligent, very vivacious young woman. Through all of these influences, they began to see more and more of each other until finally, in fact, they agreed to wed.

Speaker 1: Describe Davis's election to the House of Representatives **** representatives.

Jack Davis: Not much to describe, really, uh.

Speaker 1: Let's ****.

Jack Davis: Late 1845, as I recall. I think I made a note of it here, right?

Speaker 1: Yeah. It's by Question 25.

Jack Davis: Oh, here. I've got it as 21. Let's see.

Speaker 1: ****.

Jack Davis: Oh, describe his tenure as a representative, 25. Okay.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Jack Davis: **** in the House.

Speaker 1: And I guess, um, include into that that how did he get from Mississippi to Washington, D.C.? What was that journey like?

Jack Davis: Mm, OK. Um.

Speaker 1: How would, how would someone –

Jack Davis: He took a steam, he would've taken a steamboat to Pittsburgh, probably. But now I don't remember for sure.

Speaker 1: I don't know.

Jack Davis: Uh, okay.

Speaker 1: ****.

Jack Davis: Okay. A little bit, little bit about travel in that era.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Jack Davis: Uh, Jefferson Davis was elected to the House of Representatives in November 1845 and in December made the journey east to take office for what, for him, was going to be a very brief tenure indeed. Even in the days of steam travel, this was not an easy journey. For him, he'd have left by steamboat from Mississippi from Vicksburg and either traveled up the Mississippi then up the Ohio to Pittsburgh [yes] or else down the Mississippi to New Orleans and by vessel, by sailing vessel or steam vessel, all the way around perhaps to Baltimore or Philadelphia or even to Washington [no]. Rail travel is still uncertain. Mississippi has few railroads, even by the mid-1840s. It's not yet possible to travel all the way from the Mississippi River to the east coast by a single train without having to change trains over and over again. Travel had sped up a great deal from the days when it took Jefferson Davis weeks to traverse the Natchez Trace to get from Woodville to Nashville, but it was still a matter of several days' travel, a week

sometimes or more, to get from the Mississippi to Washington, the result being that by the time he reached Washington to take office in the House of Representatives he was already very tired from the journey and now facing the excitement, as well as the stress and uncertainty, of entering an entirely new arena. Perhaps it's good for Davis that his tenure in the House of Representatives was so short, in fact, because it was all so new. Freshman congressmen, then as now, were expected to be seen and not heard--to learn the ropes, to learn where everything was, to learn who the committee chair people were, to learn the ways of the House of Representatives, which even then, not even 100 years old, was already an institution with its own traditions and its own ethics. But that was not Davis's way. He stood up to make his first speech on the floor of the house 10 days after he'd taken office. This was virtually unheard of, and he would be up on the floor again and again in the next few months, speaking on issues, [and] as a result, calling attention to himself. On the one hand, as, as a source of pride to southerners. Here's a young man who's not going to wait. He's going to go somewhere. Yet at the same time, to some others North and South, giving evidence of a man who seemed to impetuous, too unwilling to play by the rules everyone else was observing by thrusting himself forward in this manner. We don't know how his whole first term as a congressman would've played out because the war with Mexico came along to put an end to it.

Speaker 1: In terms of the war, what was, what was Davis’s, what was Varina's reaction to Davis going to war?

Jack Davis: Varina Davis was not at all happy that her husband, Jefferson Davis, wanted to go off, become colonel of the Mississippi volunteers and go off to war with Mexico. Remember, again, this is the same Jefferson Davis who was so tired

of the military, even when he was West Point, that he thought about leaving. This is the same Jefferson Davis who doing frontier duty thought the military had ruined him for any other occupation, but then he would turn around and think about maybe I should go into railroading, or maybe I should go home and be a planter. During that decade after Sarah's death, when Davis seemed to wander, grasping for what to do, he actually looked into going back into the military from which he'd been very happy to leave. Then he got his election to the Congress and a few months later wants to leave to go back into military. There'll be hints then and later that Davis will have difficulty making up his mind, difficulty completely committing himself to something. He always wants to be somewhere, he always wants to do something, but it's often not what he's doing or where he is at the moment. And his desire to go into the military in 1846 is part of that. But, of course, also he wanted, like so many young men who had the training he had, to get the experience of an actual war. This wasn't going to be frontier duty, guarding settlers, or having the occasional Indian scrape. This was going to be a real war with opportunity, with chances for advancement, changes to make a name for oneself. No one could forget that several American presidents had gotten to the White House by being military heroes first. Davis himself had met Andrew Jackson at an early age and always thereafter worshipped Andrew Jackson, even after many in the South had actually stigmatized Jackson as a pariah because he tried to enforce the tariff in the South. So Davis's, Davis's feelings will seem to some to be inconsistent, yet for him, trained to the military, for a man of ambition, the decision to try to go to war in Mexico was perfectly natural. But to his young wife, to whom he has been married only months, the idea of her husband leaving her, going to an unknown climate, to an unknown fate, was terrible indeed and she appears to have actively tried to persuade him not to do so. But in the end, as so

often in their marriage, he would make the decision and she would simply decide to abide by it.

Speaker 1: How did Davis feel about being an officer again and, and how, how was he, how did he perform as a leader of men?

Jack Davis: Davis showed remarkable energy in building his regiment of Mississippi volunteers. He had a number of things to drive him in this. For one, of course, he had a West Point education, so he thought he understood the military. He thought he understood frontier service and indeed he had seen several years of it. He also, of course, had the benefit this time not of being an obscure second lieutenant or first lieutenant. Now he was to be colonel of the Mississippi volunteers. He would have command of his own regiment in a position with a rank of real prestige. Being a colonel was going to open doors for Davis anywhere in the South. Indeed, at that time, anywhere in the Union. So all of this built his enthusiasm tremendously. Secondly, Davis was by instinct militarily a modernizer, as we'd see later on in his career of secretary of war. He had a desire to bring the army out if its old ways and into whatever was going to be the modern ethos of the time. With his Mississippi volunteers, he managed to get them the latest, most up-to-date weapons. He managed to get them well-equipped, well-uniformed, well-transported, and he thought therefore that he had something approaching an elite unit to lead into Mexico. Certainly he was a good disciplinarian. He was not a martinet, but he was a good disciplinarian. The Mississippians were well-trained. They performed their parade and evolutions very well. They understood their weapons very well, and as a result he was proud of them, but just as significantly, they seemed to be proud of him. A tremendous esprit, a sense of élan developed in that Mississippi regiment and years afterward,

even before the old veterans were likely to be romanticizing their boyhood days, why, still it was apparent that there was a strong bond of respect and affection for Davis among the men he was to lead. Are these going too long?

Speaker 1: Oh, no. Not at all.

Jack Davis: Okay.

Speaker 1: How was he received upon his return? I think we're gonna, in terms, how was he received upon returning from the war?

Jack Davis: Davis came back from Mexico a bona fide hero. He came back with everything a young man of his time and place could hope to have: a high rank as a colonel, an important role and a significant victory behind him, and a wound. He had bled for his country. The Mexican War did not produce that many heroes, but one of them was Jefferson Davis, and it would be the foundation of his political career to come. There was no question whatever that on his return to Mississippi whatever he wished to go into, the door would be open. If he wished to return to politics, the position would be there. And indeed it was. No sooner did he get home then Jesse Speight, a sitting senator from Mississippi, died and the governor had it in his power to appoint a successor for the balance of Speight's term and that appointment went to Jefferson Davis. Overnight he went from being a colonel and a man who had only a few months' experience in Congress as a representative to becoming United States senator, a meteoric rise indeed.

Speaker 1: How did Davis feel about his reception as a war hero?

Jack Davis: Gee, I can't recall. Um.

Speaker 1: It's okay. We can move on.

Jack Davis: Yeah, I, I don't –

Speaker 1: Sure.

Jack Davis: – I don't remember anything he said about it.

Speaker 1: Let's, let's discuss, um, his transition. How did he transition from, again, transition out of the military into something else, this time into being a U.S. senator? How did that transition go?

Jack Davis: For Davis, the transition from soldier and leader into statesman and leader was not as easy as it might've been. Certainly, he was delighted to have a seat in the Senate, though, typical of Davis, he never completely detached himself from his military role. He was, in fact, honored – start that one again. It was offered, not honored. For Davis, the transition from military hero to statesman in the Senate was not as easy as one might've hoped. For a start, he still had not left behind this tendency to be uncertain of what he wanted to do. Even as he was being offered the seat in the Senate, which would've of course required that he resign his military commission commanding volunteers, he was also being offered by the president a commission as a brigadier general of volunteers. Well, if there's one thing better than being a colonel, it's being a general, and yet this is Davis, who so often did not want to be in the military, yet wanted to get back into it. Now he has the chance of staying in the military with an enhanced position or leaving that

and going into an enhanced position in politics. And so when Davis accepts the Senate seat, he delays in resigning his military commission, always leaving the door open to go back to what he'd been doing before. That alone made the transition uncertain for him. How much worse was it, however, that the transition back to peace-time living with Varina was rocky. Varina Davis is probably best described as a 20th-century woman. Bright, intellectual, very well-educated, somewhat headstrong. She had an independent turn of mind. It did not come naturally to her to do what women of her time and place did, which was to become a cringing violet and to knuckle under to the dictation of a husband. She had her own opinions and she spoke them, the result being, especially when Davis came back home, there's, there's always a period of adjustment when one party or the other has returned from a long absence, but in this instance, Davis, a man who because of his social ethic cannot brook opposition, now has to deal with a wife who by nature will oppose him. And so they argued. He called her querulous. She was always challenging him. She made it, as he said, intolerable because she did not know her proper subordinate station as a wife. And so when he goes east to take his seat as a senator, he will, in fact, leave Varina behind. It's the first of two separations, at least, that they will go through because their clash of personalities is so strong. In the end, their marriage works, I think only because Varina decides to knuckle under, to subordinate her, her independence, and to play the game the way it was expected that a woman would play it in her time and place, though I think she never completely yielded her independence or her willingness to have views opposing her husband's. Interestingly enough, only after he dies, years later, when she writes her own memoir, will she get her own back a little bit in places by revealing those instances in which she thought her husband was wrong. All that lay in the future, but in 1847 when Davis comes back from the war and is to go to Washington, there's trouble in the Davis home for a time.

Speaker 1: Let's move to, uh, Jefferson Davis as secretary of war. H, how did that, in the, in the same line of the last question, how did he transition out of the role of statesman to now statesman/ military, [as] secretary of war?

Jack Davis: Jefferson Davis was not entirely happy about accepting the appointment of secretary of war in 1852, when it was offered to him. Several influences made him do it. Chief among them, I think, was the fact that he felt enormous admiration and loyalty for President Franklin Pierce. They had been friends in Mexico. They'd been friends in politics since then. When Pierce offered him the position of secretary of war, I think Davis felt it would've been an act of violation of that friendship to say no. Furthermore, of course, he had resigned his Senate seat that he’d previously held to make an unsuccessful bid for the Mississippi governorship. He had no political base at the moment. He had no political office to hold. He may have found staying at home on the plantation in Mississippi paling to routine. At least being secretary of war offered a return to Washington, which Davis always loved and always maintained he didn't like, and yet offered him an opportunity to do something that comported with his, his feelings of himself as a reformer, by having a chance to do something with the establishment of the United States military. Again, as a West Point graduate and, of course, as a veteran with several years of frontier duty, Davis had very definite opinions about how the military ought to be run. And the United States military in 1853, when Davis took his oath of office of secretary of war, was a hidebound, antiquated institution in which, on average, it could take an officer 55 years to rise from second lieutenant to full colonel, which meant most men never lived long enough. It was an institution riven with seniority, with superannuated old men in their 70s and even 80s holding the top positions in the army at a time when they

were no longer aware of where their chair was, let alone what their duties were. Davis wanted to do something about seniority. He wanted to modernize weapons and equipment. He'd seen what modern equipment could do, especially modern, uh, weaponry, in the war with Mexico. He wanted also as well to push the transcontinental railroad, and in that era, this sort of thing could come under the purview of the secretary of war who, after all, is ultimately in charge of the Army Corps of Engineers, the biggest body of engineers in the entire country, and he wanted that railroad to have a southern route to benefit the South. So there were a number of impetuses that will drive Davis to accept the portfolio.

Speaker 1: Let's take one step back. How did Davis react to the loss of the gubernatorial race in Mississippi?

Jack Davis: Jefferson Davis, I'm sorry ****. When Jefferson Davis agreed to make a bid for the governorship of Mississippi he knew he was going to lose. It was an uphill battle from the start. Mississippi had come close under John Quitman to flirting with the idea of succession. And then, of course, it did not. And in Mississippi, as in Georgia, as, even in South Carolina, there was a rapid reaction and, uh, and a swelling of the Union, pro-Union ranks instead that, that tended to disgrace the old secessionists. Davis, of course, was associated with the Democratic party, which was associated with the secessionists, and therefore he knew that he was likely to face a Whig landslide in that gubernatorial election. But someone had to run. He felt that the Democratic party ought to be represented with a strong candidate. He was persuaded by friends--and Davis is a man who's always liable to lean toward loyalty to friends in his personal decisions. And so he agreed, knowing full well that it was a forlorn hope, as indeed it was. He gave a

creditable performance, but it was still a half-hearted campaign because Davis knew there was, in that instance, never going to be a chance that he could win.

Speaker 1: OK. ****. What time is it, sir?

Jack Davis: It's about 12:50.

Speaker 1: The question now is

PART 4

Speaker 1: All right, let's, um, we briefly discussed there the, um, –

Jack Davis: Secretary of war –

Speaker 1: – Secretary of war. There's a lot of people who argue that Davis was one of the better secretaries of war. Some people would say he was the best. How, how did, historically, Davis fare, and then also, if you can, how did Davis think that he did as secretary of war?

Jack Davis: I think Jefferson Davis always regarded his tenure of secretary of war as one of the most successful periods of his life. He was very proud of that service, mainly, I think, because [of] what he tried to do in modernizing the army, and in

the lesser amount that he actually was able to achieve. Davis in fact did not achieve –

Speaker 1: Actually I'm sorry, I need you to take that one sentence over again, with just the audio –

Jack Davis: – from the start?

Speaker 1: Uh, no, just from, um, well you might as well take it from the start –

Jack Davis: Okay, sure –

Speaker 1: – **** –

Jack Davis: Jefferson Davis always seemed rather proud of his tenure at secretary of war. In part, I think, because he felt that, in looking back on it, this was one of the most successful periods of his life, and in some measure it was. Certainly, Davis did not achieve all he set out to do. He tried to attack the seniority system and he failed. He simply could not budge it. He tried to modernize the army and had mixed success. He did expend the cavalry by starting two new cavalry

regiments, he brought along a number of promising young officers. On the other hand, he was not able to fully bring up equipment and weapons to the standards that were available at the time. He was a fair administrator, not a great one. It needs to be kept in mind that, in his era, in the 1850s, the War Department oversaw the expenditure of 90 percent of the federal budget, mainly because of maintaining the 10,000 to 12,000 soldiers and their animals on posts as far away as the Pacific Coast. He was a peace-time secretary of war, so he didn't have to face the challenges of mobilizing for a foreign war. So we don't know how well he would have performed in extreme challenge. He was a good caretaker secretary of war. He did better than some, perhaps not as well as some others, who faced greater challenges. He did there, first evidence, [of] what he was going to be like as an executive, and it was a very mixed picture. Davis intimately knew and understood the workings of every aspect of this domain that he ruled, which was to a credit, to his credit. Unfortunately, he also felt compelled to interfere in or to micro-manage almost every aspect of that domain as well. Davis was known to be seen standing behind clerks, who in those days did copying of documents from letters into letter books, with a watch, timing how many lines per minute a clerk could copy. That's not how a cabinet secretary should be spending his time. Davis was making sure that the government got its money's worth out of its clerks. He would be like this

as a chief executive yet again, in another time of much greater consequence and challenge.

Speaker 1: Let's, before we get into his second stint as a senator, let's discuss Davis and his view of slavery. You brief, briefly touched on it before and used an interesting word, you said "freedom" when you were talking about Black Hawk, you said, you know, that there was a class of white Americans who believed that, you know, Indians and children and slaves –

Jack Davis: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: – need to be dealt with with a level of freedom. I thought it was kind of an interesting use of the word. So discuss Davis in light of his views on slavery.

Jack Davis: Interestingly enough, Jefferson Davis, I think, may not have understood slavery near as well as did many other people in the South because of his experience of it was limited almost exclusively to his own plantation at Brierfield and to his brother Joseph Davis's plantation at Hurricane in Mississippi and the two Davis brothers were, if anything, very atypical slaveholders. For a start, they didn't believe in cruelty. Jefferson Davis would always have difficulty

keeping an overseer because they would be too rough on the slaves. He did not, he loathed the idea of cruelty to a child and he loathed the idea of cruelty to a slave, as he always seemed to equate the two -- slaves were like children in Davis' mind. He gave them a fair degree of freedom, that is, he allowed them to keep their own gardens. He allowed his slaves to raise small crops on their own plots, he allowed them to raise livestock in some cases, mostly chickens, in order to sell at the public market to have spending money for their own little luxuries. When one of the Davis slaves was accused of misbehaving, Davis didn't punish them or, or pass judgment on the infraction, nor after a time would he allow an overseer to do it either, he allowed the slaves to compose a jury and a court of their own, and they tried each other. They were tried by their peers, in fact. And he found, incidentally, that the slaves tended to be much more harsh in the punishments that they dealt out to one of their own than Davis was likely to be. In a time and in a place where some states in the South, by statute law, made it illegal to educate slaves, to teach them to read and write. Both Davis brothers brought in teachers to teach their slaves the rudiments of reading and writing. He provided religious instruction, even built a church on the plantation, so that they would have their own place to worship. He avoided breaking up slave families by selling one slave to another plantation or a husband away from his wife. In the context of the time, and it's important to remember this is in the context of that time, these were

enormously enlightened and benign views on slaves and on slavery itself. There's no question that Davis believed that slavery was the proper station for blacks in American society. He didn't think they were sufficiently intelligent or mature or responsible enough to function on their own. He did say that he thought a time would come when they would be--many men in the South said this--but they were often never pinned down just when that time was going to come. And, indeed, Davis himself never gave a prediction as to when he thought slaves would be up to the task of functioning as free men. He was always ambivalent on that point. So, by comparison to others of his class and his era, Davis is a very benign slaveholder, but he has no deep inner conflict or turmoil over the morality of slavery itself. He is convinced through statute law, through long-time usage and of course with the sanction of the Scriptures, that slavery is where Africans belonged.

Speaker 1: Jumping ahead, since we're just gonna stay on the issue of slavery –

Jack Davis: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: – if it comes up later that's fine, but let's touch on it now. After the War Between the States and Davis's imprisonment and in his later life, what was, did his view of slavery ever change?

Jack Davis: With the war behind him and as Davis faced all of the uncertainties of trying to rebuild his life in the latter part of the 19th century, his views toward slavery and toward its morality had no choice but to change, because the world had changed and slavery was no longer the law of the land. But his views towards blacks underwent a hardening, largely as a result of treachery that he thought he perceived on the part of some one-time blacks, oh shit, duh, one-time blacks, uh, let's try that again. Um, years after the war, as Davis faced the challenge of trying to rebuild himself as well as to participate in the rebuilding of the South in the latter part of the 19th century, his views on the morality of slavery may not have changed-- they were probably fixed-- though he certainly accepted emancipation as a fact. What did happen, though, at least for a time, as that his views on blacks hardened, as a result of some perceived injustices that he suffered at the hands of blacks whom he thought were his onetime friends. And where once he tended to romanticize African-Americans as, as happy, faithful, child-like, simple, innocent people, he now began to see that they were just like whites and like everyone else and could let a friend down, they could be ungrateful or, from his point of view, though why a slaveholder would think slaves should be grateful to him one day seems not to have been a question that occurred to Davis. By the end of his life, those hardened feelings seem to have subsided somewhat, though Davis is

certainly in the mainstream of a general tide of uncertainty and unease in the South in the late 1880s with the new social order of things, with the fact that slaves now, that former slaves now had some legal status, that they could own property, that in some very limited and prescribed ways, they could even challenge a white man, though still, in that time and place, there was no question that, in the courts as in the streets, any black took an enormous chance in trying to face-to-face meet with a white man as his equal, and I think there's no question that Davis felt that that, too, was the natural order of things. Slavery was dead, but still the subordination of the black race to the white was in effect. The game was the same, the rules had been changed.

Speaker 1: Okay. Let's check your mic, yeah everything's fine. Um, one follow-up on the slavery question. Davis as statesman, as he's defending the institution of slavery, in his public speeches-- if you want, you can go into his private-- but as he's defending it publicly, did he defend it as a social institution or an economic institution or a mixture of both?

Jack Davis: Southern leaders, in the days leading up to the Civil War, use a variety of means of defending slavery. It's recognized in the Constitution or at least implicitly sanctioned in the Constitution, it's been practiced for centuries in

western culture, it seems to be endorsed in the Bible, and who is man to challenge the words of God? Davis at one time or another was willing to use all of these justifications for preserving slavery, but he was also perhaps more pragmatic than many others by putting forth the idea that right or wrong, slavery's a fact, it exists in the United States, there are two races in close conjunction in the South, in any case, and that when that is going to happen and when there are interests are divergent and sometimes antithetical, one must have power over the other to preserve civil order and peace and to preserve social order, and he preferred that that be the white race. Blacks were not able to govern themselves, they were not able because they were childlike and immature and irresponsible to function with complete freedom. They did not know how to look after their own best interests: they needed stewards, paternalistic whites to tell them and do for them what was best for them. This is a common, very, very common attitude at that time. And that's not to say that Jefferson Davis didn't sincerely believe that. Those were simply the laws of the world in which he lived, and those are the bases on by which most often he justified slavery. It was the law of the land, it was the best relationship between white and black, and the situation in which they found themselves.

Speaker 1: In addition to slavery, one of the hotbed issues of the day was, and you, you brought this up before, um, the tariff –

Jack Davis: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: – in regards to Andrew Jackson –

Jack Davis: Yeah.

Speaker 1: – Jackson, um, what was this whole issue about, the tariff, and why was it coming to a boiling point at this time, late 1850s, early 1860s?

Jack Davis: Actually it's not, but there are those who maintain it is –

Speaker 1: Okay.

Jack Davis: – but I'll –

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Jack Davis: – it's, it's worth discussing because –

Speaker 1: Yeah –

Jack Davis: – it's, it's –

Speaker 1: – and if you have a differing position –

Jack Davis: Yeah –

Speaker 1: – **** –

Jack Davis: – it's, it's become flavor of the month the last few years. And your man DiLorenzo is big on this –

Speaker 1: Right.

Jack Davis: You want me to discuss the tariff, basically what it is, and –

Speaker 1: Basically –

Jack Davis: I'm hap –

Speaker 1: – we were discussing the tariff.

Jack Davis: The tariff is very important to Americans in early 19th century because it's one of the primary bases by which the government is financed. There are no income taxes at that time, the government has only limited sources of revenue: the sale of the public lands, mainly the territory acquired as the Louisiana Territory, tariffs and duties on imports and exports, and to a much, much lesser degree, sale of stamps at post offices. These are the only sources of revenue the government has, there are no taxes. Of course, the tariff becomes a big issue in the 1820s, when for the first time you see the rise of a political power, chiefly in the North, that sees the tariff as a potential for doing more than just covering the basic expenses of government. It sees that perhaps industry can be expanded, presumably for the good of all, but it will require the influx of money raised by enhanced tariffs to build those industries--things like canals, later railroads, public roads. There's also the feeling that certain existing industries could be encouraged by special favor in the tariffs, by protective tariffs that prevent the importation of foreign goods that might be cheaper, that might compete with domestically

produced manufactures. This sort of tariff is still with us today and it comes and goes. The problem was, of course, the industry's being encouraged but primarily in the North, which is where all manufacturing was. People in the South thought they were being asked to pay a disproportionate share of the finance of the government by paying tariff duties on what they imported as manufactured goods from Europe or else by paying higher prices for locally manufactured goods from the North. Either way, the southerners thought they were being asked to pay more and that this put too large a share, an unfair share of the burden, of financing the government on their backs. In some degree, it did. The tariffs, also, of course, also protected southern agricultural manufacturers from foreign competition, particularly southern cotton, once cotton began to come online in Mexico and India and Egypt and elsewhere, it could compete with southern cotton, but the tariff protected southern cotton, it protected southern rice. Worst than that, the southerners began to say by the 1840s, 1850s, that we are only a third of the population of the country, yet two-thirds of the tariffs are being paid in the South. We're financing two-thirds of the government when we're only one-third of it. And that came out of an interesting little sophistry that nobody ever really seems to have caught then and no one wants to catch since, which is what they were talking about is that two-thirds of the tariff revenue was being paid at southern ports, where goods are being imported. What that doesn't take cognizance of, of course,

is that then as today, the biggest port of importation in America, was New Orleans, which sent imported goods all the way up the Mississippi to the Ohio, all the way up to Michigan and Minnesota, to Pittsburgh, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, most of the central northern part of the country, imported goods via New Orleans. Import duties paid in New Orleans didn't come out of southern pockets, they came out of the pocket of whoever bought the goods and somebody in Pittsburg buying a piano from England was the one who finally paid that importation duty. But they didn't look at subtleties like this at the time. Fortunately, the tariff issue gradually died off in the 1840s as the definitely unfair, so-called Tariff of Abominations in 1828 was gradually amended and amended and amended again until by the late 1840s, the United States once again was essentially a free-trade country, that is, import duties are about 20 percent or less, and it really just raised enough to cover the revenue necessary to finance the government. As a result, the tariff ceased to be an issue driving the North-South rift, it ceased to be an issue fueling the secessionists' desire to try to press for separation from the Union. Whereas in 1832, the tariff was almost explosive enough to bring South Carolina to the brink of succession, by the mid-1850s southern politicians have completely stopped talking about it, and in 1860 all of the debates going on in the southern state conventions that lead to the secession of the states, to secede in 1860 and '61, mention of the tariff is absent from the menu, it has ceased to be an issue. It would have been once again, with

the Morrill Tariff that was even then being debated, that was going to take America back to protectionism, largely as a result of the financial panic of 1857, it had created such a depression that the government was going deeply in debt and needed to raise more funds. But southerners aren't complaining about a tariff that's likely to happen in the future. It's become fashionable in recent years to try to argue that secession had very little to do with slavery, it was really about the tariff. Uh, several books have come out, uh, maintaining this position and historians hear it all the time from people who, for whatever reason, and sincere reasons, prefer to think that slavery did not undergird secession of the South. But the fact is you have only to look at the debates in the secession conventions, look at what's being written in the press in 1860 in the Ssouth, look at what southern politicians are saying in the United States Congress when they're resigning to go south. No one is talking about the tariff. The only issue they're talking about are issues surrounding the basic issue of slavery.

Speaker 1:   **** –

Jack Davis: I guess you can cut that up into two or three if you need to **** –

Speaker 1: So, oh, actually we'll get to that in secession. Let's talk about, uh, Davis' second tour as senator.

Jack Davis: Okay.

Speaker 1: How is he perceived now that he was coming back as a senator, so he had been **** the secretary of war, and now he's coming back. How is he perceived and received by his colleagues?

Jack Davis: When Davis re-enters the Senate, after he leaves office as secretary of war, he's now one of the leading spokesman for the southern position in Washington. He's a military hero, which always helps. He's been a popular secretary of war, he was very influential in persuading the Pierce administration to repeal, or to support the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. He is a man who seems to have been anointed by John C. Calhoun in his last couple of years as a potential successor to this man who is the patron saint of the southern rcights position in southern politics. As a result, Davis returns to the Senate with a voice that, before it's first heard, is already more powerful and more influential than that of most other southern leaders of the time. And, as a result, he immediately assumes a position of leadership, important committee chairmanships, important

membership in those informal cliques in Washington in which senators and congressman got together to decide the regional policy, and from 1857 onward there are frequent meetings of southern senators and representatives to discuss how they can act with some unity in facing what they perceived as the increasing threats to southern rights and to southern sovereignty. Davis almost without wishing to be is automatically a leader, not of the secessionists--he is not in their camp yet, and never entirely will be--but he's a leader of the southern rights wing who maintain that a line has got to be drawn between us and the North or we are going to be overwhelmed.

Speaker 1: Let's discuss, since we had our discussion of slavery, let's discuss another large theme, because you touched on it there: states' rights, um, discuss Davis' position on states' rights and discuss, at this time, was that another hot one or was it, **** –

Jack Davis: Oh [yawn] excuse me, not you. This whole question of states' rights, or state rights as it's more properly called, is widely misunderstood and always has been. If one looks at what southern leaders are saying in the 1850s, you rarely find them use the term state rights or states' rights, either one, but they do talk about state sovereignty. And their basic position is this, that at the creation of a state,

whether one of the original 13 states or any state subsequently granted statehood, its people had complete sovereignty, that is, their will is law, universally, in operation within that state. In becoming a member of the United States, a state put on loan or gave away a portion of its sovereignty to the federal government so that that federal government could do things that only a central government could do in a confederation--oversee defense, maintain rivers and harbors, maintain a navy, conduct foreign policy, this sort of thing. But all other sovereignty, that is, all other rights or what took place within a state remained with the people of that state. And there were those who argued that there's no such thing as divided sovereignty, you can't have divided sovereignty. You either have complete sovereignty over yourself or you have none. These are people, of course, who have never been married. And marriage is, after all, an example of divided sovereignty. But the fear increasingly in the South is that Washington is encroaching too much on that unloaned sovereignty, on what remained the providence of the states. Asked today to identify what are all the state rights that were threatened in 1860 when southern states seceded, people can't come up with a list because there aren't any. No one was threatening the right of a state to control its own, its own local government, to raise its own militia, to control its own roads, to control its own taxation, to control a host of other things that to this very day remain the individual right of the state. The only right being challenged, and it's not even a state right, it's an individual

right, is the right to go west to the new territories, which are common property of the whole nation, and to take all of your property with you. And it has to be said they had a pretty logical argument. The Louisiana Territory was purchased with United States dollars, not just northern dollars or southern dollars. If a farmer from Ohio can move into the Louisiana Territory or the land gained from the war with Mexico, and take with him all of his property, his cows, his horses, his wagon, why can't a farmer from Mississippi go to that same territory and take all of his property, which happens to include slaves, which are legally recognized as property? It is unfair from their point of view that one man can go to this property that belongs to all of us, and the other can't. And if that situation is allowed to obtain and of course the Missouri Compromise in 1820 drew a line, saying that above this certain line, slaveholders cannot go with their slaves. The Kansas-Nebraska agitation in the mid-1850s dealt with this very, very same issue and finally wound up erasing that Missouri Compromise line. If a man can't go there with all of his property, including his slaves, what does that guarantee when that territory applies for statehood? It's going to be a free state because no slaveholders will live there, and if it becomes a free state, then it guarantees that as the Union continues to grow, the South, those principally 13 slave states, but there are really 15 slave states in 1860, is doomed to becoming an ever smaller minority. The number of slave states can never grow and that means the voice of the South in

Washington is weaker and weaker, until the point comes one day, it is feared that, perhaps as an extension of a logical absurdity, that Washington can do anything it wants with the South, even to the point of abolishing slavery, to abolishing a species of private property. That is the one state right that everyone's talking about. It's really an individual right. States don't have rights to take slaves out west, but presumably an individual should. The idea of state sovereignty was that a state should decide for itself what happens within its own community and that states collectively ought to have a right to deny the imposition of legislation or ethics or codes of conduct that they find antithetical, to deny their imposition within their own borders, and to deny their right to hold slaves at home, was antithetical to the concept of local sovereignty. That went on awfully long and may have been a little confused **** –

Speaker 1: No, it, it brought back together and kinda wound up the issue of slavery and states' rights–

Jack Davis: Okay.

Speaker 1: – and as it leads us into the questions of, uh, possession. Before we actually talk about the actual act of South Carolina, and ultimately Mississippi

seceding and Jefferson Davis giving his last speech, what was his view, what was Davis' view on the right of secession?

Jack Davis: I think there's no question that Jefferson Davis was in the mainstream of southern leaders in believing that succession was, in the abstract, was Let me start that one again. I think there's no question that Jefferson Davis was right in the mainstream of southern political leaders in the 1850s in believing that secession was an undeniable right to the states. They had loaned their sovereignty to the federal government in becoming part of the United States. What they have turned over they have the right to reclaim at will, excepting that in the abstract, it was a lawful right, even though it's not explicitly stated in the Constitution. Still, Davis is like many other southern leaders who feels that as a practical matter, it was not advisable, it was not desirable, that the South was always gonna be better off in the Union rather than out of it, and that the best guarantee for the rights of the South, for the, for the guarantees of southern sovereignty was to continue playing the game with the North, within the field of the, of the Union.

Speaker 1: Okay. Discuss that view versus, say, the view of the fire-eaters, and how did those people view southerners like Davis?

Jack Davis: Okay. Jefferson Davis had almost no use at all for the so-called fire-eaters. That is the, the, the incendiaries, the men like Robert Barnwell Rhett of South Carolina or William Lowndes Yancey of, of Alabama. These are men in the case of Rhett, who for more than 35 years have been moving toward the single goal of secession. Rhett was preaching secession ever since 1826. When he couldn't preach it on the tariff, he'd preach it on slavery, when he couldn't preach it on slavery, he'd go back to the tariff. For him, slavery was the one big idea guiding his life. Yancey and a few others like Louis Wigfall and Roger Pryor of Virginia, are much the same. Davis regards them as they were, as extremists, as dangerous men who could not see beyond the tree in front of them, for the forest behind them. They didn't tend to trust him either. Rhett especially had very little use for Davis. Just before the secession crisis, his son, a newspaper publisher in Charleston, South Carolina, sent Davis a letter asking what he thought the South's response ought to be if Abraham Lincoln were elected president in 1860. And Davis's response was cautious, it was measured. He said we should not act precipitately, we must try, if possible, to stay within the union to redress the wrongs that we feel we’re being forced to suffer, and that secession should only be a last remedy. Well, to the fire-eaters this was a sign that Davis was not with the movement, that he wasn't solid on secession or on southern rights, and indeed, it's in this peaceful conflict or disagreement between Davis, and other men like him,

and the fire-eaters that you see the birth of what will later become the virile and vocal opposition to the Davis administration once he is president of the Confederacy.

Speaker 1: Let me change tapes, um

PART 5

Speaker 1: I think – actually, we'll wait on this one. We'll come back to that. You know, the handwriting was on the wall and Davis was, was to deliver his, his speech, his farewell speech. We'll call it after his secession.

Jack Davis: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: Discuss that period for Davis –

Jack Davis: Okay.

Speaker 1: – ****.

Jack Davis: When the time came that the legislature of Mississippi instructed Davis that he needed to resign because Mississippi was

seceding, probably to that point, the most unhappy, the saddest moment in his life, other than the death of Sarah Davis. Jefferson Davis had genuinely loved the Union. He'd worn its uniform. He'd worn it, he defended it, from his point of view, in a foreign war. He regarded it as one of the blessings of his modern world. Secession was not something that he took lightly, like the fire-eaters. And when he had to walk into the Senate in January 1861 and deliver his final address and say his farewells, the colleagues, North and South, whom he had loved very much, many of Davis' closest friends are northerners. He was a man who felt like he was sacrificing a, a great deal of what he had known and loved and valued in his life. It didn't help that he was in wretched health at the moment. The combination of all these factors put him into one of those depressions that were his frequent companions in his life. And there were tears apparently in the Senate balcony when Davis made his farewell address, tears in the eyes of northerners as well as southerners, as men saw a friend forced to an action that they felt was wrong but believing that in taking that wrong action, he was behaving in a manly and honorable fashion, turning his back on the country he had loved for what was to be for him in the South, a very uncertain future.

Speaker 1: Before we get into the actual secession and, and, and the, the inception of the CSA, let's, let's take a moment and you can answer this question in light of Davis' entire life. Let's talk about his health. Let's

talk about his health, both his physical health and his mental health, and how that became a part of the Davis character.

Jack Davis: It's important for people in our era, with all of the medical facilities we have, with all the medications that we have, with all the attention that we pay to avoiding even the most minor of discomforts, that our ancestors lived in a world of almost constant discomfort. Even just 150 years ago, pain was a nearly constant companion for many people throughout their lives--dental pain, back pain, rheumatic pains, pulmonary pains--things they did not even understand necessarily the origination of, they could hardly understand how to cure them. Even within that context, however, Jefferson Davis enjoyed – if that's the word you can use – wretched health much of the time. We don't what he had of the childhood diseases. He probably missed a few of them because there was, he didn't associate that much with other children. This was common in the frontier. We do know, of course, that by the time he's in the army, he's already suffering some kind of a condition that will afflict his eyes, especially his left eye. Today, people are coming up with a variety of diagnoses for what that was. The most commonly seized upon one is some variety of herpes. There are many variety of herpes. It could've been communicated to him by his mother at birth, in playing with other children when he was small, but one of the most painful places to get it – it's not life-

threatening, but it can be intensely painful-- in the eyes, and this apparently is where Davis begins to have it over and over again throughout his life, especially in times of stress, the eye pain will afflict him. At times it will be so severe that he cannot bear light or noise. He will have to sequester himself in a darkened room with the shades drawn and have absolute silence for days. There are occasions when the eye will swell to the point that his wife, Varina, thinks it may explode. In later years, long after the Civil War, Davis will have repeated operations on the eye involving lancing the eye and draining it in order to reduce the swelling when it happens [only one eye surgery, before the Civil War]. He becomes almost blind, if not completely blind, in that left eye. And that's just the beginning. The malaria that killed Sarah Taylor Davis, of course, will plague Davis on and on for the rest of his life. His wound in his foot, as a result of the Battle of Buena Vista, will never completely heal and he'll have pain in that foot off and on for the rest of his life. And then add to that the psychosomatic illnesses. Davis is somewhat prone to depression and it's understandable when one sees the heart-wrenching experiences that he went through from time to time. Much of Davis's bouts of illness seemed to hit at times when he's under excessive stress or when he's doing something he really does not like to do. What's most telling during Davis' years as president of the Confederacy is that his health always instantly improves whenever he leaves Richmond, when he's gotten out of the capital, away from the

worries of being president, away from the oppressive burden of responsibility that he has, when he's out on horseback in the open, with the army or even when he's with the fleeing government in April and May 1865, trying to escape. Still out in the open, his health undergoes a remarkable transformation and he becomes alive, vital, energetic, even cheerful, which certainly suggests that a fair bit of what Davis will suffer is imposed on him not by microbes but by what's going on in his mind.

Speaker 1: Let's discuss some of that tragedy. Another [mega?] question **** a response. He lost four of his children during his life. What did that do to Davis? How did he deal with that loss?

Jack Davis: Jefferson Davis is a man – uh, I'll start again. Even in an era when death in the family, especially death of children, is a common occurrence, still Jefferson Davis is a man who suffers extraordinarily. He'll have six children, four boys and two daughters. Jefferson Davis will outlive all four of his sons. One of his sons will die in 1864 right outside Davis's window and yet the oppressive burden of, of the coming spring campaigns of 1864 are such that having held his dying or dead son in his arms, he actually has to will himself to try to go back to work that afternoon because he cannot take himself away from the pressing tasks ****. He'll lose two more sons in later life. The loss of Sarah Taylor, of course, was an enormous blow to him at the very

beginning of his life. There's no way that these combined influences didn't conspire to depress an already somewhat muffled and contained personality. With each new tragedy, I think Davis turned more and more within himself. It made him more difficult for other people to understand. It made it more difficult for him to open up to other people. It also helps to explain, I think, why Davis, above all Confederates, to the last instant, could not recognize that the South was doomed, because Davis had put himself into the Confederacy in a way that he had dedicated himself to nothing else in his life. And I think for him the Confederacy had become yet another of those sons, and he could no more willingly oversee its death by surrender that he could willing watch yet another one of his boys die.

Speaker 1: Davis left –

Jack Davis: That may have wandered farther than you intended it to.

Speaker 1: No, no that's quite poignant at the end. Davis left [the Senate?] and came back to Mississippi after, after his farewell speech. What did he do with himself?

Jack Davis: When Davis returned to Mississippi in January 1861, if we can believe him, if we take him at his word, he wished only to return

to his plantation at Brierfield and tend his roses and raise his crops. He maintained then and later that he had no desire to be involved further in either Mississippi's course as an independent state after secession or in the course of whatever confederation of seceded states was likely to eventuate. Of course, there's absolutely no possibility that Davis would be allowed to do this, a man of his prominence, a man of his experience in the South. And it's also quite possible that these protestations on the part of Davis were politician-speak. Every politician says I really don't want office when, of course, he really does. We don't know for sure. Davis is a man who's just as susceptible to ambition as any other. We do know that he appears to have taken no steps to try to put himself forward for a position in the new government, if one were formed. Though certainly some friends were acting on his behalf and if they didn't have his encouragement, at least he did not refuse to let them do this. He does accept command of the Mississippi state militia as its major general. And this, to him, would be a very natural course, and this, indeed, is the direction in which Davis felt his best talents could be used in preparing Mississippi to defend itself, using his military experience as an officer and then, of course, his organizational experience as secretary of war. But beyond that, when he came back to Brierfield in January 1861, he seems to have had no long-range plan. I think he really was so deeply hurt by what had happened to the Union, so discouraged for the future, that he would not have been entirely displeased if he could've been

allowed simply to stay on his plantation and let the rest of the world go to hell around him.

Speaker 1: Discuss why, after having a, uh, list of grievances with the Union, that as the southern states are seceding, that they so quickly form another union when the issue of sovereignty …. Why didn't they stay just independent states?

Jack Davis: The seceding states in the South, led off by South Carolina and then very quickly by, by six more, may have been impelled by impetuosity, by prejudice, by bigotry in some cases, by exaggerated fears that weren't real and by fears that were real. But these were not actions conducted by stupid men or by unlettered men. Much as they may not have liked being associated with the North, they, none of them, could ever have forgotten the words that Benjamin Franklin, in an earlier revolution, when he said to the other colonies not yet united, if we don't stand together, we shall all surely fall. No, shit. No, it's if we don't hang together. I'll start that one again. None of the men who engineered the secession of the southern states, regardless of how much they may have been motivated or impelled by unnatural fears, by unreasonable prejudices, by genuine fears, and quite le, legitimate apprehensions, none of them were stupid. None of them were unlettered. And none of them were unaware of the fact that in a previous revolution, Benjamin

Franklin, a Yankee, had said to the divided 13 colonies if we do not hang together, we shall surely hang separately. They may have, for all the fear that they may have had of what could happen in a new confederation after they'd seen what had happened in the old one, they instinctively seemed to know that in the event of any attempt by the Union to coerce them back into the Union or to use military force to try to put down their individual secession, they had no chance at all as independent states. Their only security lay in banding themselves together and so it was almost never questioned, as the first state seceded, that they would send emissaries out to other states to try to persuade them to secede as well, so that they could get a solid, united South or a solid slave-state South, united in opposition to the North. Some felt, among other things, that this might be a road to reunion. If all 15 of the slave states seceded, that's half the Union. If they united themselves in a unified front and said to the rest of the Union, to the North, we stand on this principle, they felt, perhaps, they could coerce guarantees of the rights of property in the territories and other guarantees that would curb federal power to allow them then to agree on a compromise to come back into the Union. So some men who were supporting secession in 1860 and '61 don't do it because they want to see a new independent and indefinite confederation of the South. They see it as a means of reunification. A variety of viewpoints, whether they're the reunifiers or

whether they're the arch- secessionists, all agree almost on one thing, which is that in safety, they must have numbers.

Speaker 1: Discuss the formation of that Confederate States and the appointment of Davis and Stephens as their, I guess, would be interim –

Jack Davis: Right. Provisional –

Speaker 1: – Provisional, right.

Jack Davis: Oh, I'm gonna yawn first.

Speaker 1: Oh, please do.

Jack Davis: Uh, okay.

Speaker 1: This can be grueling.

Jack Davis: It's implicitly understood and anticipated by most thinking people in the South that once more than one state has seceded, that there must be some kind of confederation, some kind of new formation to bind the seceding states together under some form of governmental framework. There's been no collusion. This is hard for

people today to believe, it was impossible for northerners at the time to believe, that there was no coordination of the secession movements. Mississippi wasn't trying to interfere with Alabama and tell it it had to secede or whether it should secede. South Carolina wasn't interfering with Georgia. This had been tried in the 1850s during the previous movement towards secession and the individual states rejected the idea. Georgia said to South Carolina, you may do as you wish but don't come across the line and try to tell us how, what to do in our state in which we are sovereign. Sovereignty yet again. So there is no coordination, but there's a common assumption that they've got to do something together, for mutual protection and defense, if nothing else. And immediately after the ordinance of secession is passed in South Carolina in December 1860, one of the first things done is to propose a convention of delegates from all other states that should secede and that that convention should meet in Montgomery, Alabama, which then was more less the geographical center of the old Deep South, there to discuss what they ought to do next. The proposal did not say they should go to Montgomery to form a new government, though it was understood that this is probably what they would do. And so first delegates from five, then six states, then eventually seven, as they keep seceding, do gather in Montgomery, Alabama in February 1861, with a wide variation in expectations and possibilities. Delegates from Georgia go in the main determined that they must frame a new government to get the jump on

the Lincoln administration before Lincoln can take office a month later. The delegates from Florida are instructed that they may only go and discuss. They may not take any action. They don't take with them the delegated sovereignty of Florida to commit Florida to something. So some states have said you can talk. Other states said you can form a new government. Other states have given their delegates no instructions whatever. It's a, it's a power vacuum in Montgomery. But when these men come together, they're smart enough to know that they can't just talk because time is wasting. If they talk about what they ought to do and go back and report to their state conventions or their governors and legislatures, and then more weeks pass as those legislatures and conventions decide what they ought to do, and then another meeting has to be held at which they hash out their final course of action, they have forfeited the advantage they have of preempting the Lincoln administration by acting first. And so it's decided at an informal discussion in the Exchange Hotel in Montgomery, Alabama, the day before the convention first convenes, that what was called the Georgia plan will prevail--that they will declare themselves a Congress. This is entirely extralegal. It's an act of usurpation. They will frame a provisional government for a new nation. They'll adopt a constitution, they'll elect a president and a vice president, they will get the executive departments of government up in operation and then they will go home to their states and say here's what we have done. Take it or leave it. The

feeling being that presented with a fait accompli, none of the seceded states will have the courage or the foolhardiness to reject what happened in Montgomery. And that's how the Confederacy began. It's decided within hours of the opening gavel, this is what they are going to do. Within 4 days, within 2 days, they've got rules of conduct framed. They've turned themselves into a convention. Within 4 more days, they have got a Provisional Constitution that's a chaotic document, but it says everything they need to get them going, and 1 more day after that, they've chosen a president and a vice president. Convening on February 4th, by February 9th, they have a new nation, a president, a vice president, a Constitution and they are ready to be Confederates.

Speaker 1: Let's discuss that Confederate Constitution, in light of its differences and similarities with the U.S. Constitution.

Jack Davis: Okay. The Confederacy will actually have two constitutions. One is the Provisional Constitution that's framed in the first few days of February 1861 after this convention has met and started a revolution within a revolution by absorbing to itself power that the states never gave them. It's a ki, it's, it's an odd document. It's, it's poorly organized. It's just one long sheet of paper about 18 feet long with articles and provisions and paragraphs thrown in here and there. There's very little system to it. It's mostly adopted from the U.S.

Constitution but it's not a sophisticated document, nor is intended to be, because even as they're framing that constitution, they are already appointing a committee to draft a permanent Constitution, which will address all of their concerns, or [so] it is hoped, and which they believe will redress the mistakes in the interpretation of the old U.S. Constitution. Interestingly enough, many of the Confederate founding fathers are not revolting against the Union or the idea of the Union or the Constitution. They feel the [U.S.] Constitution was a perfect document, but that it was being perverted in northern temples by priests of northern industry and ab, abolitionism. Some, therefore, argued they should simply adopt the U.S. Constitution verbatim. Others, however, thought they saw places where it could be tweaked or twisted or improved to some degree to suit their particular situation. It may also had seen from a couple of generations that there were aspects in which the Constitution, they felt, had not been properly responsive, not just to southerners but to Americans as a whole. There were men who saw not only is this an opportunity for us to create a new nation, but a chance for us to be reformers as well. People tend not to look upon the Confederate founding fathers as reformers, yet some of them were. A few of them were even wild-eyed idealists who thought they could create a system that would have no political parties and therefore, there would be no partisanship, and having left the Union behind, they would be one big happy family. We don't think of the Confederates as idealists, yet some

of them were. And depending on one's viewpoint toward reforms, they certainly did enact reforms. If you think term limits are a reform, the Confederates did it first by limiting their president to one term of 6 years. He was not eligible for reelection. If you think abolishing pork-barrel legislation is a reform, they abolished pork-barrel legislation in their Constitution, a wonderful irony, considering that two generations later, back in the United States, sou, the same southern leaders become the accomplished masters of pork-barrel legislation. If civil service reform, if tossing out the old spoils system is a reform, it's the Confederate Constitution that strikes the first substantial blow at civil service reform. There are a number of other places where they enact things that they thought were improvements over the old Constitution. At the same time, in their Constitution, they mold it to suit their particular situation. They continue the abolition of the African slave trade in their Constitution. This had been abolished in the old U.S. Constitution as well, in 1808. This is not the abolition of slavery. This is the abolition of the importation of more slaves from Africa. In 1860, there are 3½ million slaves in the south. They feel this is enough. They don't need more from abroad. It's a large enough body now that the natural acts of, of procreation will supply all future needs for slaves. Furthermore, on a more crass basis, importing slaves from Africa only tends to lower the price of slaves that are already in the United, in the South. Fearful of Federal encroachments on slavery, they hem it in to

become virtually the law of the land, making it virtually impossible that slavery can ever be attacked in the Confederacy. They make it all but impossible for a free state to join the Confederacy. Some of them actually believe that northern states may secede as well to join the Confederacy on sound, conservative, democratic principles. Believe it or not, Jefferson Davis thought it was possible that New Hampshire might secede and join the Confederacy. States like Ohio, that were very conservative, might wish to join the Confederacy. Some feared the whole Union could dissolve and all the states would reform themselves under the Confederacy, but then the founding fathers realized, what happens if that took place? If we allow free states to come into our Confederation, then once again, we can face the situation in which the free states outnumber the slave states, and we'll be right back where we started. So they make it virtually impossible for a free state to be admitted into the Confederacy. Secondly, they make it virtually impossible, not literally impossible, but virtually impossible, for an existing slave state in the Confederacy to abolish slavery. One has to ask oneself, what does that say about state rights? A state has the right to embrace slavery, but a state doesn't have the right to abolish it. What it says is that slavery trumped state rights as it's trumped all other issues. There are a number of other ways in which they entrenched slavery, yet at the same time they tried to enact these reforms, to come up with a document that's really quite remarkable. It's, it's the last major attempt

in America to redefine what democracy is going to be, and whom it's going to serve. It's a Confederate democracy, a democracy put in place to maintain social order, to maintain (among whites and blacks) to maintain in large part social order even among whites, the idea being that there is a natural class, a natural aristocracy of leadership, and that these are the people who should be in charge of government, and that the rest of the body politic should willingly fall in line. That was an expression of the world they thought they had known in the Old South, and it's only natural that that's the world they would like to be able to entrench in the new city on a hill they were building in Montgomery. God, that went on a long time.

Speaker 1: Yeah, but that really gives us a flavor of the time period, and you know, and so my next question then follows is: All this is happening in Montgomery. Davis is in Mississippi. We have the rendition of what his wife wrote in her memoirs about how he received the news –

Jack Davis: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: - of his provisional election. Describe what you think was going on with Davis, when he heard the news that he was now going to be the president of this new union.

Jack Davis: According to Varina Davis' later recollection, when a messenger arrived to Brierfield with notification that the Provisional Congress had chosen Davis as provisional president, that is, temporary president, he put a look on his face that to her looked as if there'd been a death in the family, or he heard some great, some great news of, of tragedy. It think it's fair that we take Varina at her word. Jefferson Davis was not a man who was always completely self-aware. He could be deluded about himself, just as he was deluded about others, but I think Davis always understood that at heart he was not an executive by nature. Davis was not a manager. He'd had ample opportunity in the War Department to, to see that, that it wasn't – his instincts didn't lead him in that direction. His preference, he later said, would have been for a military command, in the new order, and again, I think we can take him at <u>his</u> word that that is what he would have preferred. However, it has to be said that Davis had not closed the door on being president. It was commonly assumed when these several state conventions had sent delegates to Montgomery that if a new nation were formed, Jefferson Davis was one of the handful of names being spoken of as its leader, and there's a tremendous logic to that. In 1860 and '61, Davis is the South's greatest living military hero. There were other military heroes in the war with Mexico, but they're either dead or too old to take active field command. But Davis is still quite vigorous and only in his 50s. He has

widespread political experience. Furthermore, he's almost a man in the middle. There are people in the Confederacy who are extremists, who have wanted secession for generations. There are thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of people in the Confederacy, who don't want secession now and never will, who are attached to the old Union. And there are others in between, and Davis sort of represents those who are in between. He represents the middle, which is where revolutions always go very quickly. After the fire-eaters and the hotheads bring on an uproar, the sensible people realize that there's strength and safety in the middle. Davis was neither too assertive on secession, nor was he too hesitant. He had stood by the Union as long as he could, but was willing to acknowledge the right of the South to secede and the necessity for a new nation. It made him an ideal candidate. He had executive experience, as well. He understood this. Everyone else understood this. So even though Davis may not have been the first choice, and there may have been no real first choice for Confederate president, in the end he was one who was always one of, if not <u>the</u> most logical contender for the job. Even before that convention met, a fellow Missouri-, uh, Mississippian had written to Davis, asking him, if they form a new confederation, would you accept the presidency? And Davis wrote the perfect politician's reply, essentially saying, I have no desire to do anything but stay at home at Brierfield and tend my roses, but if called by my country, I cannot say no [to A. M. Clayton,

Jan. 30, 1861, Papers of Jefferson Davis, 7:27-28]. And of course, he would not. So he left the door open himself to be chosen president, if they wished.

Speaker 1: Why Alex, why Alexander Stephens?

Jack Davis: If Jefferson Davis was a natural choice for president, uh, Alexander Stephens of Georgia was one of the least natural choices for vice president. He's a, he's a remarkable man. He's probably the true brains of the Confederacy. A little man, only about 4 feet 9 inches tall, he never weighed 100 pounds in his life. He's about 44 years old, yet people often mistake him for a 90-year-old woman. He's got this little body with all the skin of a full-sized man, so it hangs from him in places. He is constantly seen disappeared inside a huge great coat that he wears. He refers to himself as “a half-finished man,” and yet he has an enormous intellect. He'd been an old Whig. He had opposed disunion, he had opposed secession in Georgia right up to the moment that Georgia voted to secede, but when that happened, he cast his lot with Georgia, as did so many other old Whigs, in all of the southern states. He was part of a triumvirate of Georgians. Georgia was the powerhouse state in the South in 1861, and he, Howell Cobb and most of all Robert Toombs, recently a senator from Georgia, were three of the most best-known statesmen in the entire South. They carried tremendous prestige.

It was commonly assumed in Montgomery when the delegations arrived that Georgia would get the presidency, if they chose that kind of government, because it was the big, it had the biggest delegation and had the most distinguished delegation. Robert Toombs was a strong contender, but there were personality problems with Toombs, drinking problems with Toombs, and if he ever had a chance at being Confederate president, it disappeared very quickly. Georgia having lost the presidency to Davis, Toombs himself proposed that Georgia at least ought to have as a sop to its wounded vanity, the next office, and Toombs proposed Alexander Stephens. Stephens is also not an illogical candidate, because he was a unionist who had become a Confederate. He didn't represent the extremists at either end. He wasn't anxious to accept the post. He thought, everybody at that time thought, the job of vice president was virtually pointless and waiting for the president to die, and Stephens very much had this same attitude, but he decided to accept the job, partly as an honor to Georgia, partly, I think, because he was under the impression that he would be able to have some influence with President Jefferson Davis, a realization that he all too quickly found to be mistaken.

Speaker 1: Pause there.

Jack Davis: Okay,

PART 6

Speaker 1: After he, he received that notification, he, obviously, accepted. What was the journey from Mississippi to Montgomery like for him, both logistically and, also, did he change his mind at all, meaning that our, what we're given in terms of the recollection of how he received it was dread . . .

Jack Davis: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: [that] something tragic happened. By the time he got to Montgomery, did he still have that same kind of apprehension, or had he changed over the course of that trip?

Jack Davis: Like a number of other journeys that Davis had to make in his life, he, it wasn't easy to get from Brierfield to Montgomery. There was no direct rail connection between Mississippi and Alabama. He, in fact, had to go east, even into Tennessee, then down through Atlanta and back into Montgomery almost from the east, in fact. Everywhere along the way, he was met by crowds who wanted him to make speeches, which he did not wish to do, but he did make a few. And already along the way, he's being met by prominent men who have requests, who want positions, offices, because a president will have a lot of power, or who have suggestions on how Davis ought to conduct this new office once he takes it. It's apparent from what he was saying that if Davis felt any ambivalence when he got the notification of his selection as president, he had accepted it and embraced it well before he ever reached Montgomery, because he was quite clearly making plans, outlining programs, deciding who to appoint to specific offices, even before he's taken his own oath as Confederate president.

Speaker 1: Okay. Discuss the early days of the Davis provisional administration. What, what was that, what was happening? What was the day-to-day?

Jack Davis: There was almost a carnival atmosphere in Montgomery, Alabama, when this convention met to form the new government. And that atmosphere remained for some time afterward. Montgomery had been a town of about 8,000 people that swelled to over 25 or

30,000 people for a while. It was swarmed with lobbyists; people coming to the new government. Wherever there's a government, there's going to be money, jobs, contracts, commissions, opportunities. People who wanted to raise regiments came to Davis or came to Congress, wanting to offer their services for the new cause; whatever direction that cause was going to take. As a result, –

Speaker 1: Hold on a second.

Jack Davis: **** We have a military ****.

Speaker 1: Okay, we're good.

Jack Davis: As a result, Davis himself was swamped. He had, in fact, three offices. The Congress provided a house for him –

Speaker 1: Let's, let's take that back up. And as, um, as you say as – when you're starting is as a result, make it a complete, you know, **** –

Jack Davis: Oh, right, right, right, right, right, right. Yeah.

Speaker 1: Because I may not be able to use that very part.

Jack Davis: Yeah, that's right, That's right, I forgot. As a result of the confusion and the massive people with, uh, conflicting and sometimes contradictory aspirations who had settled in on Montgomery in February 1861, when Davis arrived to take office as president, he walked into a virtual carnival. He was so busy because he was having to form a government almost from scratch that, in fact, he had three offices; one in the house on Washington Street that he, he lived in, where he had an office off to the side of the hallway, another one in what was called Government House, which was an old tobacco warehouse given to the government for its offices, and yet another in the capitol building itself. The problem being, no matter where Davis went, he was always at the office, constantly besieged by office-seekers and the like. Even though

Davis and the Confederate Congress had the model of the old United States government to copy--they didn't have to dream up the organization of the executive departments, etcetera, of a new government--still, they had to fill them. They have to staff them, find accommodations. They had to find money. There's no Confederate treasury. The Confederate treasury began with a loan of $5.00 from Henry Capers to a captain of volunteers who came to the Treasury Department and Capers pointed to a safe in the wall on which the door was open, there being no point in closing it because there was no treasury. They had to line up money. Most of the states wind up giving outright gifts of a quarter or a half million dollars to the Confederacy to begin the business of paying for government. Davis had to do things like get a post office department going. In the end, they just stole it from the United States government. A letter was sent to Washington to all the southern employees of the U.S. Post Office Department saying essentially we're setting up a new concern down here in Montgomery. Come to work for us, and you can have the same job and the same pay. And by the way, when you leave Washington, go to the stock room and take all of the stamps and all of the postal stationery, everything else you can steal and bring it with you. If one works in the research in the early Confederacy in March, April, May, even June 1861, you find that a great deal of it is correspondence. Official correspondence is on U.S. government stationery with “United States” crossed out and “Confederate States” handwritten in above it. They are making it up as they go along. And Davis is right in the center of this constantly. The poor man could come home for dinner sometime--he usually ate something like cornbread and buttermilk, and that was it--and sit down at the dinner table with his family and see a complete stranger sitting at the table across from him--an office-seeker or somebody else who wanted a contract had managed to inveigle himself in the Executive Mansion itself to importune Davis over his own dinner table for some, some gift, some beneficence, that he wanted from the president. It was chaotic. It had to have been exciting as well. But over it all was a constant atmosphere of apprehension because all this is going on before Abraham Lincoln takes office as president of the United States on March 4th, 1861. Only once Lincoln is in office will the Confederates know what the Union's going to do. Will they, as Horace Greeley said, let the erring sisters go? Will they make no effort to keep the southern states in the Union? Will they acknowledge that secession was a right and that there are now two nations on the North American continent? Or will Lincoln, as he has suggested, insist that he has a constitutional obligation to preserve, protect and defend all of the United States, not

just some of them? And if so, will he use military force to try to put down what he regards as a rebellion which the Confederates, of course, simply regard as a natural exercise of God-given and constitutional rights? [coughs] Want an obit as well? You'll get –

Speaker 1: Yeah, it's good. It's phenomenal.

Jack Davis: Some of these may actually be jumping ahead and answering other questions. I don't know.

Speaker 1: Yeah, that's fine. As the government is forming and coalescing under the Davis administration, is there a point at which you can identify it reaching a critical mass and it begins to function?

Jack Davis: Hmm, that's a good question. Okay. Thanks in large part to the fact that Jefferson Davis has extensive experience in Washington, not just with the War Department, but in the government as a whole, knowing how it operates, he and the Confederates get an enormous head start in getting their new concern going, with the result that even though they're underfunded, undermanned, and largely disorganized, still, they have the beginnings of a working civil framework in operation, at least by the first week of March. That's the important deadline that they had been aiming at from the first, because that, of course, is when President Lincoln will take office. A number of significant things will happen, among them, that same day, March 4th, when Lincoln takes his oath of office, the newly adopted Confederate flag will be raised for the first time as a national symbol in Montgomery. Enlistments are coming in almost faster than Davis and his new War Department can handle them. Authorized to raise up to 18 or 20,000 troops, in no time at all, Davis will have nearly 100,000 volunteers offered to him from all across the then seven seceded states, with more states later to come. When that point is reached, at which it's evident that there's at least a significant proportion of the population in the seceded states who are willing to embrace succession – they may not have believed in it, but they may embrace it in fear of coercion back into the Union. When Davis sees he's going to have that degree of cooperation, the degree of cooperation that has state legislatures handing money over to the Confederacy so that it can begin to buy arms and ammunition, so it

can buy war ships and start foreign diplomacy, at that point, by the first week of March, I think Davis can see that there is a chance that this government will be able to work and may even be able to last, depending upon what Lincoln decides to do.

Speaker 1: I will come back, but briefly jump ahead. Why the move from Montgomery to Richmond?

Jack Davis: There're very practical and sensible realities. I'll, I'll start again.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Jack Davis: There are very practical and sensible imperatives behind the move of the Confederate capital from Montgomery to Richmond. True, Montgomery is far more distant, much more difficult for enemy armies to get to, and, therefore, it's more secure. But that very distance also works against it. Even though this is the era of the, the telegraph, that doesn't mean they have instantaneous communications. A telegraphic message can't just go from Montgomery to Charleston, South Carolina, in one single volt of electricity. It goes from one relay to another to another, and it can take hours for a telegram to go a few hundred miles. So it's not instantaneous communication. Furthermore, the telegraph doesn't go everywhere. More than that, the railroad does not go everywhere. Railroads in the South are not merely as well developed as they are in the North. In 1861, it is impossible to get on one railroad car and go from New Orleans to Richmond. You have to change cars repeatedly because the road gauges, that is, the width of the track, on the railroad isn't uniform throughout the South, as it is in the North. Richmond is at the center of things. If there's an invasion of the South, it's going to come out of Washington, and it's going to cross the Potomac, and the first thing it's going to hit is Virginia. Richmond is close to what was presumed likely to be the major theater of military operations, if there were military operations. That being the case, Davis and his government could react much faster to circumstances if they were in Richmond, 100 miles from the battlefields, than if they're in Montgomery 8 or 900 miles from the battlefields. Secondly, there is a perception, there's a hope on the part of some southerners that Jefferson Davis will take the commander in chief clause of the Constitution literally because he's not just commander in chief

of the Un[ion], of his country, he is commander in chief of the armed and naval forces. And Davis as, again, the greatest living military he, hero in the South at the time, is expected, hoped by some, that he will take physical command of the armies and lead them in action. Whether or not Davis ever thought of doing this himself, we don't know. He might've liked to, but especially after 1862, it seems unlikely that he ever gave it serious contemplation. And thirdly, there was a practical political reality. Following the firing on Fort Sumter, when it becomes evident that Lincoln is going to pursue a war if he has to, when he issues a call for 75,000 volunteers to put down the rebellion, the border states, Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee and Arkansas, begin more seriously to discuss secession because they realize if there's a war, it's going to happen on their front because they're between the two sides. But Virginia wants to be certain that if there is a war and Virginia gets involved, that it's going to get the primary attention of the Confederate government. And the best way for that is for Virginia's capital city, Richmond, to be the Confederate capital city. And so the vice president, Stephens, is sent by Davis to meet with the Virginia convention in April, right after the firing on Fort Sumter, to negotiate the deal. And essentially, there is a spoken or a slightly unspoken quid pro quo that Virginia will secede and align itself with the Confederacy <u>if</u> the capital will be moved to Richmond. So there are political reasons for it, there are communications reasons for it, and there are military reasons for it. And even though it means that Richmond will always be at hazard through the war because of the notion that the best way to attack the Confederacy is to attack its capital, still it was sound logic and sound reasoning at the time to make that move.

Speaker 1: How did Davis go from provisional president to president of the Confederacy?

Jack Davis: The Provisional Constitution of the Confederacy had its own built-in time limit. It was to expire in February 1862, after 1 year, at which time, the permanent Constitution would take effect, and a president and vice president and Congress would be sworn in as a permanent vice president, permanent Congress, et cetera. It was provided that a, an election be called in November 1861 to choose, to elect candidates for the Congress and to elect the president and vice president for inauguration under the permanent Constitution. Davis was re-nominated and elected without opposition. There were no other names on the ballot. There was never any question that anyone other than Davis might, would, in fact, be Confederate president. Though,

some of the seeds of one of Davis' all too many feuds during the war may have had its origins in that very issue, after the fall of Fort Sumter and then, again, after the first battle of Manassas or Bull Run in July 1861. A Louisianian, Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard, is the military hero of the day. He's already not getting along with Davis in the summer of 1861, and there are those among the opponents who Davis has already found within his government who speak of running Beauregard for the permanent presidency in November in place of Davis or in opposition to Davis. That was never a practical reality, and I don't know if anybody ever took it seriously. But hearing that, Davis might've taken it seriously, and it certainly would not have improved his attitude toward Beauregard, with whom he was destined to have a life-long antipathy.

Speaker 1: Let's move –

Jack Davis: That wandered into another subject. I know.

Speaker 1: No, that's fine. As we, it's a perfect transition as we move into the Davis administration. Let's talk about the presidency. Um, since you brought up Beauregard, this is a perfect place to start. Discuss Davis in, in terms of his management of his generals.

Jack Davis: Okay. When one looks at a, when one looks at a – let's start again.

Speaker 1: Sure.

Jack Davis: When one looks at Jefferson Davis, one of the things he's best known for, of course, are his interpersonal difficulties with a number of his generals and other leading political figures in the Confederacy. It needs to be kept in mind certain – I'll start again. When one considers, perhaps, the most famous – I'm having a hard time getting this one started. In considering perhaps the most notorious of Jefferson Davis' perceived shortcomings as Confederate president, that is, his inability to get along with certain of his generals and certain other political leaders, we need to bear in mind some basic facts about Davis' individual nature, his human makeup. Repeatedly throughout his life, we'll find that Davis gets along wonderfully with women, with children, and with blacks, both free and slave. With women and children, he

can be wonderfully open and warm, joking, affable. He can show to them a man who other men never saw in Jefferson Davis. What all of them have in common is that in his time and place they're all the social inferior of an adult, white male. When confronted by another man of equivalent independence, of equivalent spirit, another man of equivalent will who knew his own mind, Davis, more often than not, could not get along with that individual and felt obliged, indeed compelled, somehow to, to overcome him or to overwhelm him. Davis had to have people agree with him. They had to change their minds to agree with him. They had to change their ways to comport with his idea of how they should behave, not the other way around. And the problem for Davis over and over, from the very beginning as Confederate president, is that he had to operate in the same system that had produced him, the same system that had encouraged his independence, his willfulness, his self-confidence, his ego. And as a result, he was bound to clash over and over again with men who simply refused to back down.

Speaker 1: And so –

Jack Davis: Now, if you want to do any specifics, then we can.

Speaker 1: Well, in terms, in terms of his management of the generals, obviously, there is a, a structure set up where he is the commander in chief.

Jack Davis: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: He is to dictate orders. He is their superior in theory. So, with the resource being these men, how was he able to manage them, both in terms of what you **** ?

Jack Davis: Okay. I didn't answer your question. That's really – yeah.

Speaker 1: And personality could also determine ****

Jack Davis: Okay. Jefferson Davis had seen the military system in operation when he was secretary of war. And it was virtually the same, or supposed to be virtually the same, with the

Confederacy. He was commander in chief. His policies were to be communicated to his secretary of war, who through the various bureaux and the machinations of the War Department would oversee their implementation. Technically, the generals in the field answered to the secretary of war. But Davis would from the first, of course, be his own secretary of war. So it really was vital that Davis himself be able to get along with and to manage the various generals who were to command the Confederate armies. His history isn't as bad as some of his critics at the time said or later, but it is at very best a mixed performance. Davis got along wonderfully with generals who obeyed certain rules. And no one did this more so than Robert E. Lee. A general need, must not talk to politicians. He must not deal with the press. He must not deal with Davis's political opposition. He must be respectful, and he must communicate constantly with the president. The president had the right to expect these things. And from generals who met those rules, Davis got along wonderfully. The Davis/Lee relationship is a model of the commander in chief, general, later general in chief, relationship, perhaps just as good as that one that grew up between Lincoln and Grant. But other men who wouldn't observe those rules were destined to come into conflict with Davis, and he would deal with them directly, not through the bureaucracy of the War Department, which meant that his disagreements with his generals, unfortunately, tended to become personal disagreements unlike, say, Lincoln, who is a natural, much more instinctive executive and manager of men, who in dealing with difficult generals, would let his secretary of war be the intermediary and take the heat. Davis had to go directly to the source of confrontation, the source of difficulty. And in dealing with men like P.G.T. Beauregard or Joseph E. Johnston, who are willful and who knew their own minds and who would not back down in front of the president, Davis was destined to have one conflict after another. This, perhaps, is one of the reasons for one of the things that Davis is most often accused of, and that is in keeping in power in his armies men who were sycophants or yes-men, people like Theophilus Holmes who was best known because one of his subordinates said he was suffering from softening of the brain, or Braxton Bragg, the man who could repeatedly seize defeat from the jaws of victory. But these men didn't challenge Davis. They obeyed his rules, and that made him feel confidence in them. And so Davis gives this mixed performance. With generals who know how to work Davis, who know how to subordinate themselves to their goal and their job, as Lee certainly did, Davis gets along wonderfully and gets wonders out of them.

With men like Johnston and Beauregard, W.H.T. Walker and a number of others, who constantly had their egos between them and the president, they were destined never to achieve anything.

Speaker 1: You mentioned earlier that people had hoped that Davis would take the commander in chief role and, and lead the army, or lead the, the Confederate military. Did Davis have a, or was there from the Davis administration an overall plan to either defend the South or to win the War Between the States, the Civil War?

Jack Davis: Davis would be attacked widely in his own time and later for the overall strategy he chose to employ, that is, the so-called defensive-offensive or the offensive-defensive. It can be either, it can be the same. Mainly, the viewpoint that the Confederacy was too small in manpower and resources to defend all points at all times. It was too small to engage in substantial armed incursions into the North. It couldn't conquer the Union, but then, it didn't need to, as Davis says in his, his first message to Congress in 1861. All we ask is to be let alone. They did not wish to conquer anything else. This is not true, by the way, as he would demonstrate when he'd launch expeditions into Kentucky and Missouri. But this was the attitude that he wished to present to the world, that we are defending ourselves. All we ask is to be let alone. So they didn't need as large an army as the North, but they didn't even have a large enough army just to defend everything they had, the result being that the policy he came up with was to try to hold everything they could and only to go on the offensive, that is, take the war to the enemy, when substantial or sufficient opportunities presented themselves for a discrete strike here or there to take advantage of a certain opportunity. That also, of course, would accord with their, the position that he'd taken, that we don't want to take anything away from the Union, so we just want them to leave us alone. What this meant, of course, was that Davis couldn't conduct his armies or his war in the fashion that mid-19th century men wanted to see a war conducted, like Napoleon. They wanted to see someone go out and risk all on a major battle and win some crushing, overwhelming victory that would end the war in a single blow, but that's not practical for the Confederacy, given its limitations, and Davis is smart enough to see that. Robert E. Lee, by the way, sees exactly the same thing, so Davis is not alone in this at all. So they will defend where they can and strike out at the enemy where they have the opportunity. There was more to your question, and I've forgotten it.

Speaker 1: Was there a –

Jack Davis: Oh, was there a time when they could win or –

Speaker 1: Well, **** you were talking about the offensive-defensive. Was that, like, a codified plan, you know, or was it kind of a hodge-podge plan that came up out of ****?

Jack Davis: Davis never actually sat down and issued a general order to all of his army commanders that this is how we will prosecute the war, but in individual discussions with them, he made it clear that what they could do and what they could expect to do and what the government expected them to do. In northern Virginia, Robert E. Lee is told he's expected to defend northern Virginia. He is not expected to conquer Maryland or to conquer Pennsylvania or to try to conquer Washington, D.C., though, if at any time, a sudden opportunity presented itself for a concentration or forces to do that with a fair expectation of success, then it would be worth trying because of the advantage it would gain the Confederacy diplomatically in the eyes of the rest of the world. And on a case-by-case basis with his several army commanders, Davis generally tried to impose this doctrine. The problem was some didn't want to hear it. P.G.T. Beauregard argued repeatedly for constant, for just forgetting about major sections of the western Confederacy, to concentrate all troops in the east for one bold, decisive blow against Washington or against the Union army, which would've been great if it had worked. The trouble is if it failed, the whole Confederate nation could go down the drain with that one defeated army, as Davis knew. He had to be mature and restrained in ways that his generals didn't have to, necessarily. He tried to achieve this policy by a departmental organization that was certainly cumbersome and unwieldy, though still not illogical. Davis was uneasy about giving supreme military power to an individual. Though, late in the war, he will make, he will agree to Robert E. Lee being made general in chief with authority over all military operations of the Confederacy. Davis is jealous of his prerogatives as commander in chief. He's confident of <u>his</u> military skill, his ability to plan as well as, if not better than, anyone else, and he's reluctant to yield his hands-on control over the military. And so he will organize the Confederate territory into a series of departments, each with its own commander, with its own forces, who are more or less supreme

within that department, the idea being that when a neighboring department is threatened, troops from surrounding departments will come to their aid for a concentration and then go back to the protection of their own departments. This results in the scattering or spreading out of Confederate forces and Confederate power all across the Confederacy, which diminished dramatically the opportunity or ability to make a major strike north. And for that, he'll be widely criticized. But it's probably the only sensible approach to the problem confronting Davis on the map. My stomach, it just started gurgling like crazy. Are you picking that up?

Speaker 1: I can barely hear it. Do you need to – do you want –

Jack Davis: I don't, I don't know whether it'll do anything –

Speaker 1: Are you hungry?

Jack Davis: No, that's not. It just decided to do it.

Speaker 1: Yeah, I, I, I vaguely hear it, but only when you're not talking.

Jack Davis: I can try talking louder to you.

Speaker 1: Let's move into – one more question on, on this kind of overall military. Was Davis successful in being a rallying point for either his generals, troops, or the people, you know, as their leader in terms of the Civil War?

Jack Davis: Okay. For all his effort at doing so, Jefferson Davis never succeeded in making of himself, uh, a personification of the cause to his people, not during the war. That will happen years later. But whereas in the Union, Abraham Lincoln, via a variety of means, will become so identified with the Union soldier and the Union war effort that, universally, he's referred to as Father Abraham, as if he's been embraced as a member of the family. In the Confederacy, there will never be a Father Jefferson. Confederates will not enlist saying I'm fighting for Jeff Davis. They'll more likely say I'll enlist because I'm fighting for Robert E. Lee. Lee, by 1863, will

personify Confederate aspirations and Confederate resistance, whereas Davis will always seem distant and, and cold and aloof from the Confederate people at large. Partly, that's the result of his personality. Partly, it's the result of media because Davis would not, like Lincoln, try very hard to make himself approachable to media. Partly, it's wrapped up in Confederate politics. Some of it reflects the personality of the man. Much of it simply reflects the situation that he was in. Years later, after the Confederacy is gone, and after Davis has been seen to suffer by 2 years of imprisonment for the sins of Confederates, if you wish to put it that way, he will actually take on a, sort of a martyr's aura. And people in the South in the 1870s and 1880s will see that there was our president who bore on our behalf the humiliations of imprisonment, the nearly being brought to trial for treason. And he'll acquire a kind of mythic stature after the war with ex-Confederates that he never actually enjoyed during the war. I jumped way ahead.

Speaker 1: No, that's okay. Let's change the tape.

PART 7

Speaker 1: Okay. How is Jefferson Davis as a day-to-day administrator? I mean he was an administrator in terms of being secretary of war. This is a much more expanded office. How did he do?

Jack Davis: Jefferson Davis as an administrator, as president, unfortunately showed a lot of the same shortcomings that he'd given hints of when he was secretary of war. He seems not to have understood how to use his time effectively. To Davis, all tasks seemed to have been of equal importance. If one called on Davis – and this actually happened – in his office in Montgomery, Alabama, you might find him with one hand examining a sheaf of papers with important news from the front, while with the other hand he was studying designs for the buttons for

Confederate uniforms. Uh, he actually selected himself the cloth that would be used to make Confederate uniforms based on the number of threads per square inch. That's not a task that a chief executive ought to be spending his time on, but Davis felt comfortable in the accomplishment of routine tasks, I suspect, perhaps, because, all too often, the big tasks couldn't be accomplished. And he did have somewhat of the instincts of a bureaucrat. There's nothing wrong with being a bureaucrat. They tend not to make good executives. David would immerse himself in too many things that he shouldn't've put his thumb into. We have innumerable documents in which Davis has received a letter and on the back he'll docket that it should be referred to the secretary of war, and the secretary of war will report back, and then Davis will send it on to another cabinet minister, and here's the president acting like a traffic cop, shuffling documents around instead of taking action on a document that in the end might just be put in the files anyhow. He could act decisively. The problem is he didn't act decisively all the time. He spent far too much time in this sort of pointless bureaucratic paperwork. Again, I think it gave him some degree of satisfaction. At the end of the day, at least he could look at a pile of papers that had been moved from Box A to Box B and this made him feel like he had accomplished something, but he was always suffering the much greater, ever present, frustration of knowing there were things he could not accomplish to bring about Confederate

independence. He worked reasonably well with his cabinet secretaries and with his personal staff. He had a small personal staff, at one time of two, later of three, secretaries and general assistants to help him with correspondence and, and other tasks of that sort. Largely, he left his cabinet secretaries to do what they wanted within their own realms, especially in cases where he didn't care that much anyhow. So the postmaster general was pretty much left to his own devices, though even there Jefferson Davis was once seen overseeing the engraving of himself that was to go on one of the Confederate stamps. But in the War Department he would interfere repeatedly. It's not a surprise that during the course of the war, he would go through six [five] secretaries of war as successive men became dissatisfied with the office or he became dissatisfied with them. And even his old close friend, General Samuel Cooper, who was adjutant and inspector general and, in fact, in actual rank, the senior ranking general in the entire Confederate army, even Cooper, who held an office that was essentially the paper-keeping office of the army, would become so frustrated with Davis simply walking all over him that he actually blurted once to his, his commander in chief and his old friend, I'm not just a secretary. I, I have responsibilities, too. So Davis maintained an uneasy balance between what he accomplished through good management and all that he failed to accomplish through poor management.

Speaker 1: In terms of the management and then-- in terms of the management, discuss the [diminution?] of civil liberties under the Davis Administration, suspension of habeas corpus, uh, income tax, conscription –

[Interviewee coughs repeatedly from here on, making questions difficult to understand]

Jack Davis: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: – all those things. And then also how, how was that received?

Jack Davis: And how is Da, and, and how much is Davis responsible for it, eh?

Speaker 1: Exactly.

Jack Davis: Okay. It's ironic that Abraham Lincoln, then and today, is widely criticized as being a tyrant and a usurper because he, uh, imposed an income tax, because he suspended the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus, because he rode roughshod over the Constitution. It's ironic that he gets all that criticism when the fact is, everything Lincoln

did, Jefferson Davis did as well and sometimes did it first and sometimes did it to a greater degree. Both men were answering the same imperatives. Necessity. In a crisis, the Constitution sometimes had to be set aside. This was not a new concept then. It's not, sadly, been a new concept since. And time after time in the Confederacy, Confederate citizens are going to be asked to see some of their rights set aside. Income tax will be enacted. Conscription, that is, the draft. The Confederacy is the first American entity to turn to the enforced draft. Seizure of private property. It's called impressment. Often livestock, but sometimes crops, sometimes slaves for government purposes to be paid for with largely worthless government scrip. Restrictions of liberties and national prohibition, control of production and distribution of staple commodities, wage and price controls. All of these sound very 20th-century and very socialistic, but they all took place to a degree in the Confederacy in answer to necessity. They even in some places had to turn a thousand years of Anglo-Saxon law upside-down because of the civil breakdown in the Confederacy. In Alabama is one example. It was decreed in one court that, henceforward, the accused were guilty until proven innocent because the backlog of cases was so great and the availability of juries and men for juries was so small, it was the only way to clear the docket. Jefferson Davis is not responsible for <u>any</u> of these things. All of these come out of the Congress. Even the suspension of the privilege of writ of habeas corpus is not something the president

imposes as a dictator. Congress passed an authorization that the president could suspend the privilege of a writ in certain circumstances in certain places for certain periods of time during times of crisis--as is the case with the Richmond area in the spring of 1862, when it's under threat from the Union army--and Davis will use that power just as Lincoln would. Unfortunately for Davis, even though he did not himself generate any of these restrictions of constitutional liberties, he is the one who will catch all the criticism for them.

Speaker 1: Now, in terms of , this is where we're discussing ****

Jack Davis: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: In terms of Lincoln and Davis, is it possible to compare and contrast the [two men?] in terms of their leadership. I mean, we're talking a broad overview –

Jack Davis: Sure.

Speaker 1: – you could write a book on this.

Jack Davis: Yeah.

Speaker 1: But a broad overview of the Lincoln Administration versus Davis Administration.

Jack Davis: Inevitably in a civil war, the leaders of the two sides are going to be compared with each other, which means that Jefferson Davis throughout posterity has always suffered by the fact that he has to stand comparison with a man to whom no other American could stand comparison and come out on equal basis, and that's Abraham Lincoln, who by almost common acknowledgement is the greatest chief executive we've ever had. If one can get past the fact that Lincoln was Lincoln, and just look at the performance of the two men side by side, actually Davis looks better than he usually does. There's no question Lincoln is by nature more of a chief executive. He knows how to delegate. He's more politic. He knows how to be a diplomat which Davis never did. Lincoln will make himself get along with people he does not like because there's something that his cause needs from them. Davis can never do that. Lincoln uses his time much more effectively. On the other hand, there are areas in which Davis will actually perform just as well as Lincoln, if not better. Certainly, Davis recognizes from the first the strategic comparatives that the Confederacy faces and deals with them realistically in his offensive-defensive strategic posture. Unlike Lincoln, Davis does not hamper himself throughout the war with appointing prominent politicians to become prominent generals because

of their political prominence and then have to deal with the after effects of putting incompetent men in high office. Lincoln never stops doing this until 1864. Davis, with one or two exceptions, does not do it from the beginning and shows a much greater awareness, I think, of the fact that there's a difference between a good leader in politics and a good leader on the battlefield. It helps, of course, that Davis is functioning in essentially a one-party environment so he does not have quite as many different constituencies he has to drag together as does, as does Lincoln. In dealing with his cabinet, Davis is about as effective as Lincoln. In dealing with Congress, Davis gets everything out of the Confederate Congress he asks for. He will give, can I just start from that? Congress

Speaker 1: Sure.

Jack Davis: Lincoln will have a rather rocky relationship with the United States Congress, though, essentially, he gets everything he needs from them. Davis will get everything he asks from his Congress. In the course of the war, Davis will hand down 32 vetoes. Only one of them will be overturned and that one on a very minor postal matter. ****. When it comes to dealing with Congress, Lincoln had rather a rocky road with his Congress, though essentially he got what he needed from them. Davis will get everything he needs from his Congress. Now it helps, of course, that he's dealing in a one-party situation in which there

are no opposing parties whom he has to deal with. He has no strong opposition in his Congress. He'll hand down 32 vetoes during the course of the war and only one of them will be overturned and that one on a very minor postal matter. So Davis has his strong points as a chief executive, even when compared to Lincoln. Overall, probably, Lincoln still comes out somewhat ahead, but then, he's destined to by the mere fact of being Lincoln. Lincoln is undoubtedly a great man. Jefferson Davis was a very good man put into a position that called for greatness.

Speaker 1: What interaction, if any, was there between Lincoln and Davis directly? We'll get into the indirect stuff so –

Jack Davis: Get into the.

Speaker 1: We'll get into the indirect stuff in a minute –

Jack Davis: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: – but was there any direct interaction between the two?

Jack Davis: During the war?

Speaker 1: Yeah, uh, or any time.

Jack Davis: So far as we know, there was never any direct personal contact between Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis. They did briefly serve in Congress at the same time in 1846, so chances are, as a matter of formality and courtesy, they may have shaken hands and said hello, but there's no indication they ever socialized together before the war and during the war, there is no direct correspondence between them [Davis wrote to Lincoln on Feb. 27 and July 6, 1861, and on July 2, 1863] whatever because Lincoln's position from the first is, there is no such thing as the Confederate States of America; therefore, there's no such thing as a Confederate president and to receive correspondence from him, or to deal with him in any fashion, risked an acknowledgement that he was, in fact, a legitimate entity. So, all dealings between them are through intermediaries.

Speaker 1: The, the, the primary focus right now the, for us, in this discussion for those interactions would be the Confederates suing for peace.

Jack Davis: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: And the delegations that went to the North. Discuss those.

Jack Davis: Okay. A couple of times during the course of the war, Davis will authorize intermediaries – not ambassadors, but intermediaries – to go north and to try to deal with the Lincoln government. In 1861, right after the Confederacy's formed, commissioners are sent to Washington to try to peacefully negotiate the turnover of Fort Sumter and other Union forts that are in now Confederate territory. Davis never personally deals with Lincoln. Those commissioners never personally deal with Lincoln. They deal with Secretary of State William H. Seward and, of course, are unsuccessful. Again, during the war on one or two occasions, well-intentioned individuals will ask Davis for his permission, if not authorization, to go north to see if some means for peace, some accommodation, can't be found to end the war, though the bases on which they would do so are always nebulous. Davis is certainly willing to allow them to do – he has nothing to lose – but for Davis the sine qua non is always that the Confederacy must emerge independent. He will not yield on that point. As late as 1865, in the so-called Hampton Roads Peace Conference, yet another delegation is sent and this time, Vice President Stephens goes and, this time, President Lincoln meets as well and so Lincoln and Stephens at least meet to try to see if there is not some way they can end all this. But there was never any possibility of an agreement. Lincoln's sine qua non is he will negotiate anything

except the Union. There must be reunion. Jefferson Davis' sine qua non as represented by Stephens is he'll negotiate just about anything except Confederate independence. So, their goals being mutually exclusive, there's no basis for compromise.

Speaker 1: Is there anything left to us, you know, that gives us any indication of Jefferson Davis's view, his position, his feelings towards Lincoln and the Lincoln Administration which **** Seward ****.

Jack Davis: Mm hmm. Yeah, maybe a little bit. Uh, Jefferson Davis held the common viewpoint toward Lincoln in the South, which is that he was a tyrant waging an unlawful war to coerce sovereign southern states back into a union of which they did not wish any longer to be a part. Davis says very little about Lincoln, the man, because he knew very little about Lincoln, the man. Interestingly enough, there is one, perhaps apocryphal statement by Davis when the idea is brought up of kidnapping Lincoln in 1864 or '65 and Davis supposedly dismissed the idea out of hand by saying it would be pointless. Lincoln is a western man; he would die rather than – fighting – rather than be taken alive. Well, of course, Davis was a western man as well in the context of the times so he was sort of complimenting Lincoln in a way. (You really want a burp on film.) There are stories after Lincoln's assassination that when Davis got the word of it, he said the South has

best lost its best friend and that sort of thing. He said nothing of the sort ["a great misfortune to the South" in Rise and Fall, 2:683; also expressed regret because Lincoln did not display "malignity" to the South; see Davis Papers, 11:551, 552-53, 584]. He certainly recognized, however, that in a reunited Union, the South would have been in a better situation with Lincoln as president than Andrew Johnson. Davis loathed Andrew Johnson. The two had almost gotten into a duel when they were in the Senate and had a tremendous oral slugging match on the floor of the Senate. Johnson was a poor white, a cracker, to Davis, a man who had no business being in government, and Davis was terrified of the idea that this man with all of his hatreds and resentments of everything that Davis and his class stood for, might actually have power over the South during the days of Reconstruction. But other than that, Davis's personal feelings toward Lincoln are entirely the same as his political and public feelings toward Lincoln: a tyrant. A man who was trying to impose subjugation and conquest on the South.

Speaker 1: Why was Davis unsuccessful, or the Davis administration, if, if that's a better character of a, characterizing of the question, in getting the, in getting countries in Europe to recognize, getting countries anywhere to recognize the sovereignty of the CSA? Besides the Vatican.

Jack Davis: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Jack Davis: Yeah, that's about it. One of the first things that leaders of the new Confederacy knew they had to do was to try to interest foreign nations and that essentially meant Europe and that really meant Great Britain and formally granting diplomatic recognition to the Confederacy. This would grant to it status as an independent nation in the eyes of the world and make it almost impossible for the North to continue to wage a war for reunification if the rest of the world viewed the Confederacy as an independent nation. And so diplomats are sent abroad and during the rest of the war, Davis will send a succession of diplomats to England, France, Russia, other, other states, in an effort to persuade them to grant diplomatic recognition and what might follow from that, of course, alliances and military aid and assistance. There were several problems with this, not the least of which was the Confederacy had nothing to offer in return. All it had was cotton and some, of course, thought that that would be enough. Cotton is king, they said. British diplomats, people in Whitehall, would see that if those woolen mills in Lancashire were lying idle for want of Southern cotton, that then they, it might be in their interest to form alliances with the

Confederacy and to grant recognition. I'm sorry, my, my throat's clogging. So, I'll start that one, again. Um.

Speaker 1: Start around from cotton is king.

Jack Davis: The widespread saying – it was so widespread, it was a cliché in the South – was that cotton was king. Davis didn't necessarily believe this, but many around him did. The notion being that, once those woolen mills and textile mills in Lancashire in England went silent for want of cotton, that the teeming millions who worked there and were out of work would put enough pressure on Whitehall that England would grant recognition in order to gain cotton and would even risk armed military invention, intervention. Jesus Christ. We'll try it one more time. Th, the standing cliché in the South was that cotton is king, that it was so important to European industry and especially to the English woolen mills in Lancashire and elsewhere, that if the Confederacy withheld its cotton from Europe, to keep those mills going, to keep their economies going, England and France and the rest would have no alternative but to see where their own interests lay and to grant recognition to the South, followed hard by armed military intervention. There were a couple of basic problems with that. The biggest one of all, of course, immediately, is that cotton no longer was king. Cotton was now available in Egypt, India, and Mexico at the same price or even

cheaper than good long-staple Southern cotton. Secondly, there'd been bumper crops in 1859 and 1860, which meant that English warehouses were full of bales of cotton they had not yet used; and, of course, southerners reckoned without the genuine antipathy toward slavery felt on the part of most of the rank-and-file public, at least in Great Britain and to a lesser extent in France. So without the economic persuasion or coercion to bring European nations in on the side of the Confederacy, and with the disinclination on the part of those nations to take the side of a nation that still practiced slavery, the Confederacy had nothing to offer. Moreover, England is the greatest maritime and trading power on the globe, but the North, thanks to the war, was building, the, fastest, the largest, most modern iron navy on the co, on the globe. England had a great deal to lose from risking maritime conflict or in fact the preying of a large Union navy on England mercantile trade again to gain what? What do they gain if the Confederacy was independent? Cheap cotton that they could get somewhere else. The result is, in hindsight, there was probably never a time when European recognition of the Confederacy was a practical reality. And Jefferson Davis seems to have recognized this from the first. Even in 1861, while going through the motions of sending diplomats abroad, he privately confided to friends that there was very little chance that England would recognize the Confederacy and give its help until the Confederacy had already proven that it didn't need it.

Speaker 1: Pre, pre-fall of Richmond, what is the greatest accomplishment of Jefferson Davis and his administration and what's his worst mistake?

Jack Davis: By late 8, by late 1864, as the war is entering its final phase, arguably the greatest accomplishment of the, of the Davis administration is simply the fact that the Confederacy was still alive in 1864. On paper, it shouldn't have been. Its government was always creaky. Its economic situation was perpetually precarious and, militarily, of course, despite a number of stunning victories, mostly in the eastern theater, the Confederacy was steadily losing territory week by week throughout the war. And yet, the southern people still appeared in the main to be willing to sustain the war, to keep sending their sons in – though many are now being drafted – to keep suffering at home in the interest of defending their, their nation. They may never have felt a strong sense of Confederate nationalism. They may never have felt like they were really part of a different country. Certainly, secession didn't make them feel that way. But the siege mentality, the act of being invaded by an opponent, even if those, uh, opponents were Americans, that served sufficiently to mobilize Confederate opinion, and Davis was able to continue capitalizing on that sense of defense of home and hearth so that the Confederate people or substantial proportions of that

population were still willing to stick with the war as late as 1864. The dissolution would begin after the reelection of Lincoln, when it became evident that the Northern people were just as determined to see the thing through to the end. The greatest failure of the Davis administration shouldn't be the fact that it lost. Arguably it could never have won. The South was too much of an underdog from the beginning. It was outstripped industrially, economically, agriculturally, certainly in manpower. There was probably never a point at which the Confederacy could have done something to win the war. Its hope, of course, was that at any time during the war, the North could always decide to lose it. And there were points at which that might possibly have happened. This is always the case with the underdog and the overdog. The overdog can always decide to quit. As long as Davis could keep the Confederacy alive, as long as there was a Confederacy, there was always the chance that the North could say, today it is no longer worthwhile to suffer what we're suffering to bring these people back into our country. Davis' greatest failure is probably his failure to appreciate the need for diplomacy within his own household. The need to get along with people whom he did not like, whether it be generals like Joseph E. Johnston and Pierre G. T. Beauregard, state governors like Joe Brown of Georgia or Zebulon Vance of North Carolina or Thomas Moore of Louisiana, Davis was never able to take his ego out of the line of fire in dealing with difficult people. He never seems to have understood that his armies in

the field were stronger if what their generals had in front of them was the enemy and not Jefferson Davis. He got along brilliantly with Robert E. Lee and with a few others, but for far too many others, Davis's nature and his, um, his ego, his personality, got in the way of the smooth and efficient running of his administration. That's not to say that the outcome would have been any different if Davis had been a model of diplomacy, but it does have to be said that he certainly made his course as Confederate president a great deal more difficult by not being.

Speaker 1: **** fall of Richmond and Davis' fleeing south. Uh, you kind of touched on, on this before that, eh, Davis was of the opinion that there was no giving up. It was kind of like a **** is it that **** it was gone.

Jack Davis: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: What was the plan as the Davis administration is fleeing southward, what was the plan for the CSA?

Jack Davis: Mm, yeah. Davis never put exactly into words what he felt the future was going to be like when he left that train. No, Davis –

Speaker 1: Hold on a second. Let me just****. Okay.

Jack Davis: On April 2, 1865, when Davis boarded a train along with most of his government ministers to flee the dying city of Richmond, he didn't articulate at the moment exactly what his long-range plan was, if he even had one. Everything now had to be contingent upon what the enemy did, but he certainly entertained no thoughts, no designs whatever of quitting. Indeed, when he reached Danville, Virginia, the next day and Danville becomes for a few days the new Confederate capital, Davis will actually issue a proclamation to the people of the Confederacy in which he essentially says, it's a terrible thing that they have lost Richmond, their capital, but it may be a blessing in disguise because now their army will not be tied down defending points on the map. They'll now be free to float about as exigencies and circumstances dictate, to take advantage of opportunities. People in Danville who saw the proclamation were seen to be laughing in the street because it was pretty severely detached from reality at that moment. Fortunately, with telegraph lines down, most people in the Confederacy never saw it. But it shows that Davis's thinking at that moment had nothing to do with defeat or surrender, but only in how to continue the contest, and even after leaving Danville, as Davis and his fleeing government ministers head further south into North Carolina, then South Carolina, then Georgia, Davis tenaciously clings to the idea that resistance can be sustained. He does know, and he's right, that as

long as there is Confederate resistance, no matter where it is, then the cause is still alive and there's still always the chance that the North will decide to stop. Even after Lee's army has surrendered, weeks later, even after the Army of Tennessee has surrendered by Joseph E. Johnston, Davis is still telling those around him, stand by me. We'll ride west across the Confederacy. We'll pick up driblets and drablets of former Confederate units, a company here, a regiment there. We'll pick up the cavalry of Nathan Bedford Forrest. We'll pick up what's left of the army under Richard Taylor. If necessary, we'll cross the Mississippi. They had no boats and the Union controlled the Mississippi, so we don't know how they'd have gotten there. But he'd cross the Mississippi where there's an army of cavalry still in the field under General Kirby Smith and they would consolidate and they'd ride north once again. If they had to pull back into the New Mexico territory, even into Mexico itself, they would come back and as long as they could keep coming back, they could keep holding out, making themselves enough of a nuisance to Yankee authorities that, in the end, the Union would say, enough is enough. You may go. Increasingly those around him saw that this was delusional. Indeed, Davis himself was probably intermittently delusional. Now, one day, he'll admit the game is pretty nearly up and will appear to indicate to those with him that he's willing to allow them to get <u>him</u> out of the country, which is the only reason his escort stays with him after the latter part of April 1865. But then the next day, he'll

come back, saying, no, there's a phantom army out there. He knew it and if he, people who'd gone to the hills, those who deserted. Those who evaded the draft are still Confederates and they're still patriots and if he simply goes to them face to face and calls on them, phantom hordes will come out of the mountains and they will have another army and they can march on to victory. Right up to the time he was captured on May 12th, excuse me, shit, May 10th. Oh, wait, right up to the time he was captured at Irwinville, Georgia on May 10th, Davis still may not have given up the idea of somehow getting himself to the west and finding this phantom army and leading them on to victory.

Speaker 1: Was Davis involved in the assassination of Abraham Lincoln?

Jack Davis: No.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Jack Davis: Almost beyond question, Jefferson Davis was not personally involved in the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, either by instigating it or ordering that it take place, or I think even by being aware that it might, for a variety of reasons.

Speaker 1: Let's pause just a second. I need to shift the camera ****/

Jack Davis:	I can start that one again.

Speaker 1:	Yeah, will you? Thank you.

Jack Davis:	Almost beyond question, Jefferson Davis was not personally involved in the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, either as an instigator or by order, ordering it or by condoning it or even being aware of it, for a variety of reasons. The, the best research now certainly suggests that the assassination of Lincoln was decided by John Wilkes Booth just a few days before it happened, after a kidnapping plot had gone awry. Booth and some of his co-conspirators involved in the kidnapping plot definitely did have some connections through a variety of intermediaries with the Confederate State Department. Secretary of State Judah Benjamin might have known something about the kidnapping plot because it looks like Confederate State Department money was somehow involved in the funding of the plot, but we'll never know all of that because Benjamin destroyed most of the State Department archives. But it's for a variety of reasons I think unthinkable that Davis would be involved. For a start, it simply runs against his personality. In the fall of 1864, when Lincoln's running for reelection, Davis actually refused to allow Confederate agents to try to influence or

interfere in the election, his belief being it was not the proper role of the leader of one government to interfere in the political structure or the political, exercise of free political rights in another one. Well, assassinating the president of another country is certainly interfering with its political operations. Linc, Davis simply wouldn't have countenanced it. Secondly, of course, Davis loathed Andrew Johnson and the assassination of Lincoln was going to make Andrew Johnson president. Davis would never have wanted that. Thirdly, I think Davis simply did not think that was the way gentlemen conducted war.

PART 8

Speaker 1: Was Davis in any way involved with the assassination of Abraham Lincoln?

Jack Davis: Almost beyond question, Davis had no involvement in the Lincoln assassination, either by instigating or ordering it, or I think even by being aware of it. For a start, the best evidence seems to indicate that the decision to kill Lincoln was only made by John Wilkes Booth on his own a very few days before the event took place, and after the failure of a long-planned plot to kidnap Lincoln. There may be some connection between the Confederate government, meaning Secretary of State Judah Benjamin of the State Department with the kidnapping plot. Certainly Confederate State Department funds had found their way to some of Booth's group, but that Davis had either knowledge or encouragement of it is highly unlikely. For a start, it's simply against Davis's character. He would not have seen assassinating a foreign leader as the way a gentleman behaved. Secondly, Davis loathed Andrew Johnson, who is now vice president of the United States. To assassinate Lincoln would make Johnson president, which was not going to do any good for the Confederacy. If he was to condone assassinating Lincoln, then he had to kill Johnson, he had to kill the secretary of state and a whole host of other government leaders before he could hope that he would have taken out the South's worst enemies. Yet, even

Davis knew how something like a political assassination could galvanize the people in exactly the wrong direction. In 1864 a failed raid led by Ulric Dahlgren and Judson Kilpatrick against Richmond had apparently as one of its objectives to capture or kill Davis. Historians still debate whether or not Davis was really a target of the raid. Be that as it may, Confederates thought that it was, and the outcry in the South was tremendous. Davis had no reason not to expect there would be a similar reaction in the North if Lincoln were assassinated, and that, if anything, it would work against the possibility of the North yielding to Confederate demands for independence. Finally, Davis had the quaint but somehow admirable notion that even in a civil war like this, it was not the proper part of one government to interfere in the proper functioning of the electoral system in the other. In the fall of 1864, when Lincoln was running for reelection, most parties realized the greatest hope for the Confederacy lie in Lincoln being defeated, because Lincoln's the man who had the determination to see the thing through. If he could be defeated by his opponent, George McClellan, then it was hoped perhaps McClellan could be forced to give, give way, to yield, either to grant Confederate independence or to grant sufficient guarantees that the Confederacy might be able to come back into the Union. But, [cough] damn it, but Davis discouraged all such talk of Confederate attempts to interfere in the election, either by bribing people or by injecting money to buy votes in the North, because this was not how a democracy ought to behave in relation to other democracies, even one with which it was at war. There we go.

[coughs by interviewee interrupt audio throughout]

Speaker 1: Davis is captured, he's imprisoned, and it seemed to take quite some time for formal charges to be filed and indictments to be brought down. Why is that? So, or, discuss the process of, of ***** Jefferson Davis.

Jack Davis: The Union didn't know what to do with Jefferson Davis once they captured him. That helps to explain why people like Lincoln and General Sherman and others tacitly let it be known that they preferred that the leaders of the Confederate government actually escape, so that they would not have to deal with them afterward because a whole host of difficult legal issues were to become involved. These men, Davis most of all, had been indicted for treason,

sometimes in multiple constituencies, in the District of Columbia, in their home states, and treason, of course, is punishable by death. But at the end of a civil war, and especially one that's so remarkable as ours, in which in the aftermath there are no mass executions, there are no mass reprisals, at the end of our Civil War, there's only one execution, the commandant of Andersonville prison camp. He was certainly unjustly executed, but what happened at Andersonville was so horrendous that someone had to pay, someone had to meet the demands of Northern emotionalism, and the unfortunate commander there was, was the man who got the job. In trying to bring about a peaceful and uneventful reconciliation, the worst thing is to have to try the leaders of the now-defeated rebellion on treason charges, and if they're convicted to have to execute them, creating martyrs of them. As a result, it takes awhile for Washington to decide what to do with Jefferson Davis, what charges to try him on, and then to deal with the issue of whether or not to try him, in fact. And while he languishes in prison for 2 years, the government still hasn't decided what to do with him. Finally, he's released on bail in 1867, but even then his trial date keeps getting postponed and postponed and postponed, as the government still argues within itself, within the administration of President Johnson, within the State Department, most of all within the Supreme Court, over what they can do, and what they ought to do, and the potential problems of what happens if the Davis trial goes wrong. At a trial requiring a unanimous verdict by a jury, there was always the possibility that even on a treason charge for Jefferson Davis, there might be one rogue juror who would vote to acquit, and if that happened, if Jefferson Davis were acquitted on charges of treason, it had tremendous political ramifications for the whole issue of waging the war for reunion in the first place. If Davis was not guilty of treason, then no one was guilty of treason, then secession was not treason, then presumably secession was lawful after all. It opened a tremendous can of worms, a Pandora's box, that no one in the North wanted to have to deal with. Finally, when the time comes that he's to be tried, he's not even present, and his lawyers deal with the federal authorities and it's agreed that they will enter what's called a nolle prosequi, a decision we will not prosecute, in part on the belief that now that the Fourteenth Amendment has been passed, which makes it impossible--it prevents anyone who's ever taken the oath to defend the Constitution and subsequently become part of an insurrection against the government, they are proscribed from ever holding public office. That means Davis can never hold public office; therefore, he has already by that amendment been punished for becoming a Confederate, and so they can satisfy themselves with

the argument that he's already been punished; to try him for treason is double jeopardy. And so the charges are quashed, not only against Davis, but against all remaining Confederates still facing treason charges, and Davis goes a free man.

Speaker 1: You mentioned early on that there was a bit of a sea change in terms of public opinion, especially in the South,on Jefferson Davis while he's in prison. Discuss that change in light of this quote I'm about to read you; this was written by Edward K. [A.] Pollard. He wrote, "It has been said that if the federal authorities capturing Jefferson Davis had turned him loose, or had wisely refrained from treating him with invidious or exceptional rigor, he would have remained today the most unpopular man in the South."

Jack Davis: You want reference to Pollard in the answer?

Speaker 1: Well, I, I, you can if you want, but I just think that that's in stark contrast to the reality of, of the man who became a hero.

Jack Davis: Mm hmm. Jefferson Davis'd 2 years in prison.

Other Speaker: ****.

Jack Davis: Oh I'm sorry, I'm moving the chair.

Speaker 1: Oh no, no, no, that's fine. I, I'll move with you. Okay, go ahead.

Jack Davis: Jefferson Davis's 2 years in prison, and the continuing furor over whether or not he was to be tried to treason and how and what would happen if he were convicted, succeeded in doing for Davis what his 4 years as Confederate president never did, and that is it injected him into the heart of the Confederate people, or the former Confederate people. They saw him first briefly manacled, and then closely held in incarceration living for 2 years with the threat of a treason trial, perhaps execution over his head, and it was easy to see him in a messianic, almost Christlike position, as one who was bearing on his shoulders the weight of the collective

responsibility of all Confederates. Davis himself felt that, and more than once made reference to it, the result being that whereas they had never loved him during the war the way they loved and identified with Lee, they could now see all too visibly, all too publicly in their daily press, what their president was going through, and therefore, he became a symbol to all of them of dignity, of continuing resistance in a way, even though the Confederacy was dead, of refusing to knuckle under to the enemy and of holding his head up high, never saying I was wrong, never saying <u>we</u> were wrong. And Davis undergoes a kind of apotheosis, then that will last, more or less, for the balance of his life. He's popular in ways with the Southern people that he never was during the war or before. He's constantly in demand after his release from incarceration for public speeches, to attend veterans' events; he's offered the presidencies of a host of different southern companies, to be a figurehead, of course, but also to be a badge of honor on the letterhead of those companies. He's asked to be involved in the lotteries, he's asked to, to lend the, the moral weight of his name to almost every charity going on in the South from the 1860s through the 1880s. And where he can, he'll participate, where he can he will endorse all the good works going on in the South as it tried to rebuild itself, and as he tries to rebuild himself, because his martyr status doesn't end when he's released from prison. Davis in his last years will spent two decades trying unsuccessfully to rebuild himself financially, trying to make his plantation work, which he can't, trying to run an insurance company, which fails, trying to become involved in railroads and a host of other enterprises. Finally writing his memoirs in the hopes of providing some kind of living for his family. All of these things failed, and all of his failures are rather public. Everyone knows that he's out there striving, trying to overcome what all the rest of them are trying to overcome as they rebuild their own lives and rebuild the South, with the result that Jefferson Davis will become a minor cultural god to southerners, especially after Robert E. Lee, their greatest deity, dies in 1870. After the death of Lee there will be no other Confederate who will have such a hold on the hearts of the people whom Davis once led, as Davis himself.

Speaker 1:	Why then **** all these potential opportunities, um, because of this renewed notoriety, was he unsuccessful financially?

Jack Davis:	Some of Davis's financial failure at these various enterprises he engaged in after the War can be laid at his own feet.

Other Speaker: ****.

Jack Davis: Okay. A fair share of Davis's failure at these successive financial enterprises he tries after the war can be laid at his own feet. Davis, for some of the same reasons that he was not an effective chief executive, was also not a very effective businessman. But this was happening widespread to a great many people. The South is trying to rebuild itself in a variety of ways, and a host of former Confederates and even former Union generals, are acting as figurehead presidents of insurance companies and railroads and publishing companies and newspapers, most of which failed because they're undercapitalized, and because that there is no body politic out there with enough capital, enough hard cash, to provide the patronage base to make them profitable. That's why Davis's insurance company failed, that's why the railroad ventures he looks at fails; the failure of his own plantation is simply emblematic of the failure of a lot of plantations in that era when the cotton prices are driven down due to overproduction and foreign competition. And of course, then there's Davis himself, who never really had the instincts of a businessman. He has the instincts in private life of a planter. His last hope was writing his memoir. He'd seen so many others write memoirs that appeared to be profitable. His old nemesis, Joseph E. Johnston, published a memoir; his other old nemesis, Beauregard, published a memoir. And so Davis thought perhaps he could provide for his family by telling his story, only what he failed to realize was (a) he was not a good writer and he produced a pretty poor set of books, those portions that he actually wrote himself, and (b) there simply for whatever reason was not an audience out there anxious to read it. And so his book failed on the open market.

Speaker 1: Now in terms of, of, of Davis's other life that was happening while he's been released, why did he never seek a pardon and the restoration of his citizenship, 'cause I mean in speeches he would often start with “fellow citizens” and then have to retract that. It became kind of a gimmick for him. Why did he never seek, as many others did, Lee, for instance?

Jack Davis: Yeah, well Lee actually did –

Speaker 1: Right.

Jack Davis: – but it got lost. Ah, it would have been unthinkable for Jefferson Davis to ask for pardon, which was the first step to securing, once again, the full rights of citizenship--rights to vote, to hold office, and so on. To do so, (a) would have meant he'd have to admit to someone, most of all himself, that he'd been wrong. Secondly, Davis was a man who never said I'm sorry. Thirdly, and most important, he's convinced he was <u>not</u> wrong. The Southern states were not wrong in seceding, they were standing up for their rights in a lawful and constitutional way. Therefore, how can he apply for pardon for something that did not require pardon? Davis could have gotten his citizenship back; it never occurred to him to request it. Years later in the 1970s [1978], of course, in one of its numerous, ah, foolish ventures, the U.S. Congress actually gave him his citizenship back. I'm convinced if Davis was alive he would have rejected it. He was proud of not asking for his citizenship back, because it would have been a sign that he was wrong, which he never was. It was his badge of honor, it was his badge of sacrifice as leader of the Confederate experiment.

Speaker 1: Experiment, interesting.

Jack Davis: Now we're going to perform experiments.

Speaker 1: In any way, obviously, he couldn't hold public office officially. Did he in any way dabble in politics after the war?

Jack Davis: Davis very much kept out of politics after the war, certainly overtly. There's no question, of course, that he had opinions about politicians of the day; he rather favored the idea of Horace Greeley running for the presidency in 1876. He certainly favored Democratic candidates over then Republican candidates, but he didn't vote, he didn't make stump speeches on behalf of candidates, and there's little evidence to suggest that he involved himself in any way or was asked to be involved in any of the backroom meetings and politics that led to putting up candidates for conventions, or that led to putting up programs for, for a state legislature, or for a group of states to try to promulgate in Washington. He was politically extinct, as much as if he

were an extinct volcano, and seems to have accepted that. In addition to which I think all that he'd seen, and all that he had suffered during the war had pretty much jaundiced him on American politics in general. He had seen how politics and how politicians had failed their country, the old Union. He was not alone in this; there were a number of others, including some other prominent Confederates, who stayed out of politics after the war because they had seen how badly it had gone wrong. And Davis preferred to devote himself to what he thought were more useful pursuits, rebuilding himself, educating his children, doing the little things that he could to encourage the rebuilding of the South, and to try to instill in southerners a sense of pride for what they had done, rather than a sense of humiliation over their loss.

Speaker 1: In one of his last speeches, or actually, excuse me, it was his last speech, he implored the crowd to believe there was a group of Confederates, I think, …..[Aug. 18, 1886, not the last speech].

Jack Davis: Young men in Mississippi cities [Mississippi City].

Speaker 1: Young men, right, and he implored them to release all rancor **** community. Do you, do you believe that that's what he believed? Had, had he changed in any way towards the end of his life to a bit more unified approach to this country?

Jack Davis: Repeatedly in the last 20 years of his life, let me start that again. Repeatedly in the 1870s and 80s, Jefferson Davis, when he spoke publicly at all, would speak of pride in the Confederate heritage and what southern men and southern women had done, but he would also call for reconciliation. This, those, there was a cult of reconciliation at the time, North and South alike, and so many other former Confederates are speaking the same rhetoric, that it's time for us to put behind us the rancor and the passions of the past, the war has happened, the victory has made its verdict; we may not agree with it, but let us be good citizens and good Americans, rebuild the South, and rebuild the Union for a better tomorrow for all of us. And I think it's fair to say that Davis intellectually believed that, right up to the time he last said it, shortly before his death, speaking to a group of young men in Mississippi, Mississippi City, Mississippi, when he tells them leave the past behind, build for the future. And there are other evidences in Davis's

behavior in those later years that suggests that he meant it. As in the case of his daughter, Winnie, who fell in love with a man who'd been a major in the Union army [Alfred Wilkinson (1858-1918) did not serve in the war], and the two became engaged, and Davis though he would have preferred that his daughter fall in love with a former Confederate soldier, still did not withhold his permission from the marriage. The marriage never took place because the young man suffered severe financial reversal, but the fact that Davis would allow the daughter of the president of the Confederacy to marry a Yankee suggests that when he spoke of reconciliation and reunification he meant it. Yet at the same time, fierce pride and a fierce combativeness was [sic] always just beneath the skin with Davis, and he could very, very quickly in the next breath, bring up the old resentments for what the South had suffered, bring up the cost to the South of the end of slavery, bring up the inequities taking place in the South at that time because of the new role of Negroes in American, ah, ah, society, and a host of other things that showed that sometimes he may have been saying what it was politic to say, yet at other times he may not entirely have yielded his old ideas.

Speaker 1: In light of the duality of what you just said, if I do recall correctly, at one point Davis said that in light of everything that's happened, if he had the opportunity to do it again, he would do it the same way. So in face of all the death, all that was lost, how is that reconciled with, you know, these kinda two halves of Davis?

Jack Davis: Even though Davis might be saying that his time for the two sides to come together, that we must reconcile, that doesn't mean, doesn't. Even though Davis might have been saying in his later years that it was time for North and South to reconcile, to put behind the passions of the past, that doesn't imply any admission on his part that anything he had ever done, any choice he had made or that the South had made, had been in error. It's possible to be right and lose, and that was Davis's attitude to the day that he died.

Speaker 1: So Davis has died, and there is a huge outpouring, both in just people coming to the funeral and everything. What was, what did David [sic] be, Davis become after his death?

Jack Davis: After his death in New Orleans in 1888, it was 1888 wasn't it, or 1889, I'll leave the year out, maybe ‘89. After Davis's death in New Orleans, there of course is a tremendous outpouring, first in New Orleans itself, where Davis is given the largest funeral the city ever sees, but secondly, all across the South, especially in the press, as the newspapers pay homage to the dead leader of the Confederacy. Indeed, some of this is even seen in the North, some of the conservative Democratic New York newspapers, for instance, actually published a fair bit of praise of Davis the man, not for what he did leading the Confederacy, but of the manly virtues he had shown in the years after the war. Davis did not then go on to become the kind of cultural god that Lee was then and had remained ever since. But for a period of years Davis was in the pantheon with Lee, because so many had identified with him, their sufferings with his in the years after the war. Unfortunately, he didn't last as a god for a variety of reasons, and again, it's easy to make the comparison with Lincoln. Davis did not have Lincoln's gift for the brilliant phrase. Lincoln is quoted everywhere about everything. There is not one famous quote by Jefferson Davis remembered. He was a good writer, but fustian and legalistic and wordy. He didn't have the gift of leaving behind in this rich trove of anecdote that humanized him the way Lincoln is humanized, or the way Lee is humanized. Lincoln didn't get known in, ah, Davis didn't get known in popular folklore the way Lee and Lincoln and others did. So he didn't have a variety of these factors to keep him in his godlike status and he rather quickly reverted to that distant figure in a portrait on the wall whom southerners recognized and knew who he was, without ever really knowing him.

Speaker 1: What is the lost cause?

Jack Davis: The lost cause is, is a definition that was, start again. The lost cause is what historians call a kind of revealed-word version of what the South was really about and what the Civil War was really about, that takes it name from one of the first people to promulgate that vision, and that's E. A. Pollard, the one-time editor of the Richmond Examiner, who wrote a book called The Lost Cause, published in 1868 [1866]. And it has several basic tenets, the first is that slaves were happy, there was no cruelty in slavery, slaves enjoyed their lot, they loved their masters, and therefore, there was no unrest, there was no internal discord in the South. This was a peaceful and benign institution that was enjoyed by and was beneficial to both masters and

slaves. Secondly, one of its tenets is that slavery had nothing to do with secession; it was about other things; it was about a rapacious Union government.

Other Speaker: But the other way around, that secession didn't have anything to do with slavery.

Jack Davis: What did I, oh, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Can I just start with that second?

Speaker 1: Sure, oh sure.

Jack Davis: Secondly, one of his tenets says that slavery had nothing to do with causing secession, that the real reasons for secession was [sic] to get away from the federal government in Washington that was rapaciously trying to swallow southern rights, that wanted to make southerners the economic vassals of the North. Thirdly, that secession was in fact a genuine inherent right stated in the Constitution, stated in the Articles of Confederation, implied in the Declaration of Independence. And fourthly, of course, that during the war itself, the South was never defeated, it simply, as one Confederate put it, wore themselves out whipping the Yankees, that there was no desertion of the Confederate armies, that the Yankees won in the end only because of mechanistic hordes of weapons and manpower overwhelming undermanned, understaffed, underequipped, heroic Confederates. And finally, that there was no magnanimity in the way the surrender and the end of the war was crafted by the Union, but rather, that immediately the North set forth on a policy, again, of rapacious confiscation and exploitation of a defeated South, and that during Reconstruction southerners were subjected to a, a kind of horrendous treatment unexperienced anywhere else in the world up to that time. None of these things are true, but it was no one likes to lose; it hurts everyone to lose. It hurts a lot more when a nation, or a would-be nation has lost. And one of the first ways you deal with loss is by persuading yourself that you bear no responsibility for the loss. We all fight battles in our daily lives. For people today it's, it's a, it's a competition for a job or a competition for a raise, or a competition for affection, and if we lose it, we don't say, well, I wasn't good enough for the job, I wasn't good enough for the raise. We tell ourselves instead that the boss never liked me or the

guy who got the raise is the boss's brother-in-law. These are the little lies we tell ourselves, little myths we create to help us deal with hard realities.

Other Speaker: I'll have you pause just a second. I need you to just say that middle section over that it's not, it's not about me, because you hit the mic.

Jack Davis: Oh, and I've noticed I ****. Let's see, I started –

Other Speaker: As you were saying like –

Jack Davis: Okay, I'll do the "little battles" deal, okay. We all fight little battles in our everyday lives, ah, boys have fist fights, adults complete for jobs or for promotions. No one admits defeat. If you lost the fist fight, well, the sun was in your eyes, you couldn't see. If you didn't get the job you wanted it's be, not because you weren't <u>good enough</u> for it, it's because the man doing the hiring didn't like you. If you don't get a raise, it's because the boss didn't like you. These are little myths we create to help ourselves deal with the psychological trauma of losing. How much greater is it when it's a nation that has lost? How do you deal with the humiliation of loss on a geographical scale the size of the globe? You deal with it by saying you weren't los, you didn't lose through anything of your own doing, the loss was beyond your control, and you lost in a just cause. It's even worse to lose in a cause that the culture of which you're a part regards as an evil cause. And by late 19th-century times, most of the world regarded slavery as an evil cause. Therefore, it was important in the creation of the lost cause myth to change the reasons that brought about secession so that it was a noble cause on high constitutional principles. It's much better to lose for a good cause than it is to lose for one that the people of your culture regard as a bad one. And hence the lost cause myth, and it's still popular today, and perhaps always will be, because it's much richer, it's, it's, it has greater tugs on the heart strings of everybody, and it's far more acceptable than the realities of what happened in the 1860s to Americans emotionally, and especially to people who feel an affiliation to or affinity with the South, where that loss is still felt very personally by millions of people today.

Speaker 1: Was the Civil War a rebellion--on the North side-- or a revolution, second American Revolution, as many leaders of the South saw it, or, or not?

Jack Davis: I think it fair to refer to the Civil War more as a revolution than a rebellion, because it's, rebellions can be temporary with temporal goals, after which the people involved may go right back to being a part of the body politic of which they were a part before. A revolution seeks to institute a new regime of its own, ah, and it is certainly apt to call it a civil war. Historians are often told it wasn't a civil war, this was a war between two nations, but the Confederacy was never a nation, not by any of the definitions in place at the time. It never was recognized by one single foreign power; it was not able to maintain its own territorial integrity and its borders; the only thing it did do was maintain a rather creaky civil government. But all three have to be maintained in order to qualify as a nation, and the Confederacy failed on at least two of the three. It was a highly organized, very sophisticated, and for a time very successful separatist movement, or revolution.

Speaker 1: Okay. I'm actually going to [end]