PART 1

Other Speaker: Camera ****.

Other Speaker: Oh yeah.

Other Speaker: This begins a new tape.
Other Speaker: Microphone.
Other Speaker: Microphone up towards you.

Other Speaker: Okay, sorry.

Other Speaker: Right there, good. Yeah.

Other Speaker: Okay?

Other Speaker: Okay.

Other Speaker: And we are speaking.

Speaker 1: Start with your name and your title.

William Cooper: My name is William Cooper, I'm a Board professor in the History Department at LSU.
Speaker 1: Please tell us what role tariffs played in the decision of southern states to secede.

William Cooper: The role tariffs played in causing southern states to secede. That's, uh, that's fascinating that you should ask that question at this point in time. Uh, for at one time, particular early in the 20th century, uh, tariffs were looked upon as very important in the sectional crisis that had, had an instrumental role in the final, the crisis of the union. Then for a number of years tariffs were really looked upon as not at all central. And now in fact there's a book coming out this year, uh, re – trying to reclaim the causative power of economics, and to see that economic forces and factors had a significant, uh, uh, impact on the coming of the Civil War. Uh, personally I don't think that tariffs had very much to do with the coming of the Civil War, the ultimate sectional crisis at all,. Uh, after all, uh, though the South was a low tariff, uh, area, the, the two tar, the most recent tariff was passed in the late '50s by a Democratic Congress and a Democratic president. The South was overwhelmingly Democratic, of course. The Democrats were for low tariff. Prior to that the, the, the tariff was the Tariff of 1846, was again a Democratic tariff. So the tariff was not a, a primary concern to southerners. Now the Republican party, the new Republican party did advocate raising the tariff. But the, the, the tariff had not been raised before 1860, and with a Republican president who wanted a higher tariff, Democrats still controlled the Congress and we’d never gotten a higher tariff. So I just, uh, I find it difficult to see that the tariff was of any serious consequence.

Speaker 1: Uh, define a tariff for us, please.

William Cooper: Tariff is simply a tax on imports. It's a tax the federal government puts on items that are imported in the United States and the reason southerners traditionally disliked the tariff is they saw a tariff as a subsidy for manufactured goods. They were buying commodities from abroad and the tariff was designed to make American commodities more competitive and even give, uh, the American commodities an advantage. Whereas southerners, chiefly the cotton states, were exporting, uh, commodities to Europe, mostly cotton, and they believed in free trade.

Speaker 1: Upon Mr. Davis' accession to the presidency, he had to select a cabinet. Please discuss with us some of the more significant members of his cabinet throughout his presidency.
William Cooper: All right, uh, Jefferson Davis in his cabinet. In Montgomery, uh, when he
selected the first cabinet, uh, he really did it by state. He, each state, there's seven states in the
Confederacy. He was the president, Mississippi, so every other state would get a cabinet
member. That's how they started doing it. Uh, through the course of the issue of the
Confederacy there was some turnover in the cabinet. There was not as much turnover as some
people want to think because most of the turnover occurred in a couple of spots, uh, secretary of
war, there was some turnover early on but then from, uh, really the beginning, end ‘62, early ‘63,
there was one person in it up to the end of the war. Uh, there was turnover in attorney general--
that was not really an important office--and, uh, there was, uh, Judah Benjamin who, uh, took
three different positions during the course of the war, but he stayed in the cabinet the entire time.
There was one other cabinet officer, the secretary – two others, the secretary of the navy and the
postmaster general who stayed the entire time. The most important cabinet officers for Davis,
without question, were the people who were secretaries of war, along with Judah Benjamin.
Now the first secretary of war, Leroy Walker from Alabama, was a person who was put in to
represent Alabama. Walker did not work out. He left fairly quickly. Uh, Judah P. Benjamin
became interim secretary of war, but he didn't stay very long and that had a lot to do with
political unhappiness in the Congress over the cabinet and some difficulties he had with generals,
and so Benjamin was moved over to become secretary of state when the secretary of state
resigned. And then the secretary of war became a man named George Randolph, who was a very
effective secretary, uh, but he and Davis fell out, and Randolph resigned late ‘62 and then we get
James A Seddon from Virginia. And Seddon remained secretary of war until the last spring. He
was replaced by John C. Breckinridge. And one thing I should say about Davis and secretaries
of war, Davis was really his own secretary of war in terms of making decisions. He liked to
confer with his secretary about any and all subjects minor and major, but he kept to himself
decision-making. He didn't say to the secretary, you can make these decisions in these areas and
I'll save these for myself. He didn't do that. Uh, he valued discussion but he made all the
decisions. So in many, you can argue from one point of view the secretary of war was a glorified
clerk. On the other hand, he was involved with the president in making decisions but the
president made all the decisions. Benjamin became Davis's closest cabinet confidante. He
started off as attorney general, he became interim secretary of war and he served as secretary of
state from then until the end of the war. Of course, as secretary of state, he really didn't have much to do because Confederate diplomatic efforts, well they really came to naught when it became clear that the British, uh, neither the British or the French was, was going to, uh, recognize the Confederacy. And so Benjamin became a close confidant of Davis. He had, uh, a number of other, he did a number of things; for example he oftentimes was a chief draftsman for the president's messages to Congress. And he did confide, no Davis did confide in him. Now having said that much, you cannot begin to go into detail and say what did he and Davis talk about. Because there's no record of what he and Davis talked about. Uh, Benjamin's own, personal archive disappeared with Benjamin at the end of the war. Benjamin, of course, escaped to France, to England I mean, and never came back to this country. And the Benjamin documents that are extant today are very, very few and don't tell us anything very much about his relationship with Davis during the war.

Speaker 1: Judah Benjamin was at a certain level a, uh, controversial figure in the cabinet, um, at a certain level because of his Jewish faith. How did Jefferson Davis handle the attacks on Mr. Benjamin?

William Cooper: Davis and Benjamin and, uh, the attacks on Secretary Benjamin. Benjamin did generate a lot of, uh, unhappiness among some people. But I think the opposition to Benjamin can be exaggerated a bit. Benjamin himself was a terribly, terribly able person. Without going into a lot of detail about his background, he came to Louisiana as a young man, a young lawyer. He made his way, he made a great deal of money, he married into the Creole aristocracy, he bought a big plantation. Then he was elected to the United States Senate. The first Jewish person elected to the United States Senate in the 1850s from Louisiana. There had been one previously, but that was a person who had converted from Judaism to the Episcopal Church, so Benjamin is the first Jewish person who is still Jewish in the United States Senate. He was in the Senate at the time of secession. Davis named him to his cabinet. He was the, obviously the first Jewish cabinet officer. There had not been one in the United States and Davis and Ju, and Benjamin remained in the cabinet. There was some anti-Semitism and, uh, in opposition to Benjamin, but Benjamin also was a lightning rod for people who didn't like Davis. He was somebody who was around Davis; they could assault Benjamin and attack Benjamin and
sometimes directly and sometimes in innuendo that would be anti-Semitism. But I think it was not chiefly that he was Jewish; it was chiefly that he was, uh, always there and a convenient target to hit against Davis. Uh, when, when, there were people who wanted Benjamin out of the cabinet especially in the fall of 1861 after, uh, Confederate, after First Manassas and, uh, Confederates had some difficulties in the fall and spring of 1861, ‘62 and there was, uh, a lot of, uh, push to get the cabinet reorganized and get Benjamin out. Well, Davis wanted to keep Benjamin and so what he managed to do, is he managed to get, move around so he could move Benjamin into the secretaryship of state and keep him in the cabinet. So he did not dispense with Benjamin. And Davis, there was always some, some attacking him on his cabinet but it, after the reorganization in early ‘62 there was not much assault on his cabinet until the very end. And then there was a good bit of unhappiness with it.

Speaker 1: Speaking of unhappiness, please discuss Mr. Davis's interaction with the Confederate Congress. Hold, please.

Other Speaker: ****.

William Cooper: Jefferson Davis and Congress. I would say the whole Jefferson Davis's relationships with Congress were positive on two grounds. One is he got from Congress almost every major piece of legislation he wanted and needed, and second, his, the opposition to him in Congress was oh, often quite vociferous, uh, quite vitriolic, I would say really bitter and vicious sometimes, but it was never very successful and thwarting policies that Davis advocated. Now I think there are a number of reasons for this. In the first place, this was a war time. And normally in war time in American history, uh, presidents have gained power vis-à-vis Congress. This was certainly true on the northern side in the Civil War with Abraham Lincoln and the United States Congress because the president is commander in chief and he goes to the Congress and he says, look we need these measures to fight the war. So the president, the executive, usually gets the upper hand. The second thing is, in the Confederacy the people who didn't like Davis were a very diffuse group. There were people who didn't like him personally. There were people who didn't like the policies he advocated, for example, he advocated conscription, that is drafting, uh, civilians to fight in the army. Uh, he advocated a much stronger central government
to, to again to carry the fight to the enemy. And there were Confederate congressmen and senators who really disliked this centralization that was coming about with things like conscription and suspension of habeas corpus and they opposed Davis on those kinds of policy grounds. But some of the people who disliked Davis most intensely agreed that they needed to have strong wartime measures. And so you, you never got a full-blown coalescing opposition, uh, that combined personal animosity with policy opposition. And so Davis overall did quite well with Congress. Now there were individual congressmen who literally hated him. Uh, but Davis was a professional politician who had been in the House and the Senate before the Civil War. He knew that relations between presidents and Congress had to be at least, at, at, at least civil, and hopefully even more than civil, and Davis spent a lot of time inviting congressmen to the Confederate White House for breakfast, for dinner, for talks, and, and, and in the Executive Mansion there was a small library that went by the name of “the snuggery” and Davis would often meet with one, two, three, four, five congressmen in this little room to discuss measures. And he was quite willing to listen to what congressmen had to say about their needs and where their constituencies were in trouble and where their states had, uh, problems. But what Davis was not willing to do, was whenever he perceived that a congressman was interested in the congressman's own advance, that the congressman's own interests were primary, Davis became ice-cold. Because for Davis, the cause trumped all and you had to be totally committed to the cause, and no matter whether you were a congressman or a general officer, if he perceived that your own interests overrode your interest in the cause, he'd cut you down.

Speaker 1: You mentioned, uh, centralized rule and increased centralized rule. The Confederate States left the Union at a certain level because of an overbearing federal government in their minds. Um, the federal government was trying to centralize as opposed to, uh, give power to the states. Given that, why is it that the southern states decided to confederate, to join another union with such, such alacrity, so quickly--as opposed to just going at it alone?

William Cooper: Why did the southern states form the Confederate States? Why didn't South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, just be a Republic of Alabama? Well I think they believed quite strongly that only by confederation could they hope to maintain any kind of independence. Because if they went off all on their own, a bunch of atoms floating about, they would be easy
pickings for the United States or for any other foreign power who wanted to come and pick. They believed from the outset that they had to confederate, to use your word, and even before they began to leave Washington in late December of 1860, January of 1861, uh, decisions were being made about uniting the confederates, uniting the southern states that seceded, into a Confederacy.

Speaker 1: We were discussing, uh, Davis's interaction with congressmen and some of his vociferous opponents. Um, there were many opponents, although diffuse at a certain level. Mr. Stephens became an opponent, Rhett, Toombs, Yancey, that whole crew, also some vociferous editors of newspapers.

William Cooper: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: Who really went after him? In your opinion, how did Mr. Davis handle such criticism?

William Cooper: Jefferson Davis and criticism. How did Davis handle criticism? Well, I think we must start with the criticism first. I think the criticism of Davis and the, uh, effect of this criticism has been greatly, greatly exaggerated. You can look at a few people and you call some names; Robert Barnwell Rhett, who edited the Charleston Mercury, Joseph Brown, who was the tovernor of Georgia, Henry Foote, our old friend from Mississippi who was a congressman at this time from Tennessee, a Confederate congressman from Tennessee, and, and two or three other people. But these people, though they were shrill and angry and bitter, they never really accomplished anything. Even in 1864 in the state of Georgia, when Alexander Stephens had finally turned full against the president and his administration, Stephens and Governor Brown couldn't even get the Georgia legislature to pass a resolution condemning Davis' administration. Now how did Davis deal with this criticism? Well, Davis, I think you have to answer that in a couple of ways. One is in terms of newspaper criticism, he'd been around a long time. He knew that newspapers criticized. I don't think newspaper criticism bothered him very much. Now people like Stephens, I think that he just had decided that Stephens didn't have a contribution to make. I think Davis was very shortsighted on that and he
just pushed Stephens aside. People like Brown and people like Rhett, I don't think he paid much attention to them. He had to respond to them and he tried to, but if what you're getting at is this is a man with very thin skin who can't stand criticism and reacts in such a fashion to, uh, and his, and his reaction is so overblown that it causes increased criticism and such, I don't really think that that's the case.

Speaker 1: You also were discussing failure to get diplomatic recognition from European states. What is your view of Mr. Davis' attempts to get such recognition and if you want to include in your answer the, um, the incident where Mr. Lincoln, uh, stopped an English ship, a British ship **** diplomatic recognition?.

William Cooper: You asked about Jefferson Davis and European recognition. At the outset, the, uh, at the outset of the war, the Confederates expected European recognition. Uh, they did not believe that the British particularly could survive economically without southern cotton. Uh, Britain had become a great industrial pow, power. Uh, the textile industry in Great Britain was terribly important to the British economy and almost all of it, the cotton, came from the United States, and southern states believed that Britain was dependent. Uh, the 1850s had been a decade of enormous prosperity in the South and they were had, they were heady times, and the southerners were very confident that Britain would have to come in on their side. And this didn't happen right away. Even when President Lincoln announced a blockade, the British didn't come in. Now the British declared neutrality, uh, which meant that they weren't taking sides and the United States was very upset about that because that meant that Confederate ships in terms of, of the British, of international law, Confederate ships could go into British ports and so forth. But Davis kept telling the British that the South had made itself into a new nation, that this was a new nation that believed in free trade, that had a commodity the British desperately needed, and the British should recognize the Confederate States. He also claimed that the blockade that President Lincoln imposed was not really a blockade. And to do this, to prove this, he said how, look how many ships get through the so-called blockade-runners, the names that were given to these ships that bring goods to and from Europe to the United States. Well the British never did agree that the blockade wasn't in place and that's because the British were the greatest naval power in the world and the British didn't wanna set any kind of precedent about saying a
blockade was not a real blockade in force for fear it might come back against them at some point in time, even though the blockade clearly couldn't stop every ship. In terms of really recognizing the Confederacy, the British government had one criteria. The British government wanted to be sure the Confederate States of America was gonna be the Confederate States of America and not be defeated. The Lincoln administration made it very clear early on that if the British interfered, the British better be prepared to fight, that the United States would go to war if Great Britain intervened on the side of the Confederacy. Now, was the United States running a big bluff? Well it was a bluff the British were not willing to call unless they felt sure about the Confederacy? On a couple of occasions the British were, were, were on the verge of, of, of, of recognizing the Confederacy. For example, after the second Manassas in August of 1862 the British were talking about it very seriously but then came the Confederate reverses in Maryland and Kentucky in the fall of ‘62 and the British backed away. In the summer of ‘63, of course, uh, it was much less likely, but still if the Confederates had managed to turn back the Union forces at Vicksburg and Gettysburg, uh, and then become victorious at Gettysburg, the British might have, um, have, uh, intervened on their side, or at least not intervened so much as call for a truce and that they would come in and mediate. Now you asked also about what is known as the Trent affair. Uh, this occurred early on in the war when the, uh, uh, a ship carrying two Confederate diplomats, the ambassadors to England and to France, this, the ship was stopped on the high seas by the United States Navy. It was a British vessel and these two diplomats were taken off and the British were very distraught about thas, that is, an American naval vessel stopping a British flag on the high seas, but, uh, diplomacy prevailed, the Lincoln administration apologized and said their commander was not operating under instructions. The British accepted that. Now one thing I should add before I end on diplomacy, the French. The French were quite interested in the Confederacy and the French were quite eager for the Confederacy to succeed, mainly because at this time the French were intervening in Mexico. And the Confederates had made it very clear to the French that, uh, they would look with favor upon the French and they wanted the French to look with favor upon them. And the Emperor Napoleon III, I think it's quite clear, would have been happy to help the Confederates, but he was not gonna buck the British. The British had the navy, the British ruled the oceans, and I think Napoleon III would've come in quickly behind England, but he was not gonna come in against England.
Speaker 1: During the Civil War, Mr. Davis, uh, implemented some measures we've discussed, uh, conscription.

William Cooper: Mm hmm.

Speaker 1: Taxation, the suspension of habeas corpus, basically diminution of liberties. Would you discuss those, um, those measures and the, uh, significance of them?

William Cooper: Well, you talk about the measures that, uh, Davis advocated and the Confederate Congress agreed to, that enhance the power of the Confederate government vis-à-vis the state governments and vis-à-vis Confederate citizens. The most notable example of this and the one that got people very excited very early on was conscription. In the spring of 1862 the Confederate Congress passed the first national conscription act in American history, that is, making available for military service, involuntary military service, I mean you would be drafted or conscripted, uh, individuals within the Confederate states. Now this was done because the Confederate administration, President Davis included, began to fear that as the 12-month volunteers, people who joined the Confederate Army for 12 months, and that's all that Congress would allow in the beginning, people who joined in the late spring and early summer of 1861, as their terms were coming due in the spring and summer of 1862, these people would go home. And the Confederates would not be able to field an army. And so Davis went to Congress and he asked for a conscription act. He got a conscription act. And the conscription act in Davis's mind enabled the Confederates to keep armies in the field and it was certainly a tremendously important measure for the Confederate war effort. And the conscription act was continued for the rest, the conscription lasted throughout the war, and there were different acts and they, what they really did was extend the age to which people could be drafted until you got to the end, there was everybody between 18 and it was either 55 or 60 years old, you were eligible for the draft. And there were other technical things in the conscription act about who might be exempted and such like that. But that was a terribly important measure, and conscription upset a number of Confederates because it certainly infringed on an individual’s choice. Now you were told you didn't have a choice, you had to go. Of course eventually the Union adopted conscription, too. It came after the Confederates, but they adopted conscription. In terms of
taxation, uh, there were various kinds of, of taxes that the Confederates, uh, Confederate Congress, uh, adopted with, with Davis' wholehearted support and, and enthusiastic backing. Uh, there were taxes-in-kind that you could pay, uh, that you would use, um, the commodities, you raise crops, you raise; you could pay an income tax was put in. There was also impressment. By impressment meant that officials of the government could come and, and press things you had, the gov, the army might need. Uh, food, uh, animals, slaves to work for the army and when, uh, items were impressed, payment was made but it was a price set by the government on what the particular item was worth. And if, if you going through the war, ‘63, ‘64 these, uh, measures cause a considerable reaction in the Confederate public. And yet, having said that, there are no Gallup polls so you can't go and say 75 percent believe that, so 33 percent believe that, but on the whole there was still considerable support for Davis and his policies. One thing to remember, through the whole course of the war, even in the final fateful winter of ’64- 65, no other public man challenged Davis' primacy. Now I'm not talking about military because Robert E. Lee certainly had surpassed Jefferson Davis in terms of, of being the national hero, but no other public person, no other po, politician came close to challenging Davis.

Speaker 1: So do you think that Mr. Davis was successful as a rallying point for southerners throughout the, uh, the War Between the States?

William Cooper: Was Davis a rallying point for southerners? I think he absolutely was. Now lots of historians disagree and Davis has been blamed time and time again basically for losing the Confederate War, for losing the war for the Confederates. In fact, one eminent historian writing about Davis and Lincoln set the tone in an essay. He said that, um, that Davis was really responsible for the Confederate defeat and in fact if, uh, Davis has been president of the Union and Lincoln the Confederacy, the Confederacy might've won. Well I think that's kinda fanciful, but I think Davis was a rallying point. I think Davis made lots and lots of efforts. He made, wrote public letters, he made public addresses, and on three occasions he traveled almost the length and breadth of his country: ‘62, ‘63 and ’64, he traveled west from Richmond, the first two times all the way to the state of Mississippi, made speech after speech after speech, and the Confederate newspapers lauded him, local politicians said that he was doing a good job. I think to say that Davis didn't rally Confederates is to confuse two things. It's to confuse the fact that
the Confederates by late ‘64 and ‘65 were getting smashed with the fact that when people are getting beaten militarily like that, that does not mean that your leader is ineffective in rallying you.

Speaker 1: What about his efforts to rally the troops? Was he successful on that front?

William Cooper: Of course, Davis and rallying troops. Well, Davis considered himself a soldier and he always said, you know that he wanted to be a general and he, and when he became president, many of his, uh, most, uh, ardent supporters were telling him he should go out and command the army, at least an army. Well he had plenty of brains enough to know that was the wrong thing to do and he didn't do that. He knew that he could not be an individual army commander. On one occasion he said, according to his wife Varina, that if only Lee could take one wing and he could take the other, he was sure they could beat the enemy. But the army was very important to him, and when he first got to Richmond as president, when the capital was moved from Montgomery to Richmond and armies, and troops being brought into Richmond to go north toward the Potomac River Valley and face the enemy, Davis would go to army camps, he would review troops, he would make pep talks to the soldiers. He made lots and lots of efforts. On his three journeys westward, he always, ‘course he went each time, one of the main reasons he went was to deal with the Army of Tennessee and command crises in the Army of Tennessee, uh, but he, um, he spoke to the soldiers there, he went out to review the soldiers. He took the soldiers and their sacrifices and their commitment quite seriously. How effective was he in rallying the soldiers? I think that the soldiers looked upon him quite positively. Again, when you get to the very end, you can see when he goes out to the west in the fall of 1864, he doesn't get quite the reception he got in ‘62 and ‘63. But he was still trying, and, uh, I think he was as effective as anybody could've been.

Speaker 1: You mentioned the move of the Confederate capital from Montgomery to Richmond.

William Cooper: Mm hmm.
Speaker 1: It’s been hypothesized that if the Confederate capital had remained in Montgomery, the Confederacy may have been better served given that Richmond was only a hundred miles from Washington, D.C. Are you proponent of that viewpoint?

William Cooper: Uh, I, no, I am not a proponent of the viewpoint that the Confederacy would've been better off to stay in Montgomery, the capital in Montgomery. Uh, I say that for a couple of reasons. We have to look at it from the point of view of the Confederates in 1861 as well. First, the Confederate point of view. Virginia was a great prize for the original Confederates, for the first seven states out. Virginia was considered the mother of the South, was the mother of the American Revolution. It was the home of George Washington. It was the home of Thomas Jefferson, who was a political patron saint of most southerners by the middle of the 19th century. And so to get Washing, to get Virginia was, was just the most wonderful thing in the world and they wanted to, to establish themselves in Virginia. But both, this is something they knew in 1861 and you can look back from now. Richmond was the most important manufacturing center in all of the South. Richmond would have to be defended. The most important ironworks was in Richmond, the, uh, factories that produced everything from locomotive to naval guns to rails. The Tredegar Ironworks was the most important single, uh, facility such as that. Richmond was also a center of other manufacturing. Richmond would have to be defended and the Confederates, if they'd kept the capital in Montgomery, they would've still been fighting in Virginia. They wouldn't have set their defense line on the Chattahoochee River which is the eastern boundary of Alabama and Georgia, I think that's fanciful to think. And you say, well, it would've taken the Federals a pretty long time to get to Montgomery. Well, it took 'em 4 years to get to Richmond. I would suggest they probably could've gotten to Montgomery in 4 years.

Speaker 1: What about the –

Other Speaker: Change tape.

PART 2
Speaker 1: New Orleans****. And, okay, turn off, please.
Speaker 1: Please, uh, discuss the importance of Fort Sumter.

Speaker 2: Fort Sumter was terribly important. After all the first shots were fired there. It became the flashpoint. And it was in many ways the first really critical decision Jefferson Davis had to make. When South Carolina succeeded from the Union the, uh, federal garrison there was in Fort Moultrie, uh, out on an island, Sullivan's Island, across rivers, from inlets, from Charleston. Uh, in December of 1860, shortly after South Carolina seceded, late December, they commander of the federal garrison moved his troops to Fort Sumter, which was an unfinished fort in the middle of Charleston harbor. He moved there because he thought it would decrease tensions because they couldn't get to him except by water all the way. You could get to Fort Moultrie, ya had to go by water, but you could get to land and then approach Fort Moultrie from land. You couldn't do that at Fort Sumter. Uh, Fort Sumter remained in federal hands at the time of the creation of the Confederate States of America. Abraham Lincoln became president. He became president on March the 4th, the day of inauguration in the 19th century. Fort Sumter was still in Union hands. The Confederates were eager to get Fort Sumter. In fact, Jefferson Davis had sent a diplomatic delegation to Washington to try to negotiate for the return of Fort Sumter and also for Fort Pickens, which was at Pensacola, Florida, and also occu, and occupied by federal troops. President Lincoln had a terrible decision to make, because shortly after he became president, he was informed that the garrison at Fort Sumter had 6 weeks of supplies left. In other words if they weren't resupplied or reinforcement in 6 weeks they'd be starved out. So Lincoln had to make a decision about what to do. Uh, he was pressed from all directions. There were those who told him to pull out, we can't possibly defend it successfully, pull out. We'll make a stand elsewhere. There were those who told him you can't possibly pull out. You've got to stand there. You've got to reinforce Fort Sumter. Lincoln finally made a decision and Lincoln's decision was a brilliant one. He decided he would not withdraw. He would not reinforce. He would simply resupply. He would send food and medical supplies to the garrison. Not an act of war, he said. It's an act of humanity. And when Lincoln made this decision, Jefferson Davis faced a terrible decision. Davis believed that the Union administration, Lincoln
administration, had been playing fast and loose with him because Lincoln's secretary of state, in an informal relationship, back up, informal communications with, um, with Davis' delegation in Washington, the delegation, Lincoln would not meet with them. But in informal communications with the secretary of state, William Henry Seward, let it be believed that Lincoln was planning to withdraw from Fort Sumter. That word went back to Davis and then when word came that the Lincoln administration was not gonna withdraw from Fort Sumter, Davis believed that they had not been played with forthrightly. So he had to decide what to do. Now should he reduce Fort Sumter or not? The arguments to reduce Fort Sumter were powerful. One was that if the Confederate government didn't do anything, the state of South Carolina might do something because there were many zealots and hotheads in Charleston who might act on their own and had been threatening to act on their own for, since Fort Sumter had been occupied by the federal garrison. And if hotheads in South Carolina acted against Fort Sumter, it would make the government in Montgomery look ridiculous. The second thing was, if he acted against Fort Sumter and some sort of conflict occurred, that would probably bring Virginia and other slave states on the Confederate side, which would be a plus. The third and most important thing, I think, the Confederate States of America claimed that they were an independent nation. And when they looked at Fort Sumter, what they saw was a military post occupied by foreign troops, uninvited foreign troops and they had asked these foreign troops to leave. They had offered to negotiate and to make a payment for the value of Fort Sumter, but they were rebuffed. What kind of independent nation Davis said to himself, are we if we allow a foreign military garrison to remain? And to argue against action against Fort Sumter, there some who said well if we do this, we will be blamed for starting the war and we will lose all our friends in the North. As it is now, we've got a number of friends in the North and Lincoln does not have a free hand, but if we shoot first there's an argument among historians on how powerful that counter-influence was, a lot of it is after the fact and we're really not sure, but clearly that point was made, but overriding Davis was the fact of Confederate independence, and he directed that Fort Sumter, if it would not surrender, be taken down. And he sent word to his command in Charleston to do that. The commander got word from Fort Sumter that they would be starved out, sent back to Montgomery for instructions. He was told if they would give, if, if the garrison would give a time and a date for surrender, we won't shoot. And the commander at, uh, Fort Sumter said he would go out on a certain date unless he received instructions from his government. The Confederates knew that
the re-supply convoy was en route. The order went out to shoot April the 12\textsuperscript{th}, 1861, early in the morning, and guns fired, and Fort Sumter of course failed.

Speaker 1: If you can just, um, redo the end and indicate who fired the guns first.

Speaker 2: All right. President Davis thus decided that he would instruct his commander at, in Charleston to demand the surrender of Fort Sumter. Uh, this officer did so. The reply was from the, uh, garrison at Fort Sumter that we will have to surrender the commander of the garrison, we will have to surrender, you know, at a certain time unless we are re-supplied, and so Beauregard says well, good. You're gonna have to, General Beauregard was the confederate commander in Charleston. He went back to Montgomery for instructions, said they tell me they'll, they'll have to leave soon. And he was told, well, if they'll give you a specific time and date, okay. Otherwise, you're gonna have to reduce it. Well General Beauregard sent a deputation back out to the fort. He was given time and date, but there was a caveat. The federal commander says if I receive instructions otherwise from my government or I'm reinforced, I will not surrender. Then General Beauregard knew his orders were clear. He sent directives out and the Confederates opened fire on Fort Sumter, April the 12\textsuperscript{th}, 1861.

Speaker 1: And what happened?

Speaker 2: Fort Sumter re, reduced very quickly. Uh, there were really no casualties in the bombardment. There were a few federal casualties after, when the gu, uh, when a gun blew up, uh, but the, uh, Union soldiers were allowed to march out. They boarded ships and went back north.

Speaker 1: Okay. Let's discuss the more significant battles in, during the Civil War. And to, to the extent you're able, uh, let's do it chronologically.

Speaker 2: You ask about the most significant battles in the Civil War.

Speaker 1: And also, uh, general, uh, President Davis's role.
Speaker 2: And Jefferson and there, and how they reacted with Jefferson Davis and vice versa. Well, I will try to do that in, in, in a fashion that, that makes sense of, uh, of what it is and not just give you an encyclopedia. What has to start was the first major battle because it was very important for Davis and for the Confederates. This was the Battle of First Manassas or First Bull Run, which occurred in July of 1861. Everybody in Richmond knew that conflict was imminent. Davis wanted to be there. Got on a train. He went up there; for him he got there a little bit late. The fight was over, but he came there right on the, uh, just in the aftermath of the battle. He was very excited that his army had stood and that his army had actually turned back the federals. This gave the Confederates a feeling of great joy. They felt they had proved themselves in the battlefield. They believed that this proof meant that they would win their independence. Jefferson Davis himself was exultant, but Davis did not think that this was the end. Davis believed that they had a long hard struggle. And, of course, Davis was directing a war on more than one front. Virginia was not the only front. There was a front out on the West and the West encompassed everything from Georgia to the Mississippi River and even beyond. It was a huge theater. And Davis placed in command out there the man he thought was the best officer he had, General Albert Sidney Johnston, a person he'd known at West Point. Uh, General Johnston went out to the West early in 1862. He set up his command post in Kentucky, but in February of 1862, a Union general, an unknown Union general at that time by the name of Ulysses S. Grant, won two battles on two rivers on the Tennessee, Kentucky border, Fort Henry, Fort D, Fort Henry and Fort Donelson, which flanked Johnston's line and drove Johnston all the way out of Tennessee, all the way down into northern Mississippi. This was a time of terrible crisis for Jefferson Davis. He had so much faith in Johnston. And now here was Johnston driven all this way back. There was a terrible outcry against Johnston. Davis never lost faith. He told Johnston that he had faith in him, that Johnston would have to stand and fight at some point. But while Johnston, while he was tryin' to encourage Johnston, Davis also had to face another catastrophe. The largest city in the Confederacy, New Orleans, fell to the federal navy in April of 1862. Nobody had any idea that New Orleans was in any danger and Jefferson Davis made a mistake in thinking that the Confederate force way down the Mississippi River could stem and hold back a Union onslaught, a naval onslaught. When the Union navy steamed past those two forts there was nothing to stop them. They had been a small naval force in New
Orleans but Davis had ordered it northwards up the Mississippi to confront union forces coming down. So New Orleans’ fall was a terrible blow to him and a terrible surprise to him. But almost at the same time New Orleans fell Albert Johnston struck back in a battle called Shiloh or the Pittsburgh Landing, uh, just north of the Tennessee-Kentucky border, and there he stopped the federal advance. The battle lines in the West were for the moment basically sort of a stalemate. I mean the federals were stopped advancing, they stabilized the lines in the Confederate West. And if you come back to the Confederate East in the summer of 1862, uh, Davis is looking at a confederate army being pushed back to the very gates of Richmond. Uh, the federal soldiers can hear the bells and the chimes of the city, uh, fighting takes place out there, and the Confederate commander is wounded and Davis makes one of his most fateful military decisions, he puts Robert E. Lee in command of what becomes known as the Army of Northern Virginia, which will be the most famous Confederate army and Lee, of course, will be its most successful general. He and Lee are of a mind on how the Confederates are to fight this war. They both believe in attack. They both believe in offensive. They both want an audacious course. Lee acts in an audacious manner in what is known as the Seven Days’ Campaign. He stops the Con, the federal advance on Richmond. Then later that summer Lee leaves Richmond and goes up to the northern part of Virginia and the Battle of Second Manassas or Second Bull Run he turns back the federal thrust. At this point, beginning of September of 1862, Lee decides to carry the war into Maryland. This is not a decision Lee makes beyond Davis' province. In fact, Davis writes a letter to another officer in the summer of '62, saying that Lee will take every advantage of every opportunity. He knows what I want and I know what he can do. They both wanted to take the war to the enemy. Amazingly, for the Confederates, at this very time Lee was getting ready to head into Maryland the Confederate army in the West, now known as the Army of Tennessee, had moved from Mississippi to Chattanooga and had a new commander, a man, a general by the name of Braxton Bragg, and General Bragg was ready to try an invasion of Kentucky. So in the fall of 1862, the Confederates invade Maryland in the East and Kentucky in the West. In many ways, the Gettysburg is often considered the high watermark of the confederacy. And in many ways, this two-pronged invasion is, because success in both those places, even in one of those places, might've tipped the balance with Great Britain and would have far-reaching impact on this side of the ocean as well. And Jefferson Davis was aware of this, and Jefferson Davis also realized that this invasion of Kentucky and Maryland was a
political act as well as a military act. He gave each of his commanders a proclamation that they were to publish when they got into Kentucky and Maryland, saying that the Confederates were only fighting for defense, only fighting for their liberty, and the people in Kentucky and Maryland needed to make a decision. They needed to throw off the yoke of the Union and they needed to decide if they wanted to deal with the Confederates, the Confederates would make peace with them. But it was a decision they were gonna have to make. Unfortunately for Jefferson Davis and his side, both of those invasions [were] turned back. And Maryland, September in 1862, with the Battle of Antietam or Sharpsburg, Robert E. Lee fought a tactical draw, but he had to pull back into Virginia. In Kentucky in October of 1862, the Confederates were defeated and the Confederates had to withdraw back into Tennessee. Now the, the turning back in Kentucky and the, the turning back in, in Maryland were terribly important because they gave Abraham Lincoln the opportunity to issue the Emancipation Proclamation, which made slavery a, brought slavery to the forefront of the war; heretofore Lincoln had said the war was only about Union, that slavery wasn't involved. Now slavery is up at the front as well. This increases the difficulty for the Confederates diplomatically because the British had been anti-slavery for a long time. And now the Confederates would have to also get around the fact that the Union is fighting a war against slavery. From Davis's point of view, the Emancipation Proclamation just gave new evidence of the horror of the war and the bestiality, as he would see it, of his foe, because he saw in the Emancipation Proclamation a call for servants to rise against masters, for blacks against whites, for the horrid possi, horrible possibility of, of race war and Davis was very, very distressed by this. But from a military point of view the Emancipation Proclamation didn't have any immediate effect, though it certainly would have an effect down the road. In 1863, the Confederates suffered the, the two defeats that are in everybody's mind are connected with the ultimate Union victory and the war--Gettysburg in the East, Vicksburg in the West, both in July of 1863. And yet both these battles help us understand the way Jefferson Davis looked at the war. They were both in fact involved and, and, in, in, in Davis' mind at the same time. Davis' leading general, Robert E. Lee, told him if you give me all I need, as much as you can, I can go north and I can win this thing for us. I think I can strike a blow. Lee was just coming off his great victory at Chancellorsville where he defeated the Union armies in May of 1863, though at great cost to Lee and his army because his great lieutenant, Stonewall Jackson, was killed at, uh, mortally wounded at, uh, Chancellorsville. When Lee asked for permission to
go to Chan, to, to north and Lee wanted as much reinforcement as he could get, there were people who were telling Jefferson Davis don't do that. What we need to do is send a portion of Lee's army west to reinforce the confederates at Vicksburg in Mississippi, to turn back the attack on Vicksburg, the last great Confederate citadel on the Mississippi, which would divide the Confederacy, split it. Jefferson Davis decided to go with Robert E. Lee. He decided to go with Lee for a number of reasons, in my mind all legitimate, but chief, if you look at it, he was his best general saying, look, I have a chance to do something, support me. In the West he was not at all as sure about the generalship and it wasn't because he wasn't interested in the West. It wasn't because he didn't think the Wwest was important. After all, his home was Mississippi. He knew all about the Mississippi River, its valley. He knew how important the great West was to the Confederacy. He devoted a great deal of time and attention to trying to devise command structures and commanders that would prevail for him in the West, uh, but he did not succeed. And Lee failed in Pennsylvania. The confederates failed to hold on in Vicksburg. The Union gained control of the Mississippi River. The Union drove the Confederate army back into, into, uh, Virginia. The Union drove the Confederate army back into Virginia after Gettysburg. Then the Confederates regrouped in the, in the West after, uh, they returned from Kentucky in the fall of '62 and, and, amazingly enough in the fall of '63, they won their only great victory, the Army of Tennessee, even after Vicksburg defeated the federal armies in the Battle of Chickamauga, just outside of Chattanooga. And they laid siege to Chattanooga. At this time, Jefferson Davis made a decision that was in keeping with his view himself as commander-in-chief and his view of his role as president of his country. There was a good deal of unhappiness and unrest. That's not really accurate. There was a hornet's nest of bitterness, small-mindedness, back-biting and vituperativeness amongst the senior generals in the Army of Tennessee. This had been the case for a time. In fact, Davis had made a journey west in late '62 and early '63, in no small part to deal with this army of Tennessee problem. He goes again after the Battle of Chickamauga because requests come to him he needs to defy General Bragg. He needs to defy this general. He needs to defy that general. Davis goes out to take a firsthand look at the Army of Tennessee and of course along the way he makes speeches, he, he, in communities from the backs of trains. He talks to soldiers. He goes again in the fall of '63 all the way to Mississippi, a month on the road. He felt that he should go out and see his soldiers, see his army, see his people. The victory at Chickamauga is short-lived for the Confederates because in November of 1863 the new Union
commander at Chattanooga, the man who had won at Fort Henry and Fort Donelson, the man who had won at Vicksburg, Ulysses S. Grant, wins the Battle of Chattanooga and drives the Confederates back down into Georgia. So 1863 does not end on a good note for the Confederates. Yet the Confederates have two powerful armies in place, and Jefferson Davis finally replaces Braxton Bragg and Joseph E. Johnston is made commander of the Army of Tennessee the western army. In the spring of '64 two powerful armies, Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia in the East, Johnston's Army of Tennessee in the West, face Union onslaughts. The onslaughts are directed by General Grant who is in Virginia and his key subordinate in the West is General William Sherman. Grant attacks Lee in what's now become known as the Overland Campaign, a 6-week campaign from early May to mid-June in which the casualties are terrible but Lee fights and brings his army in close to Richmond again. He confers with Davis all the time. Davis applauds Lee's decision to fight. In the West, Joseph Johnston faces William Sherman and Johnston retreats from northern Georgia down to the environs of Atlanta. There are a few fights. Davis can't get any information from Johnston. Johnston claims after the war that he has this great plan to defeat Sherman which he would've used, but during the campaign he writes to his wife and tells his wife he really doesn't know what to do. And so Johnson really had no plan. He was out-generated by Sherman on the, backed up against Atlanta. Davis decides he must remove Johnston because he wants somebody who will fight for him. And he removes Johnston from command and replaces him with John Bell Hood and the battles for Atlanta, the fights for Atlanta, take place in the summer of 1864. The Confederates fail. The same time that the Confederates fail out there--Sherman captures Atlanta, September of 1864--General Grant is laying siege to Petersburg just south of Richmond, which is another way of saying he's laying siege to Richmond as well. The siege lasts until the spring of 1865, when General Grant finally breaks Lee's lines and Lee is forced to head west into, Richmond is evacuated and Jefferson Davis has to leave Richmond in April of 1865. He leaves on April the 2nd with his government, trying to set up a government farther west in Virginia. And in the West after the fall of Atlanta, General Hood tries to advance into Tennessee. He makes a number of serious misjudgments and tactical errors and his army is basically destroyed at the Battle of Nashville in December of 1864. In the early months of '65 Hood's army ends up retreating all the way to North Carolina with Joseph Johnston in charge again. Lee tries to escape from General Grant. He can't. The two armies surrender in April of 1865. And talking about Lee and
Grant, one thing I have, I mean Lee and Johnston, the West and the East, I don't think I mentioned at all, and I do wanna mention this because it's so often overlooked, is the Trans-Mississippi. This was the area given to the lands west of the Mississippi River. Now for the confederacy this was a lot. So all the state of Arkansas, most of the state of Louisiana and all the state of Texas, and Jefferson Davis was very aware of the Trans-Mississippi. And he talked to governors and he talked, uh, to his generals out in this area and he understood the importance of the Trans-Mississippi, and he, in fact, after Vicksburg, he had to give his commanding general out here, a man named Edmund Kirby Smith, exorbitant power because the Confederate authority from Richmond was so circumscribed by the loss of any way to get across the Mississippi River. But Davis realized the importance of the Trans-Mississippi, and in understanding the importance of the Trans-Mississippi, [we] see something about Davis understanding the nature of the country he was leading and the war he was directing. This had to do with soldiers in the Trans-Mississippi. At the, um, time of Vicksburg, the Confederate commander around Vicksburg, General Joseph Johnston again, wanted the troops in Arkansas to be ordered to come across the river and join him so, to help him defend against the federal assault at Vicksburg. Jefferson Davis told the commanding general in Arkansas of Johnston's request and he said that's a good idea. You do it if you can. The general in, in Arkansas told Davis that I don't think I can do this, that I don't have enough people. If I leave, things will be in a bad way. And Jefferson Davis understood that loyalty to the Confederacy was something that was being built during the course of the war. There was not a Confederate nationalism. There was not a confederate allegiance in the spring of 1861. It was built during the war. And he understood that if he moved all troops out of Arkansas he might lose Arkansas. He wrote to Kirby Smith and he told Kirby Smith that the military maxim of concentration we have to temper, because in our case, if we move troops from places we lose troops and loyalty and place. We lose, in other words, if we take everybody out of Arkansas to fight Mississippi and Tennessee, we may lose Arkansas, and the troops won't come, either. Davis understood this. He understood this from the beginning. In 1861 he urged his commanders to brigade troops by state because he said our soldiers feel a great loyalty to their state, more so than to the country at this point. So we wanna put them in a place where they will feel loyalty and will want to do the very best they can. He said on a number of occasions in public addresses and in private letters that the Confederates were building a national loyalty and a national allegiance during the course of the
war. And he always equated this back with the revolution. He said this is what America should
do in the Revolutionary War. The Revolutionary War was a cauldron of American nationalism.
Thus, for Davis, the Civil War's gonna be the cauldron of Confederate nationalism.

Speaker 1: Wonderful. Wow.

Cooper: I've run, I've run out of gas.

[applause]
Speaker 1: Wow.

Other Speaker: That was remarkable.

Speaker 1: That's amazing.

Other Speaker: That was just remarkable.

Speaker 1: Um, there's much controversy about the generals in the Confederate army, uh,
some have argued that they were universally inept. Others have argued that Mr. Davis was an
ineffective, uh, commander-in-chief, military commander-in-chief. Uh, where do you come
down on this issue and feel free to refer to specific generals and be sure you use their names and
avoid the ****.

Cooper: You ask about Jefferson Davis and his generals and Davis' effectiveness as
commander-in-chief. I think that it is a mixed record. And, but I think there's a fundamental
reason for this mix, mixed record, and it's not because Jefferson Davis did not know how to
handle generals. Davis had some excellent generals and he had some abysmal generals, but he
didn't handle them simply because they were excellent or abysmal. That's not the way he made
his judgment, which is terribly, terribly unfortunate. Uh, Davis' one really superior commanding
general was Robert E. Lee. He understood that Lee was a superior general. He respected Lee.
Lee respected Davis. One reason Lee respected Davis so much was that Lee was as good a
subordinate as he was a commander. He knew how to be a subordinate. Two generals that
Davis had very bad relations with, and the two people that are usually brought in when one is criticizing Davis as commander-in-chief, were Joseph Johnston and Pierre Beauregard. And he did have bad relations with both, but the, the reason he did is the same for both, and it began in 1861 and it never got any better. And we'll take a minute to go into that because I think that's terribly important. Davis and Joe Johnston fell out in the summer of 1861 because when Joseph, when Jefferson Davis sent to the Confederate Congress the names of the five full generals, the senior commanders, Joseph Johnston was No. 4 on that list. Joseph Johnston thought he should be No. 1 on that list. Now there are reasons for that, but I don't wanna go into all that detail because that's not to the point right now. But when Joseph Johnston found out he was No. 4, he was very angry. He wrote a very hot letter to the president, but like we're all told to do he put it in his drawer for the night. He got up the next mornin', looked at it, he sent it anyway and his, major biographer says it was a crazy thing for him to do. It was a very crazy thing for him to do, I mean he condemned Jefferson Davis. He condemned the Confederate Congress. He said no matter what the president or the Congress said, he was still the senior general in the Confederate army. Now what did this do to Jefferson Davis? Jefferson Davis' whole conception of the Confederacy was that it was a sacred cause. When the Union had failed, Davis was despondent. With the Union gone the Confederacy had to succeed, was his last hope to save the American Revolution, as he saw it. And Davis believed that he had put all of himself into this task. Davis believed that he had overcome personal self interests, that the goal was all, that the cause was all, and he expected that same from all around him, civilian and general, but especially from his professional military. And what did Joe Johnston show him? Joe Johnston showed him that Joe Johnston was more important than the Confederate States of America. Joe Johnston showed him that his own personal ambition was more important than the cause. Jefferson Davis never forgave him and never got over it. Pierre Beauregard, later in that same year, now Davis had promoted Beauregard to full general in the aftermath of First Manassas, so Beauregard was No. 5 on that list of five. That didn't bother Beauregard. He was much junior than Johnston. It didn't bother him at all. But later that fall, Beauregard sent in a report about the Battle of First Manassas in which he said things about the president and the president's response to the battle that weren't really right, and Beauregard also made public his, um, feelings in ways that were really not professionally proper. But for Jefferson Davis it went far beyond that. For Davis it meant that Beauregard, like Johnston, was putting Beauregard first. And there was even talk in
the fall of ’61 that Beauregard, who was a great hero of Fort Sumter, a hero of First Manassas, might run for president. And Davis who, of course, was provisional president for Montgomery, ran for president in November of 1861, he and Alexander Stephens unopposed. There's talk of Beauregard's running. Again, for Davis, this meant that Beauregard like Johnston was interested in Beauregard. Beauregard was No. 1, not the cause, and Davis never looked upon Beauregard in the same way again, and equally from the side of those two generals. Those two generals never trusted Davis again, and so there was bad blood between them. But from Davis' point of view--and I'm not defending Davis--I'm just saying the reason he looked upon those two men as he did was because he didn't trust them anymore. Now another general that's always brought up with Davis is Braxton Bragg. And while one can understand his reaction to Johnston and Beauregard, in fact, one can say that with Johnston particularly he'd bent over backwards to keep Johnston going, even distrusting and, and putting up with a great deal from Johnston that other commanders-in-chief would not have put up with. But Bragg was, is a different case. And yet it's almost the same common denominator. Braxton Bragg started off the Civil War in Pensacola, Florida, backwater. He trained a lot of troops there, troops that were sent east and troops that were sent north to Albert Johnston's army. Well Beauregard and Joseph Johnston, Albert Johnston, Robert E. Lee were in the field—well, Lee wasn't--I should back up, but while Beauregard, Johnston, the two Johnstons [were] in the field, Bragg was training troops. But Bragg never complained. And Jefferson Davis liked that. He saw in Bragg a man who put the cause first.

Speaker 1: Let's pause here a second. I need to change the tape. After that what I'm gonna

PART 3
Speaker 1: Okay. Continue with Mr. Bragg.

Cooper: All right. Jefferson Davis and Bragg and, and why Davis, uh, stood by Bragg. Uh, uh, Davis as I said, uh, looked upon Bragg as a selfless commander, and, uh, Bragg fought at Shiloh and he got generally good remarks, good marks for, uh, Shiloh, and then he was, uh, Beauregard's second in command of the army when they retreated down into Tennessee after Shiloh and when Beauregard put himself on leave without informing Richmond, that is Davis or
the secretary of war, Jefferson Davis took great umbrage at that. Beauregard said he was, he was sick. Davis was a man who dealt with physical afflictions all the time, and he felt that Beauregard again was putting Beauregard first, so he relieved Beauregard and put Bragg in command. Well Bragg, uh, very soon thereafter, conducting one of the most amazing operations of the war, he transferred his army both overland and by rail from Mississippi to Chattanooga to prepare for a campaign in, the Tennessee. Uh, Davis looked at that and said, "My gosh. I might have my western Robert E. Lee." Of course, Davis had been crushed when Albert Sidney Johnson had been killed at Shiloh. He thought his best man was gone. But now here’s Bragg taking over the army, gets the army in good shape. He moves the army all the way to Chattanooga. He gets ready to invade Tennessee, I mean, uh, Kentucky. Uh, Davis looks with great favor on that. He thinks maybe he's found somebody, but things go bad for Bragg when he gets to Kentucky, and in the aftermath of that we have the stew that will boil and finally explode in the Army of Tennessee. Uh, when Braxton Bragg gets to Kentucky, Bragg was a great disciplinarian. He could train troops, he could move troops, but Bragg when he got to the battlefield was another matter. In Kentucky, he also dealt with General Edmund Kirby Smith who would end up in the Trans-Mississippi, but who was at that time in, in Tennessee as well. Uh, Bragg ranked Kirby Smith, though Jefferson Davis had not given Bragg formal command of the two forces that went into Kentucky. As he told Bragg, he told Bragg, "You and Kirby Smith are both patriots. I am sure that you will all do the right thing for the cause." Again, from Davis' point of view, the cause was all, and people should be dedicated. He didn't have to say you must follow commands. They should work together. When they got into Tenne, into Kentucky, and they didn't work together. They ended up as a disaster. The Confederates fell back, and what does Davis do? The Con, the senior Confederate commanders all write Davis blaming each other for, for, for, for the failure. Davis invites all of'em to come, the three of 'em, to come to, to Richmond, talks to 'em. They still blame each other. He leaves 'em in place. It's, it's absolutely unbelievable that he did that. Uh, perhaps he thought that, that things were such that, that he could work with Bragg and get things worked out, and the next spring he creates a great theater command in the West. Uh, he puts Joseph Johnston in command of it, which means Bragg, Johnston is over Bragg, and so he thought maybe with Johnston helpin' Bragg could somehow get the Army of Tennessee straightened out. No such luck. The snake, uh, the nest of vipers and rattlesnakes and such was right there at Chickamauga. Uh, they were writing Davis again:
you've got to do this. You've got to fire this person. You've got to fire this person. Braxton Bragg at the forefront, giving and taking. Davis goes out there, meets with the army, listens to these generals, and the most unbelievable command decision Jefferson Davis made during the Civil War. He left Braxton Bragg in command. The right kind of commander-in-chief, a man who, who had the, uh, the, the steel and determination should have cleaned the whole lot of senior generals in the Army of Tennessee out. Every corps commander and the commanding general should have been fired. Well Davis didn't do it, and he knew he had not done what he should have done because when he brought a senior lieutenant general in to assist Bragg, he said, "I know things aren't as they should be, but I am relying on your patriotism to make things right." Now why he didn't do that is a question I cannot answer satisfactually. I think it had to do both with his, still his conviction about Bragg's conviction about the Confederacy, also his feeling that, about the rank in the Confederate army. The Confederates had created this rank of full general. There was very few full generals, and full generals were supposed to command big armies. If he got rid of Bragg, who'd he had left, who'd he have? Nobo, nobody but Joseph Johnston because Beauregard was totally personna non grata with him. He needed to go down the ru, down into the, to the chain of command but he couldn't bring himself to do that, and I said that's the most inexplicable command decision he made during the war in my judgment, and he stuck by Bragg there. Of course, 2 months, I mean a month later in November, the Battle of Missionary Ridge, Bragg lost Tennessee, and, uh, Davis did accept his resignation at that time.

Speaker 1: Is it inexplicable to you that President Davis put so much faith in Leonidas Polk who was merely an Episcopal minister?

Cooper: Well his, his faith in Polk is just one of these horribly, horrible cases of misplaced faith. Uh, Polk had been at West Point. Davis knew him there, but as soon as he got out of West Point Polk went into the ministry, never even served in the army. He ended up being, in, in 1861, he was the Episcopal bishop of Louisiana. He came to, um, Richmond and told Davis he believed in the cause. He wanted to help any way he could. Davis made him a major general and sent him to the West, and for a time he was a senior Confederate commander in the West. Polk was a disaster as a general. Uh, even worse, Polk was, was, was a malcontent, and Polk did all he could to cause trouble in the army. He was one of the people who caused so much
trouble with Bragg. He and Bragg couldn't get along. Fine, but he would not act as a subordinate would act. Bragg didn't fire him. Davis stood by him. I mean Davis stood by both Bragg and Polk when they're at each other's throats in the same army. I mean it just, wa, wa, uh, uh, it's an, almost an unbelievable kinda situation, and again, the Army of Tennessee was something that Da, Davis never handled a command situation there in an effective manner. He never did.

Speaker 1: So why did Davis stand by these people?

Cooper: I think it was this whole idea about commitment. The, these were people who were totally committed to the cause, thus, they had to be virtuous. Thus, they had to somehow be effective. It was like commitment equaled effectiveness, which is not necessarily true at all. Now I do think there is a difference though. I think with Bragg you do have the fact of this general officer rank, which I think was, uh, added to the Bragg problems.

Speaker 1: Give us a su –

[Cameraman, after cough]: Excuse me.

Speaker 1: That's okay. Please give us a sense of, um, Mr. Davis's, the execution of his strategy. Was there a strategy?

Cooper: You ask about Jefferson Davis and his strategy. This is a question that is, uh, not easily answered, and you find lots of opinions about it. I really think that, um, the basic approach that, uh, one of the, uh, most senior of all Davis' historians, and it's Frank Vandiver took, uh, a long time ago, uh, 4 decades-plus ago. Um, about 4 decades ago, is, um, the, the best answer, uh, uh, Professor Vandiver came up with an idea he called the offensive defensive, and I think that's as, as good as any to, to try to understand what Davis was about. Now Davis understood one of the great assets the Confederacy had was this tremendous land mass. It's a long way from the Potomac River to the Ozark Mountains to west Texas. It's a long way, and for the, uh, United States to conquer the Confederate States they would have to take over all of this land, but Davis at the same time realized, that just to stand pat and let the, Co, the Union build up momentum and momentum, he understood that the, uh, physical assets of both sides weren't
equal. After all, he'd been secretary of war. He was in the United States Senate. He knew that there were more people up north. He knew that the North had a bigger manufacturing base, so Davis also wanted to strike at the North. He believed in addition, uh, that to hit the North and make them feel what warfare was like would weaken the will of the North to fight. But he was hampered by a lack of resources, and he told people as early as 1861, look, when there were all kinds of cries from the Confederate public, "Carry the war to the enemy. Go to the enemy. Fight. Fight." Davis said there was nothing more he wanted to do, but he didn't have the means to do it. He said, "I can't even respond to these criticisms and explain why I can't do what I would like to do because that tells the enemy too much about us." He said this to his brother. He said this to generals. He said he would certainly like to see the front on the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania, rather than the Potomac River or the Rappahannock in Virginia, but he said he simply couldn't do that. So Davis believed that he had to be, oh, generally on the defensive, but to strike whenever he could. I think that's the whole reason he got along so well with Lee. Lee was very audacious and Lee wanted to strike, and Jefferson Davis believed in striking. He supported Lee in '62 and '63 when Lee went across the river, I mean across the Potomac River, into the north. He supported Lee striking out against Grant in '64. Of course Lee was totally unable to turn Grant back, but Davis supported the attack, because I don't think Davis believed that the Confederates could sit on their hands and win.

Speaker 1: So do you think that the Civil War could –

Other Speaker: Hold, uh, hold just a second. ****. You're good.

Speaker 1: So do you think the Civil War could have been won by the South?

Cooper: Oh yes. I mean I'm a great believer in historical contingency. The Civil War could have been won by the South. Uh, there are any a number of occasions if thi, things had gone differently. Uh, for example, in 1862, if Robert E. Lee had prevailed in Maryland and Braxton Bragg had prevailed in Kentucky, it could have altered the diplomatic, uh, scales in a fundamental fashion, with the British deciding that they would come in to mediate at the least, or it, it could have, uh, encouraged antiwar feeling in the North. It might have encouraged the
border states like Maryland and Kentucky, uh, to rethink what the situation was. That was certainly a chance that it could have gone the other way, and, uh, in the summer of 1864, Abraham Lincoln was very discouraged. General Grant had suffered horrendous casualties, in, in his battles with Lee from May to that summer, and Grant lost as many men as Lee started with. Also in that summer, Joseph Johnston had, uh, kept Sherman out of Atlanta, at least, to, to, to, uh, the, the middle of the summer in 1864, and Lincoln actually decided he might lose the election and that, uh, if Lincoln, uh, were, were defeated, uh, then some sort of peace would be made. Uh, if, uh, the, thus if John Bell Hood could have somehow managed to win in Atlanta--and, uh, one of the big fights was very tight--uh, things could have gone the other way, and you can bring up other instances, but I surely think it was possible for the South to win. Yes.

Speaker 1: Do you think that the South did not win because of decisions made by President Davis in, for example, those two battles that you mentioned or those series of battles?

Cooper: No, I don't really think so. Uh, Davis's decisions I don't think brought the Confederates down. In terms of Antietam, he supported the, uh, invasion of the North, but he had nothing to do with the tactical outcome of Antietam. He had nothing to do with what happened in Kentucky. He could only be appalled by that. Um, I don't think Davis's decisions, uh, had anything to do with whether the South won or lost. I think in carrying out his duties as commander-in-chief, he did as well as anyone could reasonably have been expected to do and better than most people, uh, who were available to, to replace him could have or would have done. Uh, Lincoln ended up with two really great generals, Sherman and Grant. Lee [i.e., Davis] ended up with one really great general. Two is better than one.

Speaker 1: Say that again. You said Lee wound up with.

Cooper: Oh. I'm sorry. I say, Lincoln wound up with two great generals, Grant and Sherman. He needed both of 'em to win. Davis wound up with one great general, Lee. Two is better than one.

Speaker 1: Please discuss the death of Mister, of the Davises' child, Joseph.
Cooper: In the spring, uh, the death of Joseph Davis, Jefferson Davis' young son. In the spring of 1864, uh, young Joe Davis, as he was known, uh, fell off, a porch wall in the, in, uh, Executive Mansion and he fell to a brick floor and he crushed his head and he lived a very short time. He died the very same day. Uh, Jefferson Davis himself was as at, at his office. Uh, his wife was there with him. His office not in the, uh, uh, not in the Confederate White House, his, uh, office down where some Confederate, uh, cabinet offices had their establishments. Uh, his wife was there with him. She had carried him lunch. Word came that the boy had fallen. They raced back up. They realized there was no hope for him. Jefferson Davis was just, just, just absolutely destroyed. He was, uh, spent the night walking the floors of the White House. He just was emotionally hammered in a very, very difficult way.

Speaker 1: Do you think that death impacted his presidency and the efforts of the Confederacy?

Cooper: Do I think that young Joe's death impacted the, his efforts? No. Jefferson Davis for a long time had overcome both emotional and physical, uh, difficulties, sad, I mean sadness, physical disability, and he kept his eye on his mark on his, what he saw as his duty, and I don't think that the trauma of Joe's death affected anything that he did. This was in, uh, in, just before the beginning of the campaign between Lee and Grant, and just before Sherman headed off against Joseph Johnston. He had plenty to look at, plenty to do. He did that, and of course, at the time the young boy was killed, Varina was pregnant, and she gave birth not too long thereafter to the, the one who would be their final child, a young girl who would be their final child. But the trauma of Joe's death was, uh, undeniable.

Speaker 1: Please discuss for us Davis's attempts to, I guess we could say sue for peace with the Union. Um, you could include efforts, agreements to abolish slavery, how he interacted with Lincoln – Hampton Roads.

Cooper: You asked about Jefferson Davis and peace to the United States. Jefferson Davis was always willing to have peace with the United States. He said so from the beginning, but
peace for him required two things, independence and the maintenance of slavery. We should just say one thing, independence, because if the Confederacy remained independent it could do what it wanted with slavery, and that's all the southerners ever cared about, was that they would do what they wanted. Of course, they never really wanted to do anything with that, but that the, nobody else told 'em what to do, and, uh, Da, Davis on a number of occasions said that he would, um, make peace if the Union would permit the Confederate, Confederate independence. Uh, give you, uh, two examples. In 1863, Vice President Stephens had pressed on Davis that, uh, the Confederates should sue for peace. Davis said, "Well, Lincoln won't agree except if we give up, and I'm not gonna do that," and, uh Stu, Stephens said, "Well let, let's, let's try," and so Davis, uh, drew up documents addressed to Lincoln, and, uh, gave 'em to Vice President Stephens. Stephens initially intended to go to Washington, or try to get to Washington by water. Uh, but he, um, then he was, he was gonna go with Lee's army, uh, but nothing came of it, of course, because Lee got beaten at Gettysburg, and, uh, Davis, uh, Stephens did not leave Virginia with Lee's army. He ins, he decided, they decided instead he would go by water, but when he got down to Fortress Monroe, uh, where the James River empty, empties in the Chesapeake Bay occupied by the federal government, uh, it was just after Gettysburg, and they, and Stephens was turned back. Of course what Davis and Stephens had hoped was he would appear in Washington in the aftermath of a great Confederate military victory. Well, you take the winter, the final winter, in January of 1865, the famous Hamptons Roads Conference, which occurred in Virginia. Abraham Lincoln himself appeared there. Alexander Stephens appeared as one of the Confederate delegation. Uh, this came about because of an informal approach to Davis from an old pre-war, uh, uh, friend who remained loyal to the Union and had come down to Richmond from Washington and talked about the possibility of peace, and Davis said, "I will talk to Lincoln about peace," but Davis said through his delegation: independence, independence, independence, and, uh, of course, Abraham Lincoln had nothing to say but independence. Uh, he would not talk but independence. And you sayin' in the winter of 1865 why could Davis still talk of independence. Well the Confederate Congress was still interested in independence. There were a few people like Alexander Stephens who would have been willing to give up independence, but I think quite clearly in January of 1865 those people were a distinct minority, and if Davis had talked about giving up Confederate independence in January of '65 he might very well have faced, he would have faced serious grilling from Congress. He might have even
faced impeachment because nobody in January of 1865 realized that April was so close. They didn't think the end was there yet. They really didn't.

Speaker 1: Why don't you take some water?

Cooper: All right.

Speaker 1: If a Confederate state had decided it wanted to become free during the Civil War, how would Mr. Davis have responded?

Cooper: Uh, he would, uh, Jefferson Davis and the possibility of a Confederate state becoming an independent state.

Speaker 1: I misspoke, uh, free, meaning a non-slave state.

Cooper: Meaning a non-slave state. Well, the Confederate Constitution would have made that very difficult for Jefferson Davis. I think also that that is such a, um, a hypothetical question, it's so far from anything that could have happened at the time, I really don't see any purpose in pursuing it.

Speaker 1: What about – actually let me follow the question then. Uh, uh, similar question. There was talk towards the end about some of the states seceding from [the Confederacy] **** –

Cooper: Su, su, and suing for peace independently, but that's not becoming free states.

Speaker 1: No, I know. I'm just, I, I'm altering the question.

Cooper: Yeah. Sure. I'll, I'll, I'll deal with that.

Speaker 1: Okay.
Cooper: The, uh, you ask about, uh, Confederate States sort of seceding from the Confederacy and pursuing, uh, peace with the United States on their own. Well, there was talk about this in, in some states. Uh, spe, well Alexander Stephens talked about it. There was talk in Georgia. There was some talk in North Carolina. Other politicians spoke about the possible potential, if you will. And how would Jefferson Davis react? Well, Jefferson Davis thought that was really, uh, totally wrong-headed. He kept saying, "We're all this together, the, that the United States is not gonna treat you any differently, he's gonna, that it's gonna treat the rest of us." In terms of what he could do to prevent it, I think Davis would have acted, uh, you know, with his army, uh, where he could have to prevent that, because he wanted for the Confederate States to succeed and that the dismemberment of the Confederate States was not something he would countenance lightly.

Speaker 1: What do you make of Mr. Davis's statements that he would have agreed to abolish slavery at the end of the Civil War if the Union would grant independence?

Cooper: You asked about slavery, Davis and the abolition of slavery, whether he would have abolished slavery if the Union granted independence. Well, Davis and slavery went on its own course far apart from whatever thing the Union did. Early in the history of the Confederacy, as early as 1862, as a matter of fact, there was some people who spoke about the possibility of arming slaves, and if you arm slaves that would prob'ly mean that somehow the emancipation at least of those who were armed. As, in 1864, this became more than idle speculation because one of the division commanders in the division commanders in the Army of Tennessee proposed this very thing. He saw the Con, major Confederate shortfall as manpower, and where could they get soldiers? From the slave population. The Union was already employing black soldiers, many of whom had been slaves, were being, brought into, put in blue uniforms in the southern states, and by 1864, you know, they had, they had fought both at Port Hudson, Louisiana, and in Charleston harbor. There had been, uh, fights where black soldiers had conducted themselves honorably in battle, and so this general said, "Look. We need to think about doin' this." Well there was a good bit of opposition to that within the army, and when it got to Richmond, Davis was advised not to touch it and to keep it quiet. There was a great deal of political opposition. Uh, Davis, uh, put the quietus on that. In the end of 1864, in December, when he sent his message to Congress,
Davis brought up the question of the use of slaves, and he said that what should happen, the Confederates under the impressment law did perm, the Confederate Congress did permit the authorities to impress slaves to work on fortifications, roads, etc., etc. Davis said the law to be changed to permit the Confederate government to own those slaves, not just to impress them. He said this went to the heart of the southern view of slavery—that you should have a master and a slave so they could build a relationship, and the master owns the slave and the slave understands that, and the master and the slave work together. He said that's better than this impressing, of we using slaves that belong to somebody else. In that same message in December of 1864, he addressed the matter of soldiers, and he said it's a very different thing to use slaves to build forts, to work on roads and railroads than it is to put 'em in uniform. He says we are not ready for that yet. He says until the white population of the South cannot maintain its independence, I am not for that, but he said if it comes to it, clearly we'll have to cons, go that way, and in the wu, very shortly thereafter, he did support the arming of slaves, and the Confederate Congress did pass a law permitting the arming of slaves, that is, putting slaves in uniforms, but the Confederate law itself, the law Congress passed, never promised independence, and yet the regulations of the Confederate War Department setup made it such that certainly those slave soldiers would have ended up, ended up free. Of, of course, the end came so quickly, uh, that, uh, only a couple of companies were ever put together. Uh, Davis in one letter of Lee beginning of April 1865, said he was hard at work tryin' to recruit Negro, put Negro regiments together. Uh, Davis then was willing to, to envision a quite complex kind of social arrangement after the war. For example, he can contemplate freedom for slaves, and they also said that slaves, the, those who had fought would be free and were guaranteed to go back to their homes. So here you have a white person, a landowner, who would have on his farm or plantation black slaves that he owned, black people who were free, who had become emancipated for fighting in the army, who were back in their homes on this man's land. This is the kind of world Davis envisioned. Now that pro, poses all kinds of legal and political problems, and how it would have all worked out we have no idea, but Davis was willin' to contemplate this kind of thing for independence, all was for independence. The Confederacy was established to maintain slavery, but Davis was willing to jettison slavery to maintain the Confederate States. Always for him the cause. The cause had to triumph.
Speaker 1: I believe, I could be wrong, that Davis proposed to Lincoln through emissaries, that he would agree to abolish slavery in the Confederacy for independence. Is that accurate?

Cooper: You, you ask whether Davis proposed to Lincoln that he would abolish slavery. He never proposed that to Lincoln. He did propose that to the European powers. He sent a diplomatic mission to Europe at the very, at, uh, had left Richmond the, the, the, the individual left Richmond the turn of 64-65, and he carried instructions that would give him authority to override other Confederate diplomats in Europe and he was to tell both, uh, the British and the French that, uh, the Confederates would abolish slavery in turn for independence. Of course the language in the documents didn't read that way. They said, the language read something like if, if there’s anything that stands in the way of your recognizing us that we have not touched upon before, we’re prepared to do that. So Davis did make that, but of course by the time this person got there, it was far too little far too late, and the war was over.

Speaker 1: Please compare and contrast, uh, President Lincoln and President Davis.

Cooper: You asked to compare Lincoln and Davis, and I'm supposed to do that in a very brief time. That's a –

Speaker 1: Well I guess the best way to do it is – um.

Cooper: I will, I will say a few things, and if I don't say what you want, you know, you can direct me more specifically.

Speaker 1: ****

Cooper: I'll start off by saying that Davis and Lincoln never knew each other. Lincoln only served one term in Congress, and the term he served in Congress was when Davis was the Me, in Mexico. He did not know Davis. They, they, Lincoln never came back to Washington, and so, uh, although Davis spent most of the next 15 years in Washington, Lincoln was never there, so Davis never knew Lincoln. They had no direct correspondence during the war because Lincoln...
would never recognize the Confederate States. And in the, in the, leading up to Fort Sumter, Lincoln communicated his intentions to the governor of South Carolina, but not to the president of the Confederate States, because he recognized the State of South Carolina, but not the Confederate States of America, and, uh, in the two instances I menished, mentioned, uh, about, the, uh, aborted Stephens mission and the Hampton Roads Conference, uh, Davis, uh, did write formal documents to Lincoln in the former occasion, but they never got delivered, so how Lincoln would’ve responded I don't know. In the Hampton Roads doc, uh, Davis did write Lincoln and Lincoln did write back. He didn't write Davis directly back. The information came back informally through this person who set up the Hampton Roads meeting. As wa, as commanders-in-chief and war leaders, they were both people of enormous will, of utter and total commitment. Each was as committed as the other. I mean Lincoln matched Davis in commitment. Uh, of course, that was one of Davis's problems. The man on the other side was as determined and as strong-willed as he was. Uh, there was a sharp difference between them though. Uh, Davis, uh, you know, talked about his dealings with his generals, with Beauregard, with, uh, Joseph Johnston and in dealings with public, other public people who he perceives as not sharing his vision of the Confederacy, his total commitment. Uh, Davis, he could not cope with that. Lincoln on the other hand, the human folly, the human comedy, Lincoln thought was there. I'll give you a perfect example. Uh, General Joseph Hooker, who was made commander of the Army of the Potomac early in 1863 and was a losing general against Lee at Chancellorsville, Hooker had been a subordinate in that army and he had not been, uh, terribly supportive of, of his previous commander, and there was Hoo, Hooker talked a lot and he talked about well, what we need in Washington is a man on a horse, you know, a dictator quote, unique, that sort of thing. So Lincoln wrote him a letter and Lincoln said to him, "Well I hear all this talk about we need this. We need that." He said, "You win enough victories we will make you anything you want." Davis could never have written that in, ever, because he could not look at it like Lincoln did. He could not see that human foibles, ambition, pettiness, is a part of the human condition. It was gonna be around. Davis believed that the Confederates had to overcome all that to succeed, and he believed he had overcome it, and he judged other people by his own perception of what he had managed to do. Now quite candidly, I will tell you I think, uh, he that he had largely overcome, and yet he was at the top, and so he could make judgments that weren't
challenged, but in his own mind he had overcome, and he made judgments based on that. Lincoln knew that the human condition didn't change.

Speaker 1: Is there any evidence that Jefferson Davis was involved in the assassination of Abraham Lincoln?

Cooper: Was Davis involved in Lincoln's assassination? That answer is absolutely no, but there is a big but that must become a, uh, behind that no. I have never seen one shred of evidence that connects Davis with John Wilkes’s Booth plot to kill Lincoln. At the same time, there were Confederate efforts to do various things in, across the Potomac River, in the District of Columbia and Maryland, to free Confederate prisoners from the big prison camp at Point Lookout, to do various things in Washington, even to the kidnapping of certain officials. Now Davis after the war maintained that he never had anything to do with any sorts of plots like that, but strong circumstantial cases have been made that the Confederates did have such schemes underway. Uh, it's hard to believe that it as familiar as Davis was, familiar isn't even the right word, as closely as Davis monitored all things military, I mean the man even looked at requests from junior officers for transfer of one reg, one regiment to another. His notations are on those documents. It's hard to believe that anything serious could have been contemplated. He knew about certain Confederate activities in the North, and he did clearly, uh, act against possibilities. For example, there was, some people proposed that they should load ships up with blankets infected with yellow fever and smallpox and such and send them into northern cities. He clearly disavowed things like that, but in terms of covert actions by military groups, commando-type things, he had to know about some of those, but in terms of connection in the John Wilkes Booth and the assassination, absolutely not.

PART 4
Speaker 1: **** Please describe President Davis' plans to, uh, continue with a CSA government upon fleeing Richmond.

Cooper: You ask about Davis's plans for the future upon fleeing Richmond. Uh, his plans really changed. He left Richmond on April the 2nd, 1865, when he received word from
General Lee that Lee could no longer hold at Petersburg. Uh, Davis moved his government to Danville, Virginia, to the southwest. He expected the capital to be in Danville for a time. What he expected Lee to do was to, to leave the lines at Petersburg and to move southwest toward the capital, and that there Lee would, someplace in those environments, in those environs, rather, Lee would, uh, connect with Joseph Johnston, and the two armies together would decide how to fight against Grant and Sherman, because Sherman, by that time, was coming north through the Carolinas, uh, Grant, of course, had driven Lee out of Petersburg. Uh, Davis got to Danville, but his plan blew up in his face, uh, because well, one week after he left Richmond, April the 9th, Lee had to surrender, and this changed everything. Uh, then Davis’s goal was somehow to get himself to the Trans-Mississippi, to get himself across the Mississippi River, where he could set up the Confederate government, and with Kirby Smith, who still had an army out there, and there was still lots of territory and, uh, potential soldiers that he hoped to carry on the fight. He went first from Danville to Greensboro, North Carolina, where he met with General Johnston, who commanded, uh, the remnants of the Army of Tennessee. And he spoke with General Johnston about the possibility of carrying on the war and Davis wanted to carry on the war, uh, but by this time, uh, when he, uh, got to Greensboro, his new secretary of war, John Breckinridge, who had been Buchanan's vice president, had been a general in the Confederate army and was made secretary of war, uh, early 1865 when Secretary Seddon resigned, and he came and told Davis that was, there was no hope for that. General Johnston said his soldiers, there weren’t enough of them to fight. So Davis authorized that, uh, General Johnston, uh, sue for peace with General Sherman. Then Davis headed south and west. And at the time he left Greensboro, his goal was clearly the Trans-Mississippi. He went through Charlotte and South Carolina. He was finally captured by the United States army on May the 10th down in central southern Georgia at a little place, a little village called Irwinville. Uh, he obviously never got across the Mississippi River, but that was his goal.

Speaker 1: Discuss his capture and the allegation that he was wearing women's clothing.

Cooper: Well, uh, Jefferson Davis was captured in this little village of Irwinville by two, who surrounded his, uh, his party was surrounded by two, uh, federal cavalry regiments who had been sent out looking for him. They knew, generally, where Davis was. He'd been reported on
the road that the, uh, search for him was, in that part of the South, was headquartered in Macon, Georgia, and, um, his party was captured at this little place early one morning. When the, uh, shooting started for their, for Davis’s party at first, it was a, it was a hopeful sign because the two federal regiments were shooting at each other. It was before light. And Davis, uh, tried to escape. Uh, he, he did not escape, of course. Later, it was alleged he was in woman's clothes. He was not in woman's clothes. He had on a garment that was common in the middle of the 19th century. It was a cloak that was, uh, nowadays, almost like a rain, an unbuttoned raincoat. You threw it around your shoulders, and women and men wore them. And he did throw that around his shoulders, and he was wearing that when he was captured. But he was not in woman's clothes at all. Uh, one thing I might say about Davis’s capture, because, uh, this, this is a matter that has been often, uh, brought up, and I just would like to, um, make, give, give my view on this, this is a question of Davis and guerrilla warfare. Did Davis want to, uh, keep the Confederacy alive through guerrilla warfare? Uh, I, I think that that is absolutely and totally wrong. When he got to Danville, he published a public address to the Confederate people in which he said, we have lost Richmond, he says, no use to make light about it, this is a serious thing. He says, but, on the other hand, it frees up our armies, they don't have to protect Richmond anymore, they can maneuver about in the countryside, and we hope to be able to defeat the enemy this way. And he talked about armies maneuvering. He didn't talk about guerrillas, he didn't talk about disbanding armies. Uh, if you read that address carefully, there's nowhere in there that even implies guerrilla fighting. He also said, on a couple of occasions, he said to, uh, one of the entourage going south with him that, he said guerrilla war was, was, would be a hopeless proposition. There was, Davis never wanted to continue the Confederacy by guerrilla warfare. He was tryin' to get to the Trans-Mississippi, where he thought he had a regular military force, of which he could carry on the war.

Other Speaker: Brian, I'm tryin' to think of possible **** Yeah, I'm just tryin' to think of ****

Speaker 1: Mr. Davis was charged with treason. Please give us a sense as to why those charges were brought against Mr. Davis.
Other Speaker: Why charges of treason were bought, were brought. Well, charges of treason were brought because the, uh, United States of America saw the Confederate States and the Confederates as in rebellion, and Confederate citizens as being rebels. And if you're a rebel, you're a traitor, and Davis was the chief traitor. Now, it is fair to say that one of the reasons there was so much, uh, animosity toward Davis, uh, at the time, was Lincoln's assassination, that, uh, there was a, a widespread belief that Davis was complicit in that, and there were strong efforts made, uh, with the conspirators to implicate Davis in some way or fashion with Lincoln's assassination. The fact that Lincoln was murdered, uh, you know, caused a great public outcry in the North and it, uh, reaffirmed the fact that these people were supposedly traitors. And generals, of course, and, uh, the soldiers had been given paroles upon their surrender. You really couldn't bring charges like that against them without throwing as, aside all semblance of a formal legalistic situation. But the civilian people you could call traitors. And Davis was charged with being a traitor.

Speaker 1: Um, what were the politics behind keeping Davis in prison for 2 years?

Cooper: Why was Davis kept in prison for 2 years? Jefferson Davis, in part, became, uh, sort of a football with the internecine warfare within the Republican party, growing out of the Republican, uh, break with the president, Andrew Johnson. Andrew Johnson was the vice president who became president upon Lincoln's death. Andrew Johnson was from Tennessee. He had had some dealings with Jefferson Davis before. Uh, Johnson was the only senator from a state that joined the Confederates to remain in the Union. And, uh, Johnson never became a Confederate. He was sent back by Lincoln to be military governor of Tennessee when the Union occupied Tennessee. But he was made vice president on the ticket in 1864, and he became president when Lincoln was killed in 1865. But during the course of ‘65, ‘66, Johnston, Johnson and them, um, Republican party began to fall out. They had a serious division. Uh, neither side was willing to talk about any sort of, um, lessening of charges against Jefferson Davis or any sort of a re, letting Jefferson Davis out of prison or reducing charges, for fear of political repercussions. Now, I'm not trying to claim that Jefferson Davis was the focal point of the Johnson-congressional Republican, uh, battle. That's not the case at all. But he did become a pawn or a football in that. And whatever President Johnson did, one eye was cast on Jefferson
Davis. Now, within Johnson's own cabinet, there was a wide difference of opinion about what to do. There were those who thought Davis shouldn't even be tried. There were those who thought Davis should be tried before a military tribunal. So there was a wide difference of opinion on what to do with Davis. And amongst the congressional Republicans, who tended to be a more sectionally radical, uh, more involved, uh, with sectional issues than President Johnson was, uh, people thought Davis, it ranged from anywhere he should be shot to never let out of jail.

Speaker 1: So why were the charges ultimately dropped against President Davis?

Cooper: The charges were ultimately dropped against President Davis because President Andrew Johnson had withstood impeachment. He had been impeached, but not convicted. He was going out of office, this was the winter of 1869. Uh, Ulysses S. Grant had been elected president, to take office on March the 4th, and finally, in that winter of 1869, all charges against Davis were dropped. Now, Davis had been out of prison for almost 2 years by that time. He was, he was released on bail in 1867, the late spring of '67, but he was still under indictment. And trial dates were set and postponements were given. Often, the postponements were, mostly, the postponements were requested by the federal government. And one reason was the federal government couldn't decide exactly what to do with Davis. They were very concerned about bringing Davis to trial. He would be tried in Richmond, Virginia, because the Constitution says if you commit treason, you have to be tried where the treason is committed. Richmond was where he was. The federal government worried that if they brought Davis to trial in Richmond, it might lose. All it would take would be one juror who might be a Confederate sympathizer, who might be pressured or intimidated by Davis sympathizers, and then it would be the whole case would be lost, and then that not only would lose with Davis, but for the federal government to lose a case about secession was treason was not something they wanted to contemplate because that would break down the whole legal edifice about secession. And so they were very anxious when they thought about a trial date. And finally, when it became politically possible and Johnson had nothing to lose, uh, Grant was becoming president, people were losing interest in Jefferson Davis by 1869. They dropped the charges.
Speaker 1: Speaking of, um, what were the South's sentiments towards Mr. Davis post-Civil War?

Cooper: What were the South's sentiments toward Davis post-Civil War? Well, I would argue that Davis was never the, uh, ogre that many had made him out to be in southern public opinion, even in 1865. He was certainly not the hero he had been in 1861, but he was not looked upon as the cause of defeat. He was not the person that was centered on as the reason we didn't win. At the same time, it is undoubtedly true that his incarceration turned him into a martyr. He would never have had the same position in the southern pantheon, post-war pantheon, without that imprisonment. His, uh, 2 years in jail had made him into a martyr. Uh, southerners felt that their cause had been honorable, had been just, that they had made an honorable fight, and Jefferson Davis was one of them. If he were in prison, all of them should be in prison. And, uh, he conducted himself, uh, quite, uh, quite fine fashion in prison, quite honorable fashion, and they looked upon him with a great deal of pride and reverence.

Speaker 1: ****

Other Speaker: ****

Speaker 1: ****

Other Speaker: No.

Speaker 1: Um, and that pretty much answers [question #] 56 too.

Other Speaker: Yeah, okay. We don't need to mention that. Uh, what about the **** I think we should go there.

Speaker 1: Yes. Okay, um, we may be going slightly out of chronology, so forgive me **** Uh, why was Davis still sought out as, I guess you could say, a dignitary or an elder statesman throughout his entire life, uh, post-Civil War? This is the man who lost the Civil War.
Cooper: Why was Davis thought of as such a dignitary after the Civil War? Well, I think there, there are a couple of reasons that is. Um, one, I think his imprisonment was, uh, made him, as I said, into a martyr. He was, he was looked upon as someone who had made a, not only a sacrifice during the war, when he lost all of his wealth, as many southerners did, and not only did he lose family members, as many southerners did, but he went to prison. And he endured what many thought was a pretty terrible imprisonment, because the popular press and a very popular book had presented Davis as being in a much worse situation in prison, that is his physical situation, than it actually was. So he was looked upon as a man who had really suffered. He'd been in almost like a dungeon for 2 years to the southern public. Plus, remember this, Davis lived. The only other southerner who was, uh, clearly far above Davis in the estimation of the southern public was Robert E. Lee, who died in 1870. And Davis lived. And Davis also stayed out of all politics, so he was not involved in any kind of political squabble, as many of the ex-Confederates were involved in after the war, so the fact that he had been imprisoned, as many southerners saw it, he had been imprisoned for them. It had been their imprisonment. Then he lived for a very long time. He didn't die until 1889, and Lee died in 1870. And third, he stayed totally out of politics.

Speaker 1: Why?

Cooper: I think, why did he stay out of politics? Davis stayed totally out of politics because I think he believed, and rightfully, I mean, he was correct in this, that he was looked upon as so controversial a person outside of the South, he was such a flashpoint, that for him to get involved in any political activity overtly, uh, that it would condemn automatically anything he wanted to do, any cause he was connected with, any party he was connected with, any office he was connected with. If he had let it be known to the people of Mississippi, he could have been elected senator or congressman at, or governor, at any point after the end of Reconstruction. But he stayed totally out of that, and I think he was very wise to do it.

Speaker 1: Why did Da, uh, Jefferson Davis never receive a pardon and therefore, never regaining his citizenship?
Cooper: Why didn't Davis seek a pardon? Because Davis never thought he did anything wrong. He believed that secession was constitutional. He believed that he had acted in a constitutional and legal manner when he left the United States and thus, he would never request a pardon. And, uh, Davis was, he, he clung to this where, as a principle utterly immutable, because one of his colleagues told him, he says, well, look, why don't you apply for a pardon anyway? You can just do it. You don't have to really mean it, just do it. He says, they don't have to know you're not serious or not committed. And he says, look, if I did that, that would give them, make them think I believe they have the right to give me this pardon, and I will never do that. So he never requested a pardon.

Speaker 1: What do you make of the effort by President Carter in 1979, I think it was, to reinstate Jefferson Davis's citizenship?

Cooper: I, I, I, I have, I don't think it matt, I don't think, I don't have any – opinion of that.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Cooper: All I can say is Jefferson Davis would have opposed it mightily. I think it was ridiculous, but don't put that in.

Speaker 1: Okay ****. Um, –

Cooper: I will, you, I will be happy for you to put it in. I don't think Jefferson Davis would've been pleased.

Speaker 1: Okay. Um,

Other Speaker: Restate that question ****
Speaker 1: Yes. What do you think Jefferson Davis would have thought about the fact that his citizenship was reinstated in 1979?

Cooper: What would Jefferson Davis have thought about his reinstated citizenship? I think Jefferson Davis would, uh, never have supported any measure that would reinstate his citizenship if it had required any sort of statement or implication he had ever been wrong about anything. If they said, do you, uh, President Davis, what you did was honorable and just and we wanna' make you a citizen, I think that would have been all right with him.

Speaker 1: Is it okay to skip [question #] 59? That's what I'd like to do.

Other Speaker: Yes.

Other Speaker: Yes.

Speaker 1: Okay, let's go to, um, Mr. Davis’s professional efforts after the war. Um, feel free to discuss them –

Cooper: Okay.

Speaker 1: – and why you believe they were unsuccessful.

Cooper: All right. You asked about Davis’s professional efforts after the war. Uh, I'm just thinking about how the best way to do that is. I think, uh, what I will do is, uh, talk about all of them in, in one piece, so we can have them. Um, some of them, uh, uh, uh, will be very brief. A couple of 'em will be a little bit longer, if that's okay –

Speaker 1: Right **** Carolina Life.

Cooper: Well, when Davis was, um, finally let out of prison, and of course, he had no profession, his lands were gone, before the war he had not been a professional person, he'd been
a planter, he could not turn to the law or to medicine or anything like that and, of course, he was under indictment, and so for a time he did nothing. It was not until late 1868 when his attorneys told him they thought it was okay for him to go to Europe for a time because they felt that the trial, he, the, the trial date would be postponed. At that time, Davis was trying to act as an agent for a group of Canadians who owned copper mines in Canada. He went to England to try to sell them. Uh, this was a fruitless venture for him. At the same time he was in England, he tried to make arrangements with some people. He was gonna' become sort of a, an agent with a British, uh, cotton merchant to get crops sent over to England, but he didn't succeed at that either. In other words, neither of those small efforts came to anything. Then in 1869, he came back to this country and he took a job as president of a company called the Carolina Life Insurance Company. It was called the Carolina Life Insurance Company and its headquarters were in Memphis. And he ran this company from 1869 to 1873. It was a regular insurance company. They had agents and such. Many of the agents were former Confederate soldiers. He got many Confederate soldiers to sign on to be agents. Of course, he was a, the Confederate president, commander-in-chief. Uh, Davis worked hard at this. He had no experience in the business, of course, and, um, when he moved to Memphis, his wife Varina was back in England, he wrote to her and he told her, he says, I know you don't look forward to Memphis. And he says, you know, but times have changed, I don't have anything, um, it's not being a planter, it's not even being the leader of a defeated people, uh, but it's something that I must do. He worked hard at it, and ultimately, it failed. It failed in the Panic of 1873. Uh, the Panic, of course, was the word used in the 19th century for depression. It was a serious economic downturn. Many businesses went under in 1873. The Carolina Life Insurance Company went under in 1873. Davis lost his job, which was a well-paying job at that time. Uh, Davis also lost his investment in the company. And from 1873, uh, until 1876, for 2 years, ‘74 and ‘75, Davis really didn't have any regular employment. He looked for various things, and on one occasion he was offered the presidency of Texas A&M, which was a new institution at that time. Uh, he didn't take it, in no small part because Varina didn't want to go to Texas. But finally, he ended up working for a company called the Mississippi Valley Society, which was headquartered in London. It was a, a, a company designed to encourage development and trade between England and the Mississippi Valley. These people started talking to Davis in, um, as early as 1875 about becoming president of this company on the American side, and Davis, uh, went to England in late ’74 to talk to
people about this, and he had, late ’75 rather, he agreed to do it and he became president, uh, but it didn't last a year. The company folded. Uh, there was never as much money on the British side to support this company as Davis and the American investors had been led to believe, and so at the end of 1876, this company disappeared and with it, Davis’s employment. Uh, from then on, he never really had any professional kind of employment, not a job. Uh, he went to live, in January of 1877, with an old family friend on the Mississippi coast. That became his home and remained his home, uh, for the rest of his life. He would in 1881 regain control of his land, and he tried to farm again, unsuccessfully, though he held onto it until his death. Is, is that enough? Does that –

Speaker 1: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

Other Speaker: ****

Cooper: [cough] Excuse me.

Speaker 1: Do you want a drink?

Cooper: No, I'm okay.

Speaker 1: Well, why do you think Davis had difficulty or impossibility in turning, um, his prior successes into financial success after the war?

Cooper: Why did Davis have difficulty turning his prior successes into financial success? Well, his pre-war successes were as, his pre-war successes were as a planter. Uh, he did not have a chance to begin trying as a planter until 1881, and there were reasons he failed in 1881. Uh, the businesses he got involved in, the Carolina Life Insurance Company went under in the depression. Uh, he might very well have made that. The other company he got involved in was totally uncapitalized. Now, why Davis didn't find a business that he could have done better in, is one of those unknowable things. I mean, you, you can't really know that, but I don't think he failed because of something in his personality, but you've got to realize that by 1877, uh, Davis is
a man who is, uh, approaching 70 years old. It's, uh, not an age that most people can go out and start anew on something that's, uh, quite different in their lives. And also, at that time, he decided that if he ever wanted to make his great statement about the war and the nobility of the Confederate cause, now was the time to do it.

Speaker 1: Let's talk about that era. Uh, you alluded to his moving in with an old friend, her name being Sarah Dorsey. Could you tell us who Sarah Dorsey is, and then feel free to discuss his moving to Beauvoir.

Cooper: All right, uh, Sarah Dorsey. Sarah Dorsey was a friend of the Davis family. She was a good bit younger than Jefferson Davis. She was from a very wealthy family who, uh, were around Natchez, Mississippi, and had lands in, um, northeastern Louisiana, all cotton lands. Uh, she was living at a house on the Mississippi coast named Beauvoir near Biloxi. Uh, she had, uh, her hus, she and her husband had bought that house. He had died. Uh, Davis knew her, and she invited him to come and live there and work on his memoir. Uh, she offered Davis, of course, free rent and board. Davis, his pride would never let him take that, but they arranged a payment that was very, very modest, and so Davis was living there at, at a, at a very, very, very, very reasonable rate. Uh, he did work on Rise and Fall there. She helped. He brought in another associate, a former Confederate officer and a former Carolina Life Insurance agent, named William Walthall, who lived nearby. Walthall worked with him. Uh, his wife didn't go there when he went in early '77. She was still in Europe. She had not come back with him on his most recent trip. Uh, when he went over there to try to find out something on the Mississippi Valley Society in 1876, she didn't come back because she had been ill. And she had a sister who lived in England, and she remained with that sister. She did come back finally in 1878, and she went to Beauvoir to be with Davis. Initially, uh, she and Mrs. Dorsey didn't get along together at all. There have even been those who have claimed that there was some sort of, um, a romantic relationship between, uh, Jefferson Davis and Ms. Dorsey. Uh, I don't really think there was, uh, there's anything to that. Uh, it was hero worship from her part, he was an old man, uh, Varina came back, and not long after that, Ms. Dorsey contracted breast cancer. Other students who have looked at this from her side, uh, coming at it from her side and her interest in her, and, and looking at her and her family, uh, they don't see any romantic connection between Davis and
Mrs. Dorsey. I don't think there was any. Uh, but Mrs. Dorsey in her will of 1879, bequeathed Beauvoir to Davis. Now, Davis was arranging to buy Beauvoir from her. She'd agreed to sell it and she had set up very, very reasonable terms for him. I mean, it was a, a friendly deal, and he was getting a great deal. But she died, and so he inherited the whole thing. Not only did she leave him Beauvoir, she left him everything she owned. It caused a great furor in her family. They sued to break the will. That suit failed. And so Davis did own Beauvoir then, and he lived in Beauvoir, that was his home until the end of his life in 1889. Now, while he was there, he went there to write his memoir, and he worked on that and he worked on that with Walthall, and in 1881 it finally came out, entitled *Rise and Fall with the Confederate Government*, two quite lengthy tomes. Those books are not, however, a memoir, in your sense, a memoir. What they are, is they're a, um, they're a brief about Davis’s view of the Constitution or treatise on the Constitution, and a long, long defense of the Confederacy as a noble cause. That's what it's about. It's about Davis’s view of the Constitution, the Confederacy as a noble cause. I mean, it doesn't talk about what Davis did as president, what he thought of this, he tried very hard in the book, for example, not to, to talk down other Confederates. Uh, he tried, uh, for the Confederates, it was all a holy cause.

Speaker 1: Were those books well received?

Cooper: You ask were the books well received. Well, they were well received by southerners. I mean, reviews of it by southerners were quite positive. Many northern reviews looked upon it as, you know, as, as almost, uh, a historical document. This, this, this talks about something that's long gone, and Davis’s view of the Constitution was wrong to begin with, and the Confederates weren't noble. I mean, there was a sectional response to it in that sense. Southerners, yes; northerners, no, though the sales were pretty good, the sales were pretty good.

Speaker 1: Um, it's been reported that Oscar Wilde visited Jefferson Davis at Beauvoir. Will you discuss that visit briefly?

Cooper: You asked about Oscar Wilde's visit to Beauvoir. Oscar Wilde did visit Beauvoir. He was on a speaking tour of the United States and he had mentioned the, he said on occasion
Speaker 1: Could you discuss Mr. Davis’s religious faith? And as you are discussing that, I have noticed that there's a split in the literature. Some have argued that Mr. Davis was not very religious until prison and forward. I have read others who have suggested he was a very religious man throughout his life.

Cooper: You asked about Jefferson Davis and religion. Okay, let's start. Jefferson Davis was born into a, a Baptist family. Uh, he went to school initially into a, a Catholic boarding school. Uh, he married, both of the wives he married, Sarah Knox Taylor and Varina Howell, were Episcopalian. Both ceremonies were conducted by Episcopalian rectors. Davis’s older brother, Joseph, was very active in the Episcopalian church in Natchez, Mississippi, when he lived in Natchez. Davis, by all accounts, certainly he would have called himself a Christian as a young man into adulthood. Uh, but Davis never affiliated with the church. He did buy a pew in an Episcopalian church in Washington, and he went to that church. He often attended services, but Davis never officially joined the church, even though he had been raised a Baptist, and Baptists, of course, did not believe in infant baptism, you would be baptized when you, you know, depending, at 12, 13, 11, 14, when you were old enough to make a profession of faith. Uh, Davis had no recollection of being baptized. Davis’s, even with the death of his son, Samuel, in 1854, did not really change Davis about religion. Again, I would repeat, he would have certainly answered, yes, I'm a Christian. And he knew the Bible well. He read the Bible. Uh, but he was not an active church member. Davis’s religion changed in 1862 with the reverses in the war and with the, uh, Union advance on Richmond. Davis decided, in conjunction with his wife, that he would now actually join the church. And he did join the Episcopal church in Richmond, St. Paul's Church. He was baptized at that time, the same time he joined the church. The fact that he was baptized, he didn't remember whether he'd been baptized before. Uh, his, uh, feelings about religion become much more personal. His, uh, his, he, he thinks much more
of a personal God. And I think that what happens in prison is simply a carrying on of what was going on in the war itself. I don't think there's any qualitative change during his imprisonment. I think there's a deepening of his Christian faith, to be sure. I don't think it's a qualitative change. I think if you're going to look for a qualitative change, it comes in 1862. And, of course, from the time he's, uh, out of prison until his death, he remains what he would call a Christian. Uh, he does not, um, become an active church member since the, sometimes he’s an officer in churches, but he doesn't go to big church meetings and he doesn't stand up. And, uh, but his own private professions are quite deep and quite sincere.

PART 5
Other Speaker: What, what should go first?

Speaker 1: We’ll do both. There'll be a natural progression between the two.

Cooper: Well, why don't you ask about the blacks first because that gets involved with Brierfield when Joseph sells it to the Montgomerys. Okay?

Speaker 1: Right, okay. Given us a sense of Mr. Davis's, um, relations, interactions, views of blacks post-Civil War.

Cooper: You ask about Davis and blacks and the postwar years. I don't think and I argued in my book that his views changed at all. Uh, Davis believed in, uh, that the white race was superior for his entire life. As I said in my book, that doesn't make him unusual. Most white Americans and most Europeans believed the same thing during his lifetime. After all, the end of the 19th century is a heyday of imperialism, when the European nations were going into Asia and Africa, carrying the white man's burden, as they claimed. I mean Davis fit right into that. He believed that. Uh, he clearly believed that the white race was superior. He had a very paternalistic view toward blacks. At the same time, there were individual blacks that he respected and acted with in, in a quite different way. So what, at first glance, seems a quite simple thing to say, well here's just another white man who looks upon blacks as inferior, uh, before the war he dealt with James Pemberton. We've talked about that a bit, the man who
became his slave, who became his first and most successful overseer. Also, his brother owned a family, a family of blacks whose sir name was Montgomery, and Davis dealt with them before the Civil War. Joseph Davis permitted, Montgomerys ran his store, kept his accounts. Uh, Jefferson Davis corresponded with him when he was away, uh, from, uh, Davis Bend, before the Civil War. After the war, uh, Joseph Davis sold, uh, his lands, including Hurricane and Brierfield, to the Montgomery family and for a time they tried to farm there. That ended up as a failure, but they tried. And then, uh, another example of the individual, in the, uh, 1880s, a man by the name of James Jones, a black man, who had been a free black before the Civil War, but ended up working for Da, as a server in the Davis White House, and stayed with, uh, Varina and the children while Davis was in prison, and went to Canada with them even, uh, this man wrote Jefferson Davis a letter. He had ended up in Raleigh, North Carolina. He'd been quite successful as a Republican politician, and he wrote Davis a letter in the mid-‘80s, commended Davis, asked about him, said he'd even bought a copy of *Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*, and wanted a picture of Davis. And Davis wrote back to him and said that they had followed Jones's career with, uh, with, with pleasure and they were so glad he had done well, and, uh, wished him the very best and sent him the picture. And so, with individual people, uh, Davis obviously respected them, and, uh, I won't say he treated them as equals, that would not be correct, but he treated them as men of intelligence and men that could be trusted. But overall, uh, clearly, the blacks were inferior and the whites were superior and the whites should be superior.

Speaker 1: Describe for us Davis's attempts to return to planting through reacquisition of Brierfield.

Cooper: You ask about the reacquisition of Brierfield. Now that's a, that has a complication connected with it that I feel compelled to spend a couple of minutes dealing with because if you don't, it makes no sense. In the middle 1830s, when Joseph brought Jefferson home to farm with him, and he gave Jefferson a part of Davis Island, which became known as Brierfield, he never gave Jefferson title to any land. As, up until the Civil War, title in Brierfield was never passed to Jefferson Davis, even though for the 25 years between 1835 and 1860, they operated as separate businesses. One time even, in the early ‘50s, Joseph got upset because he
heard that Jefferson was gonna sell it, and he wanted to buy it from Jefferson, but still, title never passed. This becomes very important in the aftermath of the Civil War because the Davis lands are confiscated during the Civil War, but after the war, Joseph Davis petitions President Johnson for the re, for his own pardon, and the return of his property. Many southerners did this, uh, including wealthy prominent ones, those who had been wealthy and prominent, like Joseph. Eventually, President Johnson pardoned Joseph Davis and ordered the return of all of Joseph Davis's lands. Within that land was Brierfield, and Jefferson and Joseph had corresponded while Jefferson was in prison, and Jefferson urged Joseph to do that because he said once, if anybody thinks it's mine, it's certainly gonna be confiscated and never given back. And so Joseph got it all back, and then in 1867 when Joseph decide, realized he could not make a go as a planter anymore, he would sell it. And he sold it to the Montgomery family, the blacks who had been slaves on his own plantation. Now, when Jefferson Davis, in the mid-'70s, after the, the demise of the Carolina Life Insurance Company, is looking for a possible way to make a living to support his family, he thinks about Brierfield, but Brierfield at that time, of course, was involved in the legacy of Joseph Davis, land that had been bought by the Montgomerys. And Joseph Davis's last will, which was, uh, written in 1869, he does not claim that he owns Brierfield, and in fact, in the sale agreement with the Montgomerys, a part of it is that if Jefferson Davis wants Brierfield back, the Montgomerys have to sell it back to him. But in 1874, since it's still a part of that estate, if Jefferson Davis wants Brierfield, he has to go to court. This causes real family turmoil because the bulk of Joseph Davis's estate, Hurricane, whose plantation was much bigger than Jefferson's, Joseph left to his grandchildren. And by 1874, they didn't want their great-uncle Jefferson Davis to have anything to do with any of that land. They thought that their grandfather left it all to them. So Davis had to go to court, uh, in, in Warren County. In 1876, the court decided against him. An appeal was made, and in 1878, the Mississippi Supreme Court decided for him. Now, both these decisions are written in nice legal language, but they're both political. In Warren County, the one judge was a Republican, who voted against, who said no to Davis. Mississippi Supreme Court by 1878, there were two Democrats, both former Confederate officers and one Republican. The vote was two to one. The Democrats said yes to Davis, and the Republican said no. Even after 1878, it took a couple years to settle things with the Montgomerys. They were defaulting on their, uh, loan, there had to be foreclosure and such. So it was literally 1881 before Jefferson Davis actually took title to Brierfield for the first time in his
life, and he began to try to farm there. Now, it was not like before the war. First thing is simply geographical. In 1867, the river had cut off, cut across the narrow eastern neck of Davis Bend, which made it an island. It was isolated. You couldn't get there by land. You had to go by boat. Also, of course, there were no more slaves. You had to have free labor. Then there was a question of management. Jefferson Davis in 1881 was past 70 years old. He lived at Beauvoir on the Mississippi coast, which was a good little trip up the Missi, you'd go by train in New Orleans, and take the steamboat from New Orleans up there, but it was a good, good trip. His wife wanted no part of living at Brierfield. She didn't like it before the war, and after the war, it was now desolate and dingy, not an agricultural showplace, plus the landing, you had to go 5 or 6 miles through swampy territory to get there, and she had no interest at all in being there. So Jefferson hired managers. None of them worked out. He had man, he put 'em in and out as fast as he'd put overseers out in the '50s. He had intractable problems with labor. He couldn't find the blacks to come work there because for the blacks there, he envisioned the old, the old slaves of Brierfield working for him again. But they didn't, and to get black laborers to come to such an isolated place was not simple. At that time, many in Mississippi were trying to find laborers from the Carolinas and labor forces were put together in the Carolinas and sent west to Memphis, and whites would go contract with these people to bring them down to work, but Davis just never had a workforce that he could deal with satisfactorily. Then, there was the river. Uh, Brierfield was subject to floods, and in the '80s, floods came in on several occasions and ruined his crop. So he never succeeded as a planter. He blamed his troubles on the free blacks, that they wouldn't work, that he couldn't get them to work. He recognized the river as a problem, but of course, he was also caught up in the general economic situation of the 80s. The cotton prices were low, but low cotton prices weren't the only things that killed him in trying to return as a planter. It's management, race and the river, uh, I should say management, labor and the river. And the, the, the fortunate thing is, he managed to hang on. When he died in 1889, he still owned Brierfield. Now, there are various family lores [about] how he managed to do that; his good friend and, uh, factor in New Orleans [J. U. Payne], uh, bailed him out on occasion. So, but still, he owned the land when he died, and his family had the land when he died.

Speaker 1: Um, in Jefferson Davis's last speech, before his death, I believe it was in Mississippi City, he . . . are you familiar with that speech?
Cooper: Oh, yeah.

Speaker 1: Why don't you don't discuss that speech [going forward?] Can I have a tissue, please?

Cooper: You ask City Mississippi, which was a town very near Beauvoir. He gave this to a group of young people. It was a very brief speech, and he said the only reason he came to this, uh, occasion was the, the young people in the audience, and he wanted to talk to them. He said that, uh, his day was past, that he'd been proud of what he'd done, that he had no regrets about what he had done, that he thought the Confederacy had been a noble thing, and his part in that, again, he was proud of. And he said these young people should be proud of their heritage, but he said they should not be entrapped by it. They should look to the future. They should be proud to be citizens of the United States, and he looked upon a bright and prosperous future for the United States, and these young people should participate fully, be proud of their southern heritage, but not trapped by the past.

Speaker 1: Please discuss the events immediately preceding Mr. Davis's death, and then his passing.

Cooper: Uh, you ask about Jefferson Davis's death. Uh, in the fall of each year, he always went up to Brierfield. Uh, this was after most of the crop had been picked. He went up to settle accounts, to, to see the managers, to see the laborers, and so forth. As, uh, indicated before, he usually went by trail from Beauvoir to New Orleans, and by steamboat up to, uh, to um, Brierfield. This trip he made in November of 1889. When he got to the landing on Davis Island, the captain wouldn't put him off. He said he was too ill. He took him on to Vicksburg, but Davis got better, and the steamboat captain, they brought him back down and put him off at the landing. He was at Brierfield. He became very ill again. Uh, he wrote, a, a, a brief note to Varina that indicates the difficulty he was having because it's, um, some of the words are jumbled, and the language is not clear. Uh, but he, they manage it such, they get him to the landing again, and he gets on the steamboat. They also telegraph Varina. Uh, she gets word that
he's de, he's, he's really ill. Uh, she boards a steamboat to go up to meet him. The two boats meet in the river, uh, and they bring Davis, um, to, to the shore in St. Francisville, Louisiana, which is just below the Mississippi line. It's the first place, town in Louisiana, uh, below the Mississippi line. Uh, doctors look at him there. They say he's sick. He's got, you know, serious bronchial troubles, which he's had since the beginning of time, and bad cold, and all this kind of problem. They bring him to New Orleans, and in New Orleans he is, uh, taken to the home of a friend of his, and, uh, the, uh, news, newspapers have a daily watch on him, of course, and he's getting better, and he's getting worse. Uh, finally, he takes a turn for the worse; in all probability, pneumonia set in, and, and he died on December the 6th, 1889.

Speaker 1: Are there any, uh, last words that, is there any record of what he said?

Cooper: No, uh, the last things of, of that type, uh, Varina said that she was sitting by his bedside, and he was clasping her hand, holding her hand, and then the, you know, the pressure just went away, but there are no last words as such.

Speaker 1: Please describe Mr. Davis's funeral.

Cooper: Well he had, Davis's funeral, his, um, he was buried first in Metairie Cemetery just outside New Orleans. The funeral service was conducted in New Orleans. There was a huge crowd, uh, all sorts of Confederate veterans were there. It was a major event, and he was, his body was carried up to Metairie Cemetery and he was buried in the Army of Northern Virginia tomb in Metairie. Uh, as I said, all kinds of Confederate veterans were there. There was one person who did not participate. General Beauregard was still alive, and he was asked to be a pallbearer. He said he would have to think upon that, and eventually said no, he wouldn't be one. He said Mr. Davis wouldn't have been one for him, and he wasn't gonna be one for Davis. The old enmity lasted a long time.

Speaker 1: Uh, what ultimately happened to his remains?
Cooper: His remains were ultimately transferred to Hollywood Cemetery in Richmond, Virginia. It's the place his, uh, young son, Joe, was buried during the war. Uh, Mrs. Davis, after Davis died, in 1889, she removed promptly to New York City. Varina never liked the South. She never liked the heat, and she wanted to get away. She didn't like the isolation or the heat. She never liked either one, heat or the isolation as she saw it – the heat, for sure, the isolation, as she saw it. Um, she moved to New York, and, uh, where should Davis's be, remains, uh, uh, stay? Of course, uh, he was buried in New Orleans. He had lots of - well, in Metairie, it's right outside of New Orleans. He had lots of contacts and friends in New Orleans. They wanted his body there. The State of Mississippi wanted his body. Uh, Richmond, Virginia, wanted his body, and the Hollywood Cemetery offered to Mrs. Davis, uh, not only a, a space for Jefferson, but for her and for the family. And for a number of reasons, she chose to move his body to Richmond, rather than to leave it in Metairie or to put it in Mississippi, and not only is Jefferson buried there, all his children are buried there, his wife is buried there.

Speaker 1: What is the legacy of Jefferson Davis? What legacy does he leave?

Cooper: Mm hmm, I hate those kinds of questions. Uh, Jefferson, I think, Jefferson Davis you see a person who had a deep commitment to what he believed in. He struggled to do his best by those principals he believed in, and the idea of commitment in the man was powerful. I think also, he was a man who made every effort to overcome really serious and terrible emotional and physical disabilities. He never felt sorry for himself. He never became a victim. He saw his duty to what he conceived of as principle, and the position he was in to try to make sure his principles could, could be – I need to reverse that. The positions he was in in which he was trying to make sure his principles could continue, he never gave up on that. I think that that, that's a powerful legacy.

Speaker 1: To the extent your answer is different, what can a modern 21st -century American learn from the life of Jefferson Davis?

Cooper: Well, I think just to rephrase what I said. I think you can learn about a man whose devotion to his principles and a man of commitment, and a man who takes his ambition
seriously, and his ambition is to further himself and his principles, and a man who does not permit serious physical and emotional trauma to deter him. Now, there's much about Jefferson Davis one cannot admire. I mean, one today cannot admire a slave-owner. One cannot admire a man who is a racist, in our terms, but he was a man of his time. Um, most of us are people of our time. He was clearly a man of his time, and he could not broaden his vision beyond a, a, a certain, he wouldn't go, he wouldn't go but so far.

Speaker 1: Are we still fighting the Civil War today? Or put it another way, are the North and South, is the North and South still divided?

Cooper: You ask is the North and South still divided. North and South is not at all divided in, in any kind of Civil War way. The differences between North and South, even with the advent of shopping malls and subdivisions and all that such, there are still differences between North and South, and people are in the North and South can often detect those differences. One difference is southerners still, on the whole, are much more preoccupied with their past than northerners are. But, in terms of refighting the Civil War, I don't really think so. I think southerners, white southerners, are certainly more passionate about the Civil War than northerners in their emotion, but I don't think in the general interest, because the general interest in the Civil War is national. I mean, uh, books and programs, uh, that are so popular could never have that kind of popularity if it were only a southern audience being reached. I think the emotional view of the Civil War is probably more, more strongly still held in the South, but I don't think the general interest. I think the general interest is, is nationwide. And I don't, we, we're not refighting the Civil War, but still, certainly one of the major ingredients in the Civil War is still at the forefront of this country. That's the, the issue of race. I mean, the Civil War never would have occurred, but for slavery. Now I don't wanna get involved in slavery as the cause of the war and all that. It's a very complicated question and all, but, but for slavery, it certainly never have occurred. And we are still dealing with race today in this country. The issue is certainly different. We're not dealing with slavery, but race, the racial question in this country is not totally solved at all.

Speaker 1: Is there anything else?
Other Speaker: Well actually, I have one last question for you. Um, there's been movement to rename parts of Jefferson Davis Highway.

Other Speaker: Thank you.

Other Speaker: There's been movements to move, remove his name from buildings, to remove his statutes from public spaces. What is your feeling about, uh, the actual physical manifestations of Jefferson Davis being asked to be removed from public view?

Cooper: You ask about my views of Jefferson Davis's statues, monuments, etc., in terms of the public. Well, to me, I've answered this question before, and I'll answer it as I have before. I don't think you get very far by trying to remove history. History is with us. Jefferson Davis lived. Jefferson Davis did things. He was a terribly important person in his time, a man of real consequence in American history, and what does it prove to say that you're gonna change the name of a building away from Jefferson Davis? Do you make like he didn't exist? What he did exists. The influence he had exists. I don't think it does anything except one tries to manufacture a past, and I don't believe in manufacturing a past.

Speaker 1: Is there anything else?

[applause]

Cooper: I know I must have said enough already. You all must be, you all must be –