

William J. Cooper interview regarding Jefferson Davis, for documentary "Jefferson Davis: an American President" 2008, by Flying Chaucer Films

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William J. Cooper, Professor of History, LSU

PART 1

Speaker 1: How was Mr. Davis on the stump?

Cooper: Davis, Jefferson Davis, on the stump is an issue in question. Um, in his early speeches, particularly when he was running for Congress in 1845, in the year 1845 he ran for Congress in Mississippi, and Mississippi at that time still had a general ticket system. You had to run across the state. Everybody had to run, uh, all across the state. Congress had, just a few years before that, passed a law saying that congressmen had to run in their own districts, but Mississippi's law hadn't yet changed to cover that. This would be the last time there would be a general ticket election in Mississippi. So, you had to campaign across the whole state, and he, um, his speeches got a lot of attention. Uh, some people said that when he first began his speeches were a little bit stiff, uh, that his arguments were really wonderful, uh, but there was not enough emotion in his speeches, uh, but he

improved over time, and he began to get more emotion in his speeches. Uh, if you look at his speeches later on, in, in the later '40s and 1850s, down to 1860, there's much more emotion than there was when he began. He was a, a neophyte, but he learned and he improved.

Speaker 1: Is there a problem with the sun kind of coming in and out?

Speaker 2 [cameraman]: Yeah, I'm, I'm just writing the exposure **** –

Speaker 1: Okay. Good.

Speaker 2: – Sorry about that.

Speaker 1: As long as you're okay.

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Um, around this time, he came to meet Varina Banks Howell.

Explain to us, um, how he met Varina, please.

Cooper: Jefferson Davis met Varina Banks Howell on Davis Bend. Uh, Varina Banks Howell's father was a, lived in Natchez. He was a native of New Jersey, but he had come to Mississippi, like lots of northerners, came to Mississippi in the 1810s and '20s. Mississippi was booming on the frontier and lots of people came down. Among them was How, Mr. Howell. He and Joseph Davis became fast friends in Natchez, and, uh, to indicate the friendship, uh, uh, Howell, one of, uh, Howell's oldest son was named for Joseph Davis. Uh, his young daughter was named Varina, and she called Joseph Davis Uncle Joe, and Joseph Davis had invited Varina to come up to Hurricane and visit him, and she came up on this occasion to visit the man she called her Uncle Joe, but, of course, he was not an uncle in any blood sense at all. And, uh, and she was really at the house of one of Joseph Davis' daughters that was there on Davis Bend, and Jefferson Davis was en route to a political meeting, uh, in Vicksburg, the county seat and main town in Warren County, and Joseph Davis told him to stop by this house and tell Varina that he was ready for her to come on down to Hurricane, Joseph Davis' home, and so Jefferson Davis stopped, uh, gave the message, and he went on about his political business, and the young woman who, at this time, is about 16 years old, uh, she goes to, um, to Hurricane to visit with Joseph Davis. In the meantime, of course, Jefferson Davis comes back from his political meeting, and he is utterly smitten with this young woman. For the first time, at least as far

as the record shows, he really has an interest in a woman for the first time since Sarah Knox's death. Sarah Knox died in 1835. We are now talking about the beginnings of 1844. So, we, we've gone through 8 years, and he is really smitten with this young woman, and she obviously is taken with him, and she visits there at Hurricane for a couple of months, and she and Jefferson see each other most every day. They ride horses together. They visit together. They talk together, and Jefferson Davis, quite frankly, now he's a man, at this time he is a man of 35 years. He is becoming giddy. Now, how can we say he's becoming giddy? We read the letters he writes her. When she leaves to go back to Natchez, the letters he writes her, this is, this is a fellow who is just head over heels in love. He talks about he can't bear to be, uh, from her sight. He can't bear for the mail to come on the steamboat and not get anything from her. He's all concerned about her, and he has clearly, in this very short time, made up his mind he wants to marry her. But, history seems to be repeating itself, because there is this vast age difference. Jefferson Davis is 35. Varina Davis is not yet 20, and Varina Davis' mother is concerned about this age difference. She's also concerned, because she knew how important Sarah Knox was to Jefferson and how devastating Sarah Knox's death was to Jefferson. She knew that because of Joseph's relationship with her husband, William Howell. Uh, but finally, uh, the Howells give their permission and their blessing to Varina and Jefferson's marriage, and Varina and Jefferson agree to be

married, and they end up married early in 1845. They marry in Natchez at the home that the Howells were living in at that time, but like his first marriage to Sarah Knox, Jefferson has no close relatives at this marriage. Joseph doesn't come down. None of his siblings is there, uh, but as soon as he marries, uh, Varina Davis, they leave for a wedding trip to New Orleans, but, en route to New Orleans, they stop in West Feliciana Parish. Davis goes to visit his sisters. He takes Varina to see Sarah Knox's grave, that's on her honeymoon. She goes to Sarah Knox's grave, and then he takes her up to Woodville to meet his mother, who is still alive and living in Woodville. Uh, she will die later that year, but she is alive and living in Woodville, and then they go to New Orleans for the wedding trip, and they stay in New Orleans a month or two, then they go back up to Davis Bend and Jefferson takes up his plantation again.

Speaker 1: Right around the time of the wedding, Jefferson apparently was taking a boat trip to Natchez, and he ran into an old friend, Mr. Taylor. Tell us about that encounter.

Cooper: Jefferson Davis' encounter with Zachary Taylor on the steamboat on the Mississippi River, one hate, hates to say this, but that's about all that we can tell you, except during this encounter, whatever hard feelings had been felt were put

away, and the two men embraced each other, and they formed a friendship, or recreated a friendship or re, I probably should say refashioned a friendship, is probably the best word to say. Refashioned a friendship and a respect at that point in time, that only grew through the Mexican War and when Zachary Taylor was president. When Zachary Taylor died in the White House, Jefferson Davis was at his bedside. So, they refashioned a friendship, and they became very close.

Speaker 1: When Jefferson was –

Cooper: [clears throat] Excuse me.

Speaker 1: – No, that's okay. When Jefferson ran for Congress, uh, the first time, it would be the first time, to the United States Congress, what were the big themes that were percolating in the nation at that time?

Cooper: Well, from, in the, in the South, the, the big themes in 1845 were Texas, the annexation of Texas. Uh, in 1844, when James K. Polk had won the election as president, the Democratic candidate, Polk had favored annexation of Texas. Uh, Congress had passed an annexation measure on the very eve of Polk's taking office, and when Polk took office, he sanctioned the annexation of Texas, so

Davis would have been campaigning on the annexation of Texas as a good thing. The tariff was still a big issue. The tariff, of course, was a tax on imports. Uh, the tariff was generously opposed vigorously by Democrats, especially southern Democrats, because they saw the tariff as being a tax on them, that is people who exported cotton abroad and imported products to benefit northern manufacturers. It was a subsidy for northerners and a tax on southerners, and Democrats tended to oppose tariffs. Whigs tend to support tariffs, so Texas and tariff would have been two of the big issues in 1845.

Speaker 1: How did Jefferson do in that election?

Cooper: Jefferson Davis was elected to Congress in 1845. He did very well. It was his, uh, of course I said before he had to run statewide. He did not get the largest number of votes of all the people running for Congress, but I think he, I think his votes were No. 2. I think he was at the second highest number of votes, which is pretty remarkable for the first time in a statewide race, but of course, just the year before, he had covered the state as a candidate, as a presidential elector. Uh, but he was elected to Congress in '45, and he went to Washington to take his seat in December of '45. So, 1845 was a notable year. He begins a political career, and he begins a second marriage.

Speaker 1: He also lost his mother in 1845.

Cooper: Correct. He was campaigning when he got word that Jane Cook Davis died. He was campaigning for Congress. He left the campaign trail. He went down to Woodville to her funeral. She is buried at Rosemont, the Davis family home there. Uh, the, the home at that time, the land was being farmed by one of her daughters, who had married William Stamps, but a close friend of Jefferson's, and Jefferson came for the funeral, uh, but politics called and he left the funeral and went back to campaign.

Speaker 1: He, uh, goes to Washington, D.C. Brings Varina, um, what made him decide to bring Varina, and was that **** something **** happened in the fall?

Cooper: That, Jefferson Davis decided to bring his new wife, Varina, to Washington, was in many ways remarkable. It was not often done at that time. Washington was not what it is now. Washington was a frontier town. Most congressmen and senators came only for the sessions of Congress, and unlike now, Congress did not meet interminably. Congress would meet and go home, especially in the short sessions that began in December, like December '45. They

would go to March, and then they would adjourn in March and go back home and meet again in December. Uh, so, most people didn't bring their wives, and most congressmen and senators lived in boarding houses, what they called messes, and friends would gather together, people from the same state, people from the same section, people from the same party. A few people brought wives. It was normally people with a good bit of money who brought wives, because you had to put your wife up at, it would cost more to go to a place where she would live than a place where you could live in the same room with several fellas. And so, it was, uh, remarkable. I think he probably brought her because he was very proud. She was young, and she was eager to come, and my goodness, did she flourish in Washington. She adored Washington. She was a very bright woman, and she had received an in, a very good education. For a time she had been sent to what we would call a prep school in Philadelphia, and then she had a private tutor in Natchez, uh, a well-educated New Englander who was down there to become a judge who was a friend of the family. Um, uh, tutored her in languages and history and literature, and when she got to Washington, the people she met, the congressmen, the senators, the people in the Smithsonian Institution that she met, she was absolutely taken with it, and she never liked being in Mississippi after being in Washington in 1845 and '46. That's what she liked.

Speaker 1: How did Jefferson do upon his arrival in the United States Congress?

Cooper: Davis did very well, uh, as a freshman in Congress. He, uh, did the things you were supposed to do. He voted with his parties he was supposed to vote. He made speeches about things that, uh, freshmen made speeches about, particularly southern freshmen. He made, uh, he talked about slavery and he talked about the southern rights and, and the West and territories. He talked about the question of Oregon. At that time there was a, uh, there was a big issue of what to do with the Oregon territory, which encompassed all of the modern Northwest. It was not what is now just the state of Oregon, and we owned that jointly with Great Britain. Uh, at that time, what should happen? Should we break off from Britain and try and take it for ourselves? Uh, these kinds of issues Davis talked about.

Speaker 1: Uh, John Quincy Adams was in the Congress at that time, a former president. What did he think of Mr. Davis?

Cooper: Uh, Davis and John, Jefferson Davis and John Quincy Adams got along famously. Uh, John Quincy Adams had positive things to say about Davis, and Davis had positive things to say about John Quincy Adams. There was no

enmity between them. Of course, Davis was a very young, fledgling guy, and Adams was a man at the end of a long, illustrious career, even though Adams was, uh, by that time an adamant anti-slavery spokesman, and Davis was just beginning his career as an adamant pro-slavery spokesman, they got along fine.

Speaker 1: Early in his career, there were efforts to discredit Senator Webster, Daniel Webster, a Whig. How did Davis handle those attempts?

Cooper: The attempts to discredit Daniel Webster, the attempts to discredit Webster had to do with Webster's, uh, when his tenure as secretary of state under William Henry Harrison and John Tyler, it had to do with alleged malfeasance of funds and, uh, misappropriation of funds, and some Democrats in Congress were trying to blacken Webster's name and do him in, the same kind of partisan stuff that goes on today, from just because he was a Whig, we've got to, we've got the clout, let's stick it to him. And Jefferson Davis didn't like that. He didn't like that approach. He didn't think there was any evidence that Webster had done anything wrong, there was anything that he should be admonished for, disciplined for, anything should happen adverse to Webster, and so he said so. And, of course, Webster was quite pleased.

Speaker 1: Uh, Jefferson got appointed to the Smithsonian Institute Committee.

Tell us about that.

Cooper: Well, Jefferson Davis and the Smithsonian, Davis was very interested in, um, in, uh, progress, in progress of all kinds, a material progress. He was interested in technology. He was interested in science, and the Smithsonian Institution was really the first national institution in this country that was, had a mission of, of, of trying to do something about advancing technology, about advancing science, and Davis was very pleased to be a part of that, and he remained interested in that sort of thing throughout his career in, uh, antebellum politics.

Speaker 1: How was his health?

Cooper: Davis, Jefferson Davis' health, at this time, was as good as it would be. He periodically had repercussions from his malarial attack of 1835. These would be in the form of severe headaches. He had, uh, bronchial difficulties. Uh, he had, uh, neuralgic problems. Most of these at this time were under relative control for him, and, uh, I would say in the mid '40s, his health was as good as it ever was after 1835.

Speaker 1: Um, early in his tenure in Congress, tension began to mount between the United States and Mexico. Talk to us about those tensions, the events that caused the outbreak.

Cooper: Tensions, uh, were heightened between the United States and Mexico as a result of the annexation of Texas. Uh, Texas was a part of Mexico until 1836, when the Texans, mostly Americans who had migrated to Texas, mostly southern Americans, people chiefly from states like Tennessee and Mississippi and Arkansas had, uh, migrated to Texas, Louisiana. In 1836, they, these people led a revolt against the Mexican government, and they set up the Republic of Texas, but the Mexican government never recognized the Republic of Texas. For the Mexican government, Texas was still legitimately Mexican, and so when the United States comes along in 1845 and annexes Texas, uh, Mexico takes this as a great insult, because to Mexico, Texas is Mexican, and now the Americans say it belongs to the Americans. In 1845 and '46, tensions increase and President James K. Polk sends a military expedition under Zachary Taylor, who is now a brigadier general, from Louisiana, across into Texas, uh, down to what, the, uh, the general neighborhood of what is now Corpus Christi, Texas, and this is what the Mexican government claimed was the southern boundary of Texas, on the Nue, Nueces

River, which comes into the Gulf right about Corpus Christi. The Americans claimed that the southern boundary of Texas was the Rio Grande, which is over 100 miles south, and President Polk orders General Taylor to march to the Rio Grande to assert American sovereignty. On the banks of the Rio Grande, the inevitable happens. Uh, Taylor's men and Mexican soldiers come in contact with each other and they're, they're shooting, and the shooting occurs on the northern bank of the Rio Grande, and James K. Polk says that American soldiers are shot at on American territory. Therefore, we must go to war, and he asked Congress for a declaration of war against Mexico, which he gets.

Speaker 1: How did Jefferson Davis respond to this, uh, violent act against Americans?

Cooper: Well, Jefferson Davis was enthusiastic about the Mexican War, and now, from the Mexican point of view, the violent act had come when the Americans sent an armed expedition south of the Nueces River, but Jefferson Davis was very enthusiastic about the Mexican War, so enthusiastic that he wanted to go. Now, this caused a serious difficulty with his wife, because his wife didn't want him to go, and evidently he had made a promise to her that he would not make a unilateral decision to go. At the same time, he let it be known back in

Mississippi that he would be very responsive if, uh, Mississippi were to offer him a commission in a regiment that was being raised to go to Mexico. At this time, the United States Army was a very small, uh, animal, small regular Army, and when conflicts like this came, the President would call for volunteers from states and regiments would be raised in states, and a regiment was being raised in Mississippi. It would be known as the First Mississippi Regiment, and, uh, Davis let it be known that, uh, he, he would be glad to participate in that, and it turns out, uh, that he was elected Colonel of that regiment, that is the commanding officer, and he accepted that commission and then told his wife he had done it, and it created quite a furor. She was very unhappy and very distraught. She wrote her mother saying that she was devastated that Jefferson would do anything like this; that he would tell her he wouldn't, and then he would, and she was devastated, but Jefferson Davis was ready to go. He waited in Congress until the tariff bill of '46 had been voted on. He promised President Polk he would do that. That was the most important Democratic measure up that year. He wanted to be a good party man. He wanted to vote for the bill. He voted for the, uh, measure. He went back to Mississippi. He caught up with his regiment that had already gotten to New Orleans, and then they went from New Orleans, uh, to the coast off the Rio Grande to get ready to go into Mexico.

Speaker 1: I want to backtrack for moment, and then we'll get back to the Mexican War.

Cooper: Right.

Speaker 1: Um, before he left Congress, there was a question about the expansion of West Point, and he made a statement about, um, whether the United States would have been victorious if, uh, soldiers were tailors and blacksmiths.

Cooper: Oh, you're talking about Davis', uh, talk about West Point and his running with some of his fellow congressmen. This has really to do with the issue of professionalism, and Davis defended West Point, saying that this is a school for professionals, and that we need professional soldiers in command of our armies, and that we need these professionals because the army has become more and more technological. He talked about artillery and fortifications, and you have to have training to do this. He said, "It just can't be a tailor or a blacksmith and do this." Well, one of his fellow congressmen happened to be a tailor from Tennessee, a man who would be in Jefferson Davis' future also, a man named Andrew Johnson, who one day would be President of the United States when Jefferson Davis was imprisoned, and Andrew Johnson took great umbrage at this. He felt that he was,

um, uh, his reputation was being demeaned, and Jefferson Davis hastened to say he was not demeaning anything. He was simply talking about professionalism; that you need training to do whatever you do. Lawyers need training, doctors need training, army officers need training, but he said it in such a way that, that if you had a thin skin, and Andrew Johnson's skin was as thin as Jefferson Davis', and Andrew Johnson took it as a personal, and he said something about it, and Davis quickly tried to say, "Oh, no, I'm not trying to speak about you. Uh, I'm not saying anything about tailors, bad about tailors or blacksmiths or carpenters, but we need professionally trained soldiers."

Speaker 1: Do you think that this impacted the way Andrew Johnson interacted with Davis on his entry into prison?

Cooper: I don't think it was simply that. I think Davis and Andrew Johnson didn't get along when Davis was in the United States Senate in the late '50s with Andrew Johnson. Uh, they didn't get along then. Uh, Johnson, in fact, wrote a letter at that time in which he said that Davis was so ambitious, he didn't know whether Davis could survive if he didn't become president. Now, he meant president of the United States at that time. I don't think Johnson and Davis ever

got along, so it wasn't just this statement. They did serve together in the Senate in the late '50s.

Speaker 1: Okay. Back to the Mexican War. Um, he gets to, I guess, uh, Brazos Island, and, um, how did he interact with his regiment?

Cooper: How did Davis interact with his regiment? Well, we would start, remember that, that Jefferson Davis was elected by this regiment to be its colonel; that he was not appointed by the governor. He was elected. The commission came from the governor, but the men in the regiment elected him, so obviously, there were many people in the regiment who looked up to him anyway as a, as a person who had military training. He'd been to West Point. He'd been in the regular army. He was already run two statewide races in Mississippi. He was a notable person. So, he would have had a favorable image with these people when they started. When they got to Brazos Island, he immediately began to act like a military commander. He trained them. He gave them training in arms, training in drill, where some of the volunteer commanders like Davis didn't do anything with their people. They, they, they, they made like they were still home. Davis put them on guard duty. He made them, and some of the troops got unhappy. They

felt they were being drilled too much, but Davis was trying to do what professional officers do when they're getting people ready to go to war.

Speaker 1: Did the fact that Davis and Taylor had a long history, did that somehow impact the way Taylor, um, interacted with the Mississippi Regiment?

Cooper: I think it very much did. I think that Zachary Taylor's relationship with Jefferson Davis certainly had an impact on the way Taylor dealt with the First Mississippi. The first thing I think it did, when Jefferson Davis' regiment first arrived on Brazos Island, which is right at the mouth of the Rio Grande, where the staging area for American Forces, its right now big vacation spot is South Padre Island in Texas. This is the area we're talking about. Zachary Taylor, himself, told Jefferson Davis that it would probably be a while before his regiment could come inland. At that time, Taylor had transferred the bulk of his army way up river, up the Rio Grande, to a place called Camargo, where he would, this was going to be his jumping-off point to invade Northern Mexico. He told Davis that regiments were being brought up as they came in, so Davis would have a wait, but somehow the First Mississippi got ahead. They jumped up. They didn't have to wait all the way in line, and one can only, uh, surmise that Zachary Taylor brought them up because, um, of his relationship with Jefferson, and the second thing, uh, Taylor,

when he got ready to invade Mexico to, to march toward Monterrey, he was, decided he wouldn't take everybody. He stripped down his army, and he told Jefferson, however, that the First Mississippi would be one regiment that would go with him into the interior of Mexico.

Speaker 1: Yep.

Cooper: So, so I think that Zachary Taylor's relationship with Jefferson Davis definitely had an impact on the First Mississippi and his army.

Speaker 1: And what happened at Monterrey?

Cooper: Well, at the Battle of Monterrey, to make a long story short, the Americans won. It was Jefferson Davis's baptism under fire, and Davis did very well as a regimental commander in the Battle of Monterrey, both in the taking of a Mexican, uh, fort on the outskirts of the city, and in the fighting down in the interior of the city and the street fighting as they approached the main square in the city. Uh, when the battle was over, the Americans had won, and, uh, the Mexicans sued for peace, uh, for an armistice. There was an armistice committee set up, and, uh, Zachary Taylor appointed Jefferson Davis, uh, to this, uh, group. It was a

signal honor because the people on it were senior to Davis in rank, uh, political and military. Uh, it was the governor of Texas and a general, and so, uh, Davis was, this again showed Zachary Taylor's, uh, view of Jefferson Davis.

Speaker 1: But what happened with regard to the armistice?

Cooper: Well, the armistice was, um, disregarded and condemned by the administration of, of, um, James K. Polk, because Polk had decided to take a stiffer stance against Mexico, because Mexico would not give Polk all he wanted. What James K. Polk really wanted from Mexico was California, and a land bridge between Texas and California. Texas as well, of course. Uh, Mexico was not as forthcoming as Polk wanted, and so Polk decided that Taylor's armistice had been too generous and too kind. So he said, "We're not going to, we're not going to honor that armistice at all. We're going to carry the fight on into Mexico farther," which is what they did, of course.

Speaker 1: As a result, did Mr. Davis choose to resign from Congress?

Cooper: Mr. Davis, Jefferson Davis resigned from Congress before the Battle of Monterrey. But, notice he did not resign from Congress as soon as he left

Washington to go to Mississippi. He did not resign from Congress when he left Mississippi to go to Mexico. He left his resignation with his brother, Joseph. Clearly Jefferson Davis didn't want to leave Congress if the Mexican War was going to be over too quickly, but if the Mexican War was going to last a while, he would have, he would give up his seat, and so he waited until the fall of 1846 before his resignation took effect. Joseph put it in for him, but it was before Monterrey.

Speaker 1: Now, after Monterrey, he returned to Mississippi. How was he received?

Cooper: He, Jefferson Davis –

Speaker 1: Can we, um, we should probably talk about that he was wounded in battle **** –

Cooper: Uh, Jefferson Davis did return home after the Battle of Monterrey, and he, uh, was re, was given a hero's welcome when he returned home. The First Mississippi had had, uh, uh, a major role in the Battle of Monterrey, which was a great American victory, and the first great American victory in the Mexican War,

the first major victory on Mexican soil. Zachary Taylor was a hero and Davis, who was right at Taylor's right hand, here he comes back to Mississippi. He is lionized. He is lionized, and, of course, Davis, as most human beings would, Davis, he says it's wonderful. Uh, but, every speech he gives, what he says, he's so thankful he could command such wonderful people as the First Mississippi Regiment, and all the troops did it. He didn't do it all by himself. He had, he had these wonderful troops with him, but he obviously is, uh, enjoys being lionized. Now, of course, Davis comes home, his trip back to Mississippi has nothing to do with military affairs at all. His trip has to do with his personal life. It, uh, allegedly he asks for leave to come home to check on health and so forth, but the reason he came home was because his wife, Varina, and his eldest brother, Joseph, were literally at war with one another, and he felt he had to come back to see if he couldn't pacify the two people who were, who meant most to him. Uh, Varina was, um, very angry with Joseph. Uh, Joseph looked upon Varina as he had looked upon her in 1843 and '44, as a grandchild almost. I mean, she was a child. She was a, young, uh, she was still only 20 years old. Uh, but now, as the wife of a man who had been in Congress, as a woman who had been to Washington, as the wife of a man who was a colonel in the army, uh, she wanted Joseph Davis to treat her more as an adult. Uh, Joseph Davis did not do that. She became very angry and upset, and Joseph obviously told Jefferson he needed to come home.

Speaker 1: He returns to Mexico and engages in the Battle of Buena Vista. How did that battle go?

Cooper: The Battle of Buena Vista. Now before I get to the Battle of Buena Vista, uh, we've got to carry the, what I call the Iron Emotional Triangle back to Mexico, because when Jefferson gets back to Mexico, he gets letters from Joseph about Varina, and Varina, Jos, Joseph's telling him he thinks that maybe things are getting along better. Jefferson writes back to his brother and says he hopes so. He actually writes his wife and says he hopes that, that they can get along better and things will be okay. In the meantime, in terms of the war, the American Government has decided to make its main thrust into Mexico from Vera Cruz on the Gulf Coast directly toward Mexico City, which means that Zachary Taylor's army in the north becomes a secondary theater, and, in fact, Taylor's army is stripped. A number of Taylor's units are taken and taken to the Port of Vera Cruz, and put with the American army that's going into the interior of Mexico. But the First Mississippi remains with Zachary Taylor. Now word comes that Zachary, that the, the Mexicans are, are launching an offensive northward, uh, from the central Mexico, across the great desert, up toward the, toward Monterrey, coming across the desert to the southwest of Monterrey, and south of a town called Saltillo,

which is about 50 miles southwest of Monterrey. Zachary Taylor takes his army down there to confront this Mexican advance, and in February of 1847, the two armies collide at a place called Buena Vista, which was the name of a Mexican hacienda, and in a bitter fight there, February of 1845 [1847], uh, Taylor's army defeats the Mexican army, and the Mexicans turn and go back south into Mexico. Um, during this conflict, the First Mississippi Regiment has a really cardinal role to play in terms of, uh, thwarting attempts by the Mexican army to turn the American left flank, and also later, the day of the final attacks the Americans made in the center of the Mexican Army to drive them off the field. Uh, during this conflict, Davis was wounded. He was shot in the heel. It was a very painful wound, uh, but he remained in the saddle with his troops until the battle ended, and then he went, uh, for, for medical assistance.

Speaker 1: Tell us about the ****, I mean, can you grab [end of tape]

PART 2

Speaker 1: How was Jefferson Davis received upon returning after the success at Buena Vista?

Cooper: Jefferson Davis returned to Mississippi after, uh, Buena Vista. Well, the accolades he had received back in the fall of 1846 were simply multiplied. He was looked up as an, as a great hero, an enormous hero. I mean he was, uh, now the hero of two battles, wounded in combat, wounded in action. Davis was lionized. He was [pause] Mississippi was at his feet.

Speaker 1: How did President Polk accept Jefferson Davis back into American politics?

Cooper: President Polk and Davis, when Davis came back from Buena Vista, well, President Polk had a brigadier generalship to award. And he didn't want to give it to Jefferson Davis. He wanted to give it to a couple of his old politics cronies. Polk really believed that any general had to be politically loyal. Of course, Davis was a Democrat. That's okay, but he wasn't his per, he wasn't personally as close to Polk as some other people. But Polk acknowledged Davis's political prominence when he told a correspondent that he couldn't give this general, he had to offer this generalship to Davis because it was so critical in Mississippi that if he did not offer it to Davis, Mississippi might turn against the administration. So he had to make the offer to Davis although it was not what he

personally preferred to do. And he did offer to Davis to be a brigadier general in the United States Army.

Speaker 1: Did Davis accept?

Cooper: Jefferson Davis turned this down. Davis turned it down because he claimed that it was his state's rights constitutionalism that this general would be in charge of state troops would be over volunteers from states and he didn't feel that that was constitutionally appropriate. Well, of course, this I think one has to really question, uh, that had been done in the Mexican War already. Um, in fact, Davis's commander at Monterrey was General John A. Quitman, a fellow Mississippian, who had been in the very same position, been given a commission as general and he was put over couple regiments, including the First Mississippi. I think at the time Davis was much more concerned about his political career. He had, uh, talked to Joseph about that. He had also been in correspondence with General Taylor. And General Taylor told him that he really thought the chances for much more real notoriety in Mexico were pretty much past that he thought in the northern part where he was there would be basically guerrilla fighting, which wouldn't redound to anybody's benefit and if Jefferson Davis went down to, to the other American Army commanded by Winfield Scott. He was Taylor's enemy,

figured, Jefferson Davis figured he'd do too well in, in Winfield Scott's Army and there was, it was pretty clear the governor was going, going to appoint him to the Senate because a sitting United States senator had just died. And so Davis, Davis's appointment to the Senate and his perception of how things were going in Mexico, they had a great deal to do with his declining President Polk's offer of a general's commission, much more than any constitutional issues did.

Speaker 1: So, he entered the United States Senate. Um, it's a short term because he's finishing up a term of a deceased senator. Did he have difficulty getting elected to the, uh, to the 6-year term coming up?

Cooper: Davis's, when Jefferson Davis first entered the United States Senate he did come as an appointed person. He did have a short term ahead of him. And from the word, from the first word his main goal was to get himself elected in his own right. And he worked at that. He corresponded with, um, people back in Mississippi. He made every effort to get it. And he was named senator by the legislature. There were opponents, but Davis, he was such a hero and nobody had a chance. Mississippi was a Democratic state. Davis was a hero. He really didn't have much trouble getting elected in his own right in 1848.

Speaker 1: His fellow senator was Henry Foote. How did his relations with Mr. Foote, um, how did they actually turn upon his entry into the Senate?

Cooper: Well, Jefferson Davis and Henry Stuart Foote had been political colleagues for a time. They were both rising stars in the Mississippi Democratic party. They knew each other. Uh, and they had been, as I said, colleagues. But sometime during Davis's first time in the United States Senate--he was in the Senate the first time from 1847 until 1851--sometime in the early part of that he and Henry Stuart Foote had a very serious falling out. They almost came to, in fact they did come to blows. There was even talk of a duel. And after that point Jefferson Davis had absolutely no use for Henry Stuart Foote and Henry Stuart Foote had no use for Jefferson Davis. Uh, they were bitter political enemies in Mississippi until the early '50s when Foote's, for reasons about Mississippi politics, when Foote's possibilities just ran out and he left to go to California. But for maybe from '47, '48, '48 on 'til 1852 and '3 he and Foote were arch-political enemies.

Other Speaker: Think a moment there.

Speaker 1: Okay.

Other Speaker: And I think there might be some advantage to me kind of discussing the duel thing. I don't think a lot of people understand what that really means.

Speaker 1: What's a duel?

Cooper: The duel. The duel was a, an, an institution. And I'll, I'll say an institution. In the antebellum South it was terribly important in the society. Two people faced each other in mortal combat. This had to do with sense of honor, with southerners believing that if their honor were called into question, that their reputation was called into question, uh, their sense of themselves as independent, respected, honorable people. Now you say how in the world can this be? Well let's go back to Andrew Jackson whom we talked about a bit. Andrew Jackson said one occasion that a slanderer was worse than a murderer because he says a murderer only took your life. A slanderer took your good name. And without a good name you had no standing at all. Remember this is a slave society. In this society there's a very visible group of people who have no independence, who were bought, who were sold, who had no control over their own lives. And then the exact opposite of independence and honorable us terms as a white sort. And so if you allowed somebody to say you had no honor, if you allowed somebody to say

you were a person without integrity, without honor, you were allowing somebody to call you a slave-like person, to put you on that kind of pedestal. And most white southerners simply did not, did not abide that. And, um, duels were fought. And duels were fought quite often by political people who were in the public eye. I mean if, we go back to Foote and Davis, if Foote said something to Davis and Davis said something to Foote, because they were public men it would be known publicly. And if it were publicly known that somebody had said something to you that put you in a bad light and you didn't respond, then you lost all standing. And this went all through the social, I mean up to the top of the ladder. I mean Andrew Jackson who became president of the United States fought duels, not as president, before he was president. In the late 1820s the secretary of state of the United States fought a duel with the United States, a sitting United States senator. I mean these were prominent people who did, who fought these duels. There was even, uh, a book published in the 1830s by a former governor of South Carolina on the etiquette of dueling. It was sort of like the Amy Vanderbilt, Emily Post told you what to do. You know, you just get the book out, it told you all the steps, it was very ritualistic, very ritualistic process. Uh, generally the weapons were pistols, but sometimes they could go up to shotguns.

Speaker 1: Mr. Davis had yet another reason to feel animosity towards Henry Foote and that was as a result of the death of one of his brother-in-laws, Jefferson Davis's brother-in-laws.

Cooper: Ooh now.

Speaker 1: Are you aware of this.

Cooper: No. You got me on this. I'm not, I'm not, I'm not up on this.

Speaker 1: Well, apparently Henry Foote defended the man that killed –

Cooper: Yeah.

Speaker 1: – one of his brother-in-laws.

Cooper: But I'm, I'm really not prepared to talk about that. So if you'll let that slide, I'll be, be glad.

Speaker 1: You're allowed then. Let's continue. Uh, biggest question that fell upon Mr. Davis was the question of slavery in Oregon. And as a result Mr. Davis spoke a whole lot, for lack of a better way to say it.

Cooper: Correct.

Speaker 1: A whole lot about slavery on the floor of the Senate. Now would be the time for you to give us your kind of mini-speech about Jefferson Davis's view of Slavery.

Cooper: Jefferson Davis and slavery. We'll take that in two parts. First I want to talk about Jefferson Davis and the institution of slavery for a bit. And Jefferson Davis on about the issue of slavery in the territory, you mentioned Oregon, but let's make, generalize, and say the territories because we'll come into the Mexican Cession, which is the name of the territory that comes from Mexico to the United States after the Mexican War, and California, all that. So let's talk about slavery in the territories, but first the institution of slavery. Jefferson Davis never once questioned the legitimacy, the morality, the constitutionality of the institution of slavery. He was born in a slave society. He was raised in a slave society. His father owned slaves, never very many, but his father owned slaves. The one

tangible he inherited from his father was a slave. Really, it's the only tangible thing inherited from his father was this one slave, James Pemberton. Davis believed that in the South, southern society could not survive without slavery because he believed, as did most white southerners, in fact most white northerners and white Europeans at the time as well, that blacks were inferior to whites. And when you had large numbers of blacks the superior race had to control the inferior race. The method of control was slavery. And this was a good method. Davis believed that slavery was good for blacks because he said it was the great Christianizing and civilizing mission for white southerners to bring heathen Africans, savage Africans, as they saw it, heathen savages to the United States, Christianize them and civilize 'em. So in this sense he thought it was good for the blacks. Of course, this means that if you were Christianizing and civilizing that you somehow improving people. This means at some point you reach a level in improvement where you are civilized and Christian, but for Davis there was never any sense when the, when it would end. He seems to have believed that at some point in time somehow maybe slaves would, blacks would keep moving westward and somehow end up through Mexico and Central America, but this is just a vague, vague kind of notion. He never talked about a possibility of a date for ending slavery at all. As, as, in terms of his own slave force he started with one, James Pemberton. He went out and bought slaves to, uh, build up a slave force on his

plantation. And in 1860 when the slave regime ended he had 103 slaves, so he went from 1 to 103. There was natural increase on his slave plantations, meaning men and women had children. He kept buying slaves throughout the 1840s and '50s. There is no evidence that he sold slaves. Uh, one striking thing about his slave force is, um, through the '40s and the '50s there are practically no people who are over 50 years over. And, uh, the question is what happens? Obviously, these people don't live that long. Now the average life expectancy for a slave is, um, less than for a white person at this time, but for a slave it's a little bit, got the numbers in the book, I can't remember right now, but it's something like 40 years old, 39, 37, 38, 40 is the life expectancy because, of course, there's so many infant deaths. Uh, but on his plantation there are no elderly slaves. And there's no evidence he would've been selling elderly slaves. There's no market for elderly slaves. So obviously they didn't live to be very old. And the sexual breakdown varies over time, which could have to do with purchases and/or just the natural increase of our, the, uh, the, the care of the slaves. Now in his family there is a tradition that his slave plantation and his brother Joseph's were really almost idyllic, that there were slave juries and the slaves on these juries they judged the other slaves who were accused of transgressions, and the only time the masters got involved was to ameliorate punishment. I don't, I really think that's a great exaggeration. I could find no direct evidence, no contemporary evidence of any such idyllic operation.

The Davis brothers were prominent enough and their plantations were so accessible, right on the Mississippi River, that somebody would've said something about this. I even had graduate students go over to our library. We have [in] the manuscripts of our library lots of papers of planters from the Natchez area.

Anybody talk about this, either to condemn or praise it? You think somebody would've said these people are ruining our slaves or this is, nobody says anything. And so I, I find it hard to believe that it was this idyllic operation. And then after James Pemberton dies in 1850, Jefferson Davis has real trouble with overseers. Most planters had a lot of trouble keeping overseers. Overseers had a terrible job. They were supposed to make a good crop. Plus they were supposed to keep the slaves reasonably content. The two often clashed. And Davis went through overseers like everybody else. He had almost, he had I think seven overseers between Pemberton's death and 1860. And why would he get rid of these overseers? He would go home and he would write, and he would say well, they have mistreated the people. He doesn't give details. He says some of the men's morals aren't what they should be. He doesn't give details, but clearly things on Brierfield weren't as he wanted them to be with all of his overseers. So these slaves were brought there to work and work hard they did. And there was a very, Davis made a lot of money as a planter. The land was rich. The slaves worked hard. He was a wealthy planter. But he never questioned slavery. Never.

Speaker 1: And how did he treat the slaves? Did they like him? Did they fear him?

Cooper: The evidence for that is very, very, very, very, very thin. Um, Davis, like most planters, certainly would give his slaves enough to eat because they couldn't work if they didn't eat. Now they may not have a nutritional diet that would meet all the standards today, but they ate basically what the poorest white people eat. They ate corn in various forms and they ate pork, mostly the, not the loins, but the, the fatback and the jowls and then smoked pork is what they ate, salted pork, salt pork and corn products. And in season they would have vegetables or many planters would allow slaves to hunt, you know, birds, kill animals. They could fish. Davis's slaves surely did that. They had plenty to eat. In terms of healthcare, most planters wanted to keep their slaves healthy because that was money. If a slave died, you lost. Slave was sick, you lost. And so most planters did have, um, doctors come to the plantations regularly. Davis certainly did. In fact a doctor was one of the chief agents at his plantation. But again the doctors could only do so much for white or black at that time. But in health they tried and tried in terms of, um, that Davis had ministers on his plantation for slaves. And most planters were eager for slaves to embrace Christianity because

they taught slaves, you know, serve and obey thy master and they thought if slaves believed in, in God and in heaven, you know, you're loyal to your master on earth, you'll get to heaven and this was the gospel that the whites preached the blacks.

The blacks didn't necessarily accept this as their version of the Gospel, but the blacks certainly, em, embraced Christianity, although they looked upon Jesus and Moses as leading their people out of bondage. And at some point they were gonna be let out of bondage. They didn't know when that was gonna happen. But they anticipated at some point in time somebody, many of the spirituals are about this, if you think about it. So many of the spirituals are about leading out of bondage.

Um, did they fear Davis? Well they obviously feared Davis because he was, um, he had control over them, um, and punishments were, were, uh, meted out. Davis allegedly, supposedly, I should say supposedly, not allegedly, did not like to whip slaves, did not like to have slaves whipped. Was the whip ever used on his

plantation? I can't imagine it wasn't, but I can't say that it was. There is a wonderful letter written by a brother of Varina's, not written by a brother, written by a person who talked to a brother of Varina's about a punishment Davis gave a

slave. He put him in his own version of, uh, iso, of isolation. He built a little box and put him in the box. They only fed him through the box for a time, said after

that the slave did what he was told to do. And Joseph wrote Jefferson a letter in

1860 in Washington, '61, about some slaves on the plantation giving trouble, but he

gave no particulars, gave no particulars about the, uh, punishment meted out. In other words, there's not a lot of hard evidence to be very specific about Davis's slaves. Now there is this big collection of slave narratives put together in the 1930s in the New Deal about white people talking to very old black people. Now you can say all kind of things about this. The blacks were telling the whites what the whites wanted to hear. This was the age of segregation and all. But if you look at this, you look for major themes. And if you look, there are a few with Davis's slaves, few of the interviews. What do you get from this? Basically that they knew that they belonged to a famous man. Basically that he was kind to children. And, uh, they talk about, some of 'em talk about being bought and brought there. But you don't get the kinds of details that you would like for me to talk about and that I wish I could've written about.

Speaker 1: Do we have those tapes? Do we have those tapes?

Other Speaker: No, no, they're not audio tapes.

Cooper: No they're, they're –

Other Speaker: They're transcripts.

Cooper: Transcripts, transcripts.

Other Speaker: ****.

Cooper: They're published.

Speaker 1: Yes, WPA stuff.

Other Speaker: It's on –

Cooper: Yeah. There, there is an audio, if you look in the footnote in my book

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Other Speaker: **** ask about it.

Cooper: There is an audio of a slave who was on Jefferson Davis's plantation that's in the folklore collection of the Library of Congress, which I listened to. But it's so utterly, utterly fanciful that, you know, it's fun to listen to this guy. But, you know, I put no credence in what he's got to say.

Other Speaker: He wasn't being honest.

Cooper: Well I don't think it's, I, I think it's fanciful. I don't think it's lying. He's got all this stuff going on that never went on. But if you wanna listen to it, I, I, my book has the specific citation for it 'cause I listened to it. And it's wonderful to listen to. But he's got things happening that never happened.

Speaker 1: Okay. So, um, that's Davis's plantation.

Cooper: Now, all right now we come to slavery in the territories.

Speaker 1: Yes.

Cooper: All right. Jefferson Davis was a, a, um, very articulate and vigorous proponent of the southern view of slavery in the territories, a general widespread view of southern territories. Southerners claimed that they should have every right to take their slaves to the territories. Now we just go through a series of steps how they get there. First is, they say they're American citizens. And the territories belong to American citizens. And all American citizens have the right to go to the

territories and take their property. The Fifth Amendment to the Constitution says that property can't be taken without due process. We think of the Fifth Amendment in terms of not to incriminate yourself. But it's also a due process clause. And they said so Congress can't just pass a law and say you can't take slaves to the territories. It's our right as American citizens and, of course, the United State Supreme Court in 1857 in the Dred Scott case accepted this view. But why was slavery in the territories so powerful for southerners? I think there are several things. Some practical and some much more ideological, emotional. Practically, it had to do with politics. If you don't get any more slave states, that means the power of slavery in the Congress will decrease because states, what govern the United States and the Congress and the presidential elections, and if you have a slave state, you not only get the white vote, white population, you get three-fifths of the slave population counts for senators, I mean congressmen. So you add that to the senators it helps the vote in the Electoral College. It has to do with power, political power. But it has to do with a whole lot more than that. If it was just political power, I don't think it would've ever ended up like it did. But it has to do with a sense, southerners believed that they were American. They believed that they were moral. They believed that they were loyal. They believed they were patriotic, just like Jefferson Davis. And to be told that no you're not, that you're not moral, that you're not patriotic, that you're not American, was a slap in

their face. They were also being told they were not honorable. They were not honorable men and that slavery blackened the escutcheon of America, that was a horrible thing and you people are horrible. You people are pariahs. You people are lepers. And we want nothing to do with you out there in what is the property of the United States of America. And southerners said no, we won't accept that. We are American. We are moral. Look at all these people who owned slaves and fought for the country, from George Washington to Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, Zachary Taylor. We are good Americans. Southern Americans said after the Mexican War, like Davis, that we went to Mexico. We fought. We bled. We left people down there in the ground. Now you're telling us we can't take our property to what we won with a triumph. We won't accept that. So that's why the territorial issue is so powerful to southerners. That's why it's so powerful. When Davis articulates this, as you say, starting in 1847, going right on until 1861. The same themes over and over and over and over and over again. They don't really change.

Speaker 1: Speaking of Zachary Taylor around 1847, 1848, he became the presidential nominee for the Whig party. Quite a pickle that puts Jefferson Davis in. How did Mr. Davis handle that?

Cooper: Zachary Taylor's candidacy for the Whigs for president in 1848 was a difficult time for Davis. But Davis was by that time really a professional politician. He was a Democrat. There was no question that he would not announce for a Whig. But at the same time he did not have to be as energetic or as active as he might be. He made it publicly known that he was for the Democratic candidate Lewis Cass. And he said that even though I have private feelings in this matter, that I'm a Democrat, I'm for Lewis Cass. He is the person who is, should be, the president and my vote will go for Lewis Cass, my influence for Lewis Cass. But he didn't canvas Mississippi for Lewis Cass. And the Mississippi, the Democratic newspapers, said that everybody understood why Colonel Davis, they called him Colonel Davis, why Colonel Davis was not out campaigning, but we understand that. That's all right. That's all right. He's announced he's for Cass. We understand.

Speaker 1: Uh, Zachary Taylor wins.

Cooper: He does. But Cass carries Mississippi. But Taylor comes closer in Mississippi than any candidate would ever come in Mississippi, any Whig candidate.

Speaker 1: So, uh, Taylor wins. And what happens upon his victory as it relates to Jefferson Davis?

Cooper: Well Zachary Taylor and Jefferson Davis had a short unhappy life, to borrow a phrase, short unhappy life, to turn Ernest Hemingway's phrase around a bit, in politics, because Zachary Taylor did not accept Jefferson Davis's view of slavery in the territories. He did not accept the generally held southern view.

Taylor was very idiosyncratic on that. Taylor had told Davis before that if the abolitionists in the North got so active that slavery itself was really threatened, he says then I have to defend it by, with force if necessary. But Taylor didn't believe that slavery could expand into the Mexican Cession, that desert out there. And he thought it was very divisive in the country and he wanted to try to get around that question. And he, Davis, I don't think Davis really picked up that Taylor was gonna be as adamant on that issue as he was. There's some signs that Taylor did say things to Davis and Taylor did tell Davis, look, we're gonna disagree about some things and you go your way and I'll go mine, we'll not touch our personal relationship. You do what you have to do. And so they were bitter opponents on the territorial measure. Zachary Taylor wanted to bring California in as a state and it did come in that way in 1850. Davis was almost willing to resort to a quasi-violence on the floor of the Senate, going up and tearing up the California bill to

show his displeasure with California as coming in as Zachary Taylor wanted. But again, though politically they were deeply and bitterly opposed, it didn't affect them personally because, as I said, Jefferson Davis was sitting at Zachary Taylor's death, beside his deathbed.

Speaker 1: Talk to us about that, about Jefferson Davis just –

Cooper: Well he and Taylor retained a close personal friendship. And, um, there's not a lot of, uh, detail about their interaction while Taylor was president. Taylor was inaugurated, I mean was inaugurated on March the 4th, 1849, and he died on July the 4th, 1850. All of that time Davis would not have been in Washington with Taylor, except from December of '49 till December of 1850, and that was the time of the great fight about California and the territorial issue that resulted what is known as the Compromise of 1850. Both Taylor and Davis opposed the Compromise of 1850. And it would never have passed if Zachary Taylor had lived. But his death made, was, was essential for the passage of the Compromise of 1850. And during those months he and Davis still had a close personal relationship. But I can't tell you how many times Davis went to the White House or how many times he's talked to Taylor. I can't tell you that.

Speaker 1: Uh, Zachary Taylor becomes sick and Jefferson Davis is there for him. Tell us about that. You did a little, but I wanna get it in a full complete –

Cooper: Okay, but it's gonna be very brief 'cause I don't know much.

Speaker 1: Right. Well –

Cooper: But Taylor, Taylor becomes ill in the summer of 1850, he's, on July the 4th he goes out to an outdoor celebration out on about where the Washington Monument is. And he becomes ill after that. Uh, acute gastroenteritis probably, he probably had too many raw fruits and too much cold milk and such and he got sick. And it, it got worse and worse, and they couldn't do anything about it. And this old fellow who had campaigned through so many wars and battles and sleeping on the ground and swamps and mountains, here he is dying in his White House bed and Jefferson and Varina Davis are there. And Jefferson Davis is sitting by his deathbed when he does die.

Speaker 1: How were Varina and Jefferson getting along during this time?

Cooper: Jefferson and Varina, in terms of their relationship. When they came back, when Jefferson Davis came back from Mexico following Buena Vista, when he came back for good, there was still a great deal of tension in the house with, uh, Varina, I mean, I shouldn't say in the house, because Jefferson and Varina didn't live in the same house that Joseph did. But there was a great deal of tension in this triangle of Joseph, Jefferson and Varina. And Varina's behavior infuriated Jefferson. And, in fact, when Jefferson went back to Washington he didn't take her. He wrote her a letter. And not taking her was a great blow. He knew what that meant because he knew what Washington meant to her. And he told her that if she couldn't learn to comport herself properly, that they would simply have to live apart. He said that, they, he didn't talk about divorce. That was nothing [of the thing?], but she would just have to go live someplace else and they would not be together because he could not put up with a wife who couldn't conduct herself properly, that he came home wounded from Mexico and she should've been taking care of him and worrying about him instead of worrying about herself. And if she was gonna complain and, and fuss all the time, she could go do that by herself someplace. And she would have to shape up--or else. I mean it was very blunt. The letter is very blunt. Now she takes this to heart now. She begins to write back what she's doing and she is striving to be a good wife. And she begins to read self-help books about how to be a good wife. And, uh, she tells him about the books

she's reading. And, in fact when I was writing this book, my wife and I read that book about what you're supposed, and it did, it's the normal thing, you know, uh, your husband is the head of the house. You obey your husband. You do what needs do to make him happy, that's the way, that's the way things are. You know, God's the head of the world. Your husband's the head of you. And you do these things. And, um, their relationship got more even keel. I think one thing that happened that really made a difference for them, and, of course, it doesn't come right way is Varina finally has a baby. Now here's a young woman in a society where the whole role of women is to have babies. And she's around young women who are having babies and she's not having a baby. She married in 1845 and the first baby doesn't come, little Samuel is born in 1852 I think is right. So she's, there's evidence of a miscarriage in 1850, '51. There may have been more than one. There's only evidence of, of the one. But here she is not being able to fulfill the role for which she is literally made, in which she's in the world to do. This on top of all the trouble with Joseph, I think that Varina is, is, is a very frustrated, angry, young woman at this time.

PART 3

Other Speaker: Can you hold on? Dr. Cooper interview, after lunch. So, you're on.

Speaker 1: I'm gonna ask the question, Ryan, okay? Do we want Bill to explain the Compromise of 1850 or is that something we wanna pass on, and has the voiceover, give him time?

Other Speaker: Yeah, give him time?

Speaker 1: What?

Other Speaker: Give him time **** all that.

Speaker 1: But we'll have him talk about Davis? Okay. Uh, talk to us about Mr. Davis' involvement in the Compromise of 1850.

Cooper: The Compromise of 1850 and Jefferson Davis. The Compromise of 1850 came about because of the dispute over what to do with the Mexican Cession. There was a territory that came to the United States after the Mexican War. They've got a, what are now, a modern Southwest, plus California. It's reached on up into Nevada and Colorado as well. Uh, the issue was slavery in this territory. Would slaves be allowed to go there or would slaves not be allowed to go there?

Davis, uh, speaking for the South and with other southerners, took the position that he'd enunciated clearly before, that southerners had every right to go into this territory, every right as an American. President Taylor, on the other hand, decided that the whole issue was so divisive and so dangerous to the Union, because northerners were taking the position that slavery would be prohibited from going in their territory, would be organized, and slavery would be prohibited. So Taylor decided what he would do is, he would bring California as a state immediately, not go through the territorial phase. Usually, when new lands came in, new areas, they were territories for a while, then when the population got to a certain level, they would become states and then they would be admitted to the union of states. Well, Taylor decided to miss the whole territorial issue because everybody agreed that a state could do what it wanted on slavery, that the federal government had no role in that. And he wanted to bypass the territor, the territorial issue for California. Now Jefferson Davis thought this was horrendous. He thought that this broke all precedent, that this went against what had been the American practice and the only purpose of do, for doing this was to get around the slavery issue. He also maintained that there weren't sufficient Americans in California to have a reason, responsible state, and again, he opposed and he opposed vehemently and vigorously. Now this is all Zachary Taylor wanted, was to bring in California as a state. He later had planned, there were plans also if you work, work with

California, he would organize all the rest of it as New Mexico, as one state, and bring it in quickly after California. But this got caught up with a man named Henry Clay, who was a senior American statesman who had been around for a long time, and Clay had been, had become known as the great compromiser. He'd been instrumental in the Missouri Compromise and settling the nullification crisis in Jackson's time, and he brought up several issues which he called, measures he called the Compromise of 1850. Jefferson Davis was opposed to all of it because to him the lynchpin was California, and all the other things involved, which included, such as the Texas, the western Texas boundary, the issue of fugitive slaves, the slave trade in the District of Columbia. Davis saw all of that was, uh, just on the, on the edges of things, that the, the central question was California, and he opposed it to the bitter end. When, uh, the votes in Congress came, the first vote came on the whole of the Compromise, it was a package put together called the Omnibus Bill, and it went down, much to Davis's excitement. Uh, Davis in voting against this bill was in league with northern Whigs who were vehemently anti-slavery. They wanted it to fail also because they didn't like parts of it, like, the fugitive slave law and the fact that the territories, New Mexico was not, or, and Utah were not organized, prohibiting slavery. But they wanted California in, but they wanted the measure to fail. Davis supported the things they opposed, but he opposed California so vigorously. But the whole thing failed. But then Zachary

Taylor died and Henry Clay decided he washed his hands; he was an old man and hot and tired in Washington. He left the city and younger people got involved with it and they broke it up into its constituent parts. And with a new president, Millard Fillmore, being an avid supporter of it, they managed to build coalitions for each part of it, to get through. There were very few who voted for every part of the Compromise, but each measure got through. Davis voted for a couple things, but against most of it, including the admission of California as a free state, which to him was a critical issue because that meant that there would no longer be a balance of free and slave states in the United States Senate, which he saw as a tipping of the power scale against the South and in 1850, that to him meant that the South was headed in the wrong direction. Now, he later changed his mind about that. But that's what he feared in 1850.

Other Speaker: As a result of the Compromise, the political parties in the South broke apart. Talk to us about that fracture and how Jefferson Davis aligned himself as it ****.

Cooper: Well, political parties in the South did break apart in a few states, in three states, because of the Compromise of 1850, in Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi. Now what happened in those states, there was some Democrats.

Democrats generally opposed the Compromise of 1850, like Davis did, but there were some Democrats, like Davis's Mississippi colleague, Henry Stuart Foote, who supported the Compromise, and in those three states, those pro-Compromise Democrats allied with Whigs to form what they called the Union parties, on the state level. At the same time, the remaining Democrats, which they tended to be a majority of the Democratic party, but they turned out to be a minority, usually against the Demo-pro-Compromise plus Whigs, and from 1850, 51 and 52, this breakdown occurred in these three states, and it did cause a realignment of politics in the South. The first thing that happened was the Whig party disappeared in those three states, and the second thing, the Whig party never reappeared in those states. But the Democratic party was fractured. And in a state like Mississippi, where the Democrats had been dominant, this was very important and Henry Stuart Foote came back from the Senate to run for governor, as a Union party candidate, and what the Union party claimed was that the majority of Democrats, who became known as State Right Democrats in Mississippi, that these people were really secessionists, anti-unionist, and they had to be stopped because they were trying to destroy the Union. And Jefferson Davis became the leader on what was called the southern rights party. Davis denied that he was for secession. He denied that he was tryin' to break up the Union. He maintained that the Compromise of 1850 was dangerous and the South should take a stand against the Compromise of

1850. Now what kind of stand did he, did he advocate? It's not quite clear what he meant by take a stand. Mississippi should, in its legislature denounce it; Mississippi should call a convention and denounce it. Maybe several southern states should meet together and denounce it. It was never very clear what, uh, course this opposition was going to take, what form it was going to take, but politically, it put Davis and the Democrats in this, now, southern rights party, state rights party they called it, it put them on the defensive. And the, um, the Union party, with Foote as its gubernatorial candidate, but a majority of the people in the party were former Whigs, they had a majority in the election of 1851 for governor, Henry Foote beat Jefferson Davis.

Other Speaker: Expand on the issue a little more. Tell us what happened with Governor Quitman.

Cooper: All right, the, uh, incumbent governor in Mississippi was John A. Quitman, who had, uh, uh, been a major figure in Mississippi politics for a generation. In fact, he'd become a major general in the army during the Mexican War and was Jefferson Davis's immediate commander at the Battle of Monterrey. Later on, he became a governor and after that, later in the '50s, he became a congressman. But in the '50s, Quitman was a secessionist. He was a radical. He

thought that the Compromise of 1850 meant that the South should go out of the Union. And he worked in conjunction with politicians in South Carolina to try to get Mississippi to go out. He failed in doing that. In the meantime, Quitman was caught up in efforts that were known as filibustering, that is, efforts made to get certain, mainly Caribbean and Central American areas, under American domination by force, force exercised by private groups. And Quitman was indicted in being involved in one of these cases. He was indicted in New Orleans and he resigned as governor to go face this indictment. But when the crisis came along for the, uh, 1851 race with the unionist party and the state rights party, Quitman was looked upon by many democrats as deserving the party's nomination again, and what, many others wanted Davis because they felt that Quitman was too radical, and Quitman would lead the party to defeat in Mississippi. Davis probably could have gotten the nomination, but he wouldn't agree to it unless Quitman agreed to step aside. Quitman wouldn't step aside, and so Quitman got the party nomination. But when the campaign actually started, Quitman proved very ineffective on the stump. Henry Stuart Foote routed him, time and time again. They almost had fights. Finally, Quitman withdrew and with a very short time left, the state rights party drafted Davis to run as its gubernatorial candidate. Davis agreed to accept this draft, and he did mount a campaign. He had less than 1 month, and he pulled within fewer than a thousand votes of, uh, Foote, but he lost.

What's even more amazing about that, when he agreed to run with this thing, he resigned from the Senate so he no longer had his United States Senate seat, and he didn't wanna hold that while he was running for governor. On top of that, he had just passed through an excruciatingly painful illness, but he got up from his sickbed to make this run for the state rights party.

Other Speaker: Hold on, I gotta change the battery.

Cooper: And you asked me about his eye. Now, I can't quote the medical terms for his diseases unless I open my book and read 'em out, so you have to tell me whether you want me to do that or not.

Other Speaker: Yeah, I'll tell you what it was.

Cooper: Yes, but I can't, I can't remember those terms.

Other Speaker: Herpetic keratitis.

Cooper: Say it again?

Other Speaker: Herpetic keratitis.

Cooper: Herpetic keratitis.

Other Speaker: Oh, herpes, uh, herpes –

Other Speaker: It's a form of herpes.

Cooper: Yeah, herpes in the eyes.

Other Speaker: Okay.

Cooper: I just may say that rather than tryin' to say the medical term. Does that bother you?

Other Speaker: No, no, I mean.

Other Speaker: No.

Other Speaker: That means you're not a doctor.

Cooper: Yeah.

Other Speaker: But if you could say if it's true, that this is when his eyes started to ****

Cooper: Oh, no. It is true.

Other Speaker: Okay. Talk to us about the illness he suffered in his eyes?

Cooper: Davis had, of course, Sir, Jefferson Davis had recurring manifestations of his malaria problems, but it never really affected his, uh, eyes very much, but in 1851 he suffered a very severe ophthalmologic disease. He probably had something, uh, involved with herpes in his eyes and, um, he almost went blind from it. He was in ferocious pain. He could have no light whatever. He stayed in darkened rooms. His wife would read to him because he could not stand any kind of sunlight. He really had no medical treatment there. He was at Brierfield. He did correspond with a family friend and noted physician in New Orleans, who did, um, talk to him about what he had and we know very much about it because Davis was very detailed in his description of his symptoms. Uh,

this disease that he had, uh, modern medical studies show can be connected with malaria. There have been studies in Africa that show that this kind of disease can come from connections of malaria and probably also with psychological stress, which he certainly had, enormous stress, political stress at this time. Plus the malarial, uh, legacy, and he was really felled. And when he got up from his sickbed to go campaign for governor, he still wore goggles to try to protect this eye, and his eyesight never really came back to normal. Later in the decade, he would suffer even more severe eye difficulties, but this was the beginning of really serious problems in his eyes.

Other Speaker: After he lost the governor's race, and he had resigned from the Senate, he really didn't take much time out of politics. Uh, talk to us about the presidential election of 1852.

Cooper: Well, I wanna say, before I get to the presidential election of 1852, I wanna talk about Davis and politics. Uh, so many people talk about Davis and say when 1860 comes, he was a poor choice for Confederate president and such because he really wasn't a politician, that he was just a man who had been in politics. That's totally untrue. Davis was a seasoned politician. He knew how to practice politics and in the campaign of 1851, this was in the general run before the

presidential run, he, he wrote his wife a letter and he said look, I, I would like to be home more, but I've got to go out and campaign. This is what I've got to do now. This is what I'm about. I mean, this was a man who understood what his profession was, and his profession was politics. After he loses for governor in '51, he's no longer in the Senate, he goes, he's at Brierfield, he begins to turn his full-time attention to becoming, to being a planner, which was the way he made a living. But 1852 comes very quickly, and 1852's a presidential year. And the Democratic party comes back together. The divisions that had followed the Compromise of 1850 in these states in the South, of Georgia and Mississippi, these divisions no longer obtained, and the democrats rallied together to support a national ticket, and the national ticket is headed by Franklin Pierce of New Hampshire. Jefferson Davis is enthusiastic about this reunion of Democrats in Mississippi. In fact, he tells some of his colleagues that we welcome them all back. Some of his colleagues in Mississippi said we should not let these people come back in, who opposed us, and they said ugly things about you. We should ostracize 'em, keep 'em out, and Davis says absolutely not. We wanna bring everybody back into the Democratic tent. We want the Democratic party to be whole again. Davis supported that enthusiastically, and when Pierce got the nomination, uh, Davis was pleased. Pierce was nominated on a platform of classic Democratic, classic Democratic creed of state's rights, southern rights, protection

for slavery, etc. So Davis had no problem with Franklin Pierce. Interestingly enough, uh, Franklin Pierce from New Hampshire ended up bringing Jefferson Davis back into national politics because Pierce had decided that he wanted to have a cabinet that cut across all the ideological lines in the Democratic party. He didn't want to have just people who supported the Compromise or just those who hadn't supported. He wanted all kinds. And so, Jefferson Davis, who had been against the Compromise, was not cut out for ideological reasons. And in fact, many southerners pressed Pierce to put Davis in the cabinet as representative of these people who had been against the Compromise, but never really left the Democratic fold because Davis always called himself a Democrat, and he was an ardent supporter of Pierce. And so Franklin Pierce ends up, to make it short, offerin' Davis the position in his cabinet as secretary of war. Davis, at first, says he doesn't want to take it, but he's told he should take it because it would really help the state rights' agenda, and help the state rights' cause to have a man of his stature accepting a position with the president. Of course, my own opinion is I think Davis was eager to take it all on because he was a politician. This was a chance for a new start and I think he was delighted to have it, and he did finally accept Pierce's offer.

Other Speaker: During the 1852 election there was some movement to draft Jefferson Davis on the ticket. Um, talk to us about that movement.

Cooper: The movement to put Jefferson Davis on the ticket in '52, I think, it was a movement that didn't get very far. It didn't have much oomph behind it. There were a few people who talked about Davis, but it didn't go very far at all. Uh, Davis was never a serious contender for vice president in 1852. Uh, he was, he did make it into Pierce's cabinet, but he was never a serious contender for vice president.

Other Speaker: Describe the relationship between President Pierce and Secretary Davis.

Cooper: The relationship between Pierce and Davis is a fascinating one, uh, because Pierce and Davis were never friends. Uh, Davis met Pierce when he was in Washington in the late 1830s. At that time Pierce was the Democratic senator from New Hampshire. Pierce had fought in the Mexican War, but never with Jefferson Davis. Pierce was in the campaign of Winfield Scott, from Vera Cruz into Mexico City. He was never in northern Mexico with Zachary Taylor. To my knowledge, Jefferson Davis and Franklin Pierce never spoke, never corresponded,

between the late '30s and Pierce's election as president. And yet, Pierce approached Davis as almost a friend and Davis responded as almost a friend, but then during the course of Pierce's administration he and Davis became quite close. Uh, Pierce suffered a personal tragedy, just before he became president. Uh, he and his wife and his, uh, child were in a railroad accident, in which his child was killed. Uh, Pierce's wife never got over the death of that child and Pierce was severely, uh, uh, traumatized by it, and he and Jefferson Davis became very close through his administration. I think it's fair to say that Davis was the closest of his cabinet members to him. And afterwards, from 1857 'til the outbreak of the Civil War of course, uh, Davis kept in close correspondence with Franklin Pierce. And even after the Civil War, Franklin Pierce came to visit him when he was in prison at Fortress Monroe. So they became fast friends during Pierce's administration, but the, the previous relationship is, um, not one that you can say they were friends.

Other Speaker: What were Jefferson Davis's most notable accomplishments during his time as secretary of war?

Cooper: I think Davis's most memorable accomplishments were several. One thing, he managed to get the size of the army increased, which he thought was critical because the nation was expanding westward rapidly, and he thought the

army needed to be increased to protect the settlers and their western movement, to protect them from Indians, uh, to guard them. And he also got pay for the soldiers, uh, increased by Congress. He was very pleased with all of that. Uh, Davis also was, uh, wanted very much to upgrade what he called the, what he would call, the intellectual side of the army. And he was interested in reading about, uh, military developments in Europe. Of course, the Europeans were the vanguard of military, modern military operations at that time. He also sent a deputation over to study the Crimean War and bring back lessons to the United States. That's the second thing. The third thing, Davis was really interested in, in the West. This is not just the, increasing the size of the army to protect settlers. He was enthusiastic about the growth of the United States, the projection of American power to the Pacific Ocean, but he believed that the projection of American power to the Pacific Ocean was endangered because it took so long to get from east to west. You had to go either around the tip of South America or go down to the Central American isthmus and transship men and material across, and he felt that American interests on the west coast could be endangered by a, a major European naval power. For example, Great Britain, how would we respond? So Davis, early on, became, became a champion of a transcontinental railroad. And he was deeply involved with getting surveys done, tryin' to pick the best route for this transcontinental railroad. Uh, nothing ever came about because of politics. They couldn't decide

where to build the thing. Southerners wanted it built from the South. People in the Midwest wanted it built from St. Louis west and such, due west, so the thing was never built before the Civil War. But interestingly about Davis, uh, Davis believed that the government could be deeply involved in building this railroad. He was not a man who said this is not a governmental responsibility. He thought the government could be involved by giving land, public land to the railroad companies building the railroad. And he, uh, some of his strict constructionist friends in Congress got very upset about this. And, but he, he defended it on, on the grounds of national security. It was a national security issue. The Congress gave the federal government authority to protect the national interests and national defense, and he thought this was essential. I've said, of course, it never got done before he left office, but the, they produced a massive 15-volume set, published by the, uh, the War Department on surveys and such, out there for the West, to try to find the best routes that were used, uh, when the railroads were eventually built. But one footnote along the way, Davis saw the future in railroads, but he was concerned about what you do until you get the railroads. And he began to look at camels and, uh, he saw camels used by the, uh, French in Africa. He knew the Ottoman Empire used camels. He knew that in classical times the Romans had used camels, and so he had a study done, and he had camels brought from the Middle East to the United States, and a camel corps was established and there was

a trial run made of carrying, of camels going west from Texas all the way to California. Now this trial, uh, did not end before Davis's time as secretary of war ended, but it was successful. And one can foresee, one can see that camels would have been used successfully on the American frontier if railroads hadn't come so quickly as they did come. Uh, Davis saw the camels not only as a beast of burden to help settlers get across the desert waste, but he saw them also as, uh, being used by cavalry, and to defend and attack Indians because they could move a lot of material much greater distance than horses, and the, the trial that was made was really pretty successful. But railroads came along and the camel, people laugh sometimes about Davis and camels, but it really was not a laughing matter. It was, it was an idea to, it was almost like a form of technological progress. And, uh, when asking about Davis as secretary of war, and I mentioned the, the increase of the army and the money and the intellectual and the west, Davis also was very interested in, um, weaponry and improvements in weaponry. And in Davis's time, you get, uh, changes in, in the basic musket so that you begin to have rifling. He has a new book on tactics written, for the army to follow. And he's very interested in government, um, ordnance area where, uh, weapons were made, armories. He wanted the government to run armories. There were people he wanted to, in our terms, he would say privatize the construction and operation of armories. Davis was opposed to that. He said the government ought to do it because the people

doin' this ought to be beholdin' to the government and it was not a, a thing for private business.

Other Speaker: What was Jefferson Davis's involvement in expansion of the U.S Capitol?

Other Speaker: Actually, hold on one second, **** a second.

Other Speaker: Uh, what was Mr. Davis's involvement in the expansion of the Capitol?

Cooper: Uh, Davis, Jefferson Davis and the Capitol. President Pierce gave Davis a good bit of authority dealing with the Capitol. As secretary of war, the, the, uh, the War Department, the engineers were in the War Department, the military engineers. Those were the only professionally trained engineers in the country at that time, and they were used in all kinds of construction projects, and they were deeply involved in, in construction of public buildings and public works in Washington, D.C., and since the secretary of war was the man ultimately in charge of the Corps of Engineers, uh, Davis had a great deal to do with, uh, the Capitol; in fact, things about the dome. At that time, the dome had not yet been

put on the Capitol. Matters involving the dome were, uh, matters that Davis was concerned about. Davis was also very concerned about the mall and the designs for, for modernizing the, or making the mall into what we think of today as, kind of a park because prior to that, it was just, sort of, open land out there.

Other Speaker: When was the Capitol completed?

Cooper: I can't answer that.

Other Speaker: What I'm getting at is – OK.

Cooper: I don't know, so I can't tell ya.

Other Speaker: Okay, uh, describe to us, um, the importance of the Kansas-Nebraska question, during Davis's tenure.

Cooper: The Kansas-Nebraska issue was absolutely, centrally important in American history, and Jefferson Davis had a central role to play in it. The Kansas-Nebraska question has to do, again, with slavery in the territories. Uh, Kansas-Nebraska, where the two states are now, it was, at that time, one territory called the

Nebraska Territory. It was north of the Missouri Compromise Line, which was 36 degrees, 30 minutes, the southern boundary of Missouri. According to the Missouri Compromise of 1820, any territory north of that line, slavery was forbidden. Well, in 1853, Senator Stephen A. Douglas, Democrat out of Illinois, who was the chairman of the Senate committee on territories and an ardent expansionist, decided it was time to organize the Nebraska Territory. After all, the settlers were there. They were in Iowa. They were in Missouri. This was the next stop along the line, and it had to be organized so that you could have surveys, so that there could be military protection, so that people could move in and begin building a society. Well, when Douglas put this bill before the Senate, he failed. He couldn't get any southern support because southerners said well, look, southern Democrats said, look, the Repub, the Democratic platform of 1852 now says that popular sovereignty is the policy of the party. The popular sovereignty was an idea that came about in the late '40s, in an attempt to get around no slavery in the territories. What it said was that Congress wouldn't pass any law about slavery in the territories. We'll let the people on the ground in the territories, the people themselves, the sovereigns, they would make the decision. The decision made on the ground, in New Mexico, in Kansas, wherever, was called popular sovereignty. This was in the Democratic platform of 1852. So southern Democrats said well, look, why can't popular sovereignty hold for Kansas as well? Nebraska? Why do

we have one rule here and one rule there? Let's have this rule, and they told Douglas that they wouldn't support it, unless he did throw out the Missouri restriction and permit, at least theoretically, the possibility of slavery. Well, Stephen A. Douglas was anxious about this because he knew that if you hit the Missouri Compromise, you would hit a vein that could really cause an uproar in the North. So he said he wouldn't do it unless the president signed on. And so Douglas, with a couple of other major congressional figures, went to visit Secretary Davis for an audience with the president, because they all knew that Davis was very close to Pierce. And they came late on a Saturday, and Davis said they'd have to come back on Monday because it was too late and Pierce didn't see people on Sunday, and Douglas said we can't wait that long because of the count in the Senate, so Davis took 'em to see the president, and the president agreed to sign off on throwing, throwing aside the Missouri Compromise. Now, Jefferson Davis thought this was the right thing to do because he always believed the Missouri Compromise was unconstitutional. And if you believe, like he did, that every American had the right to take any property anywhere, then any prohibition was against the Constitution. Now, Davis had always been willin' to accept the Missouri Compromise, in terms of the Mexican Cession. He was willing to extend the Missouri Compromise line all the way to the Pacific Ocean. He said he was not giving up on principal there, but he was willing to follow precedent in

Missouri, he was willing to make an agreement for the sake of the Union and for national harmony. But when the Missouri Compromise line extension was rejected by northerners, especially northern Whigs, then Davis felt no longer any necessity to hold to it, and he felt it was unconstitutional. So he supported this Kansas-Nebraska move, and after the president signed off, Davis did, uh, use his influence in the Congress and the Senate and the House, to talk to people about, Democrats about getting it through the Congress. And it went through the Congress in the spring of 1854 and it caused a political firestorm in the North. It hurt the Democratic party desperately. It killed the Pierce administration, and it was instrumental in the rise of what would become the Republican party.

Other Speaker: What happened with Kansas and Lecompton then?

Cooper: Well, Kansas and Lecompton. Uh, to answer a question like that, I'm gonna be, be very general because it's so involved and it's so complicated, and I don't want to be trapped, but you must tell me if I don't say enough.

Other Speaker: Yeah, we're just tryin' to get to how it impacted Jefferson Davis.

Cooper: All right, but I just, just tell me if I don't say enough?

Other Speaker: Okay.

Cooper: In the aftermath of Kansas-Nebraska, of course, people began to move into, into Kansas, for, before Nebraska. Kansas, of course, the southern part of the territory because Kansas abutted Missouri, and Missouri was, had been a state for a long time and people came through Missouri and Missourians themselves moved to Kansas. But Kansas became a flash [clears throat], excuse me, a flashpoint, with zealots on both sides of the slavery issue, uh, antislavery and proslavery. And their, their zealousness really overrode what normally happened in territories. I mean, most people that went to Kansas didn't care that much about slavery, yea or nay. They saw Kansas as a frontier, as opportunities, a chance to go up, to get land, to get more land. They were concerned about taxes. They were concerned about who was gonna be sheriff, but the zealots on both sides created such a climate in Kansas that the territorial legislature couldn't even meet, that the proslavery and antislavery forces in the territorial legislature met separately. The territorial governor appointed by President Pierce could not get anybody together. There was a climate of violence in Kansas. And when Franklin Pierce goes out of office in 1857, and James Buchanan comes in, you have the same drama in Kansas.

There, there's a terrible fight in Kansas and violent men go in, murders are committed, fires are set. It's a terrible situation. And finally, in 1857, the, the proslavery forces in Kansas, acting on their own because the antislavery forces boycott their meeting, write a constitution that's called the Lecompton Constitution, because it was written in Lecompton, Kansas, and this constitution was gonna make Kansas a slave state. And the president, James Buchanan, had urged his governor to make sure the constitution is submitted to a vote. Well, the governor told the Lecompton Constitutional people, you have to submit it to a vote. They refused. And in their refusal, they weren't acting in an unusual fashion because most constitutions of new states, coming out of territories, had not been submitted for popular referendums. But this case was a grave mistake because it created a terrible uproar. This was not popular sovereignty. Everybody knew this was a minority in Kansas and the majority in Kansas did not want a slave state, and when the Lecompton Constitution got to Congress, the Democratic party faced a terrible decision. The president and the southern leaders in the party, who dominated the Congress, said this is it. We've got a chance for a slave state. If we lose here, we're never gonna get one. I mean, Kansas is just west of Missouri, just to the northwest of Arkansas, this is, it's now or never for us. And the southerners pressed Buchanan, and Buchanan said well, you know, if we do this, we'll get the territorial issue over with. It'll be done. We can get back to normal life.

Other Speaker: Hold it a second right there, we need to change the tape.

PART 4

Cooper: Buchanan looking at Lecompton saying that if we do this, the territorial issue will be getting behind us. Everything will be fine. There was one problem. The most important Democrat in the Congress from the North was Stephen A. Douglas, our friend from Kansas- Nebraska. Douglas looked at Lecompton, and Douglas said, "I can't support this." For Douglas had made a mockery of popular sovereignty. It wasn't popular sovereignty, clearly it wasn't, and Douglas at this time is facing a major challenge in Illinois from this new Republican Party. The new Republican Party is talking about no slavery in any territory, no slavery. And the Republican Party is saying the Democratic Party is caught by the South. The South has the Democratic Party by the throat, and the South makes the Democratic party act in an undemocratic way. Stephen A. Douglas says we can't win with Lecompton. We Democrats in the North can't stay on our feet with Lecompton, so Douglas says, "I won't do it." He breaks with James Buchanan and the administration. As this is going on, Jefferson Davis is coming back to the Senate. He reenters the Senate March of 1857. The Pierce administration goes out of office. Jefferson Davis leaves secretary of war and becomes the United States senator for Mississippi. As he looks at Lecompton, of

course Lecompton to him is what it's always been about, the right for slaves to go into a territory and to see whether the United States will accept a new slave state, so Davis supports Lecompton. He opposes Douglas. He supports Lecompton. He supports the president. Now Lecompton passes the Senate. The southern Democrats have the muscle to get it through the Senate, even with Douglas' opposition, but they can't get it through the House. Douglas Democrats along with Republicans have enough votes in the House to stop it, and Lecompton is stopped in the House. A compromise is reached whereby the measure's sent back to Kansas with the provision that the land that was granted in the Lecompton's revision were so great that, to the State, that it should be, the grant of land should be decreased, and then Kansas can decide then whether they want to do that or keep this. Now Jefferson Davis looked at the Lecompton Constitution, and he tried to claim it was a southern victory because the admission of Kansas as a slave state was not denied, not refused, he saw this compromise sending it back, [cough] he defended it as protecting the rights of the South. Of course, Davis put, I mean in modern times, this would be a spin. He put a spin on it to help himself and help the Democratic party because it was a terrible defeat for the South, the failure of Lecompton and what the South wanted at that time. But Davis claimed otherwise.

Speaker 2: Go ahead and pause so you can get a drink of water.

[interlude, conversation cut off]

Cooper: - [Lecompton] Constitution, Davis is also dealing with another horrendous attack on his eyes. For the first time since back in 1851, he is literally felled. His eye pain is excruciating. His physician in Washington brings in physicians from Philadelphia to look at his eyes. They prescribe rest, they prescribe darkness, but what really happens is Davis basically loses sight in his left eye. He ends up with a film over this left eye, and people talk about a film. People talk about opaqueness in this eye, and he can probably distinguish shapes out of it but not much else. A little bit later on, he will have an operation on that eye. We don't have details on the operation. We have pretty much detailed what happens in Washington in '57 because the notebook of his Washington physician has survived, is in the Library of Congress, and you can, the physician even made diagrams of Davis's eye, and when I was doing my book I had an ophthalmologist look at that and tell me what they could about his troubles, but he was desperately sick for a good long time. While he was ill, he had visits of course, and interestingly enough, Davis had visitors of all kinds. He had longtime friends from the old army days. He had people he'd known as secretary of war. He had southern senators come to see him. He also had northern senators come to see him. One of his most frequent visitors was a man named William Henry Seward, who was a senator from New York, had been a Whig, and was now a major Republican. In fact, he was the most

important Republican in the Senate at this time. And he and Jefferson Davis got along famously. I think this will come back to play later in the secession winter, what anticipations Davis had about the possibility of some sort of deal at that time. But Seward did visit Davis, and Mrs. Davis recollected that Seward was, you know, quite diligent in his concern about Davis and how often he came to see Davis. As Davis begins to get well, his physicians recommend he take a trip to New England. He does go up to New England. He spends a good bit of time in Maine, and he's rejuvenated. He's rejuvenated physically, and he's also rejuvenated emotionally, and emotionally to include politics because he had an enormously successful visit in Maine. He made a number of public speeches. He had a tremendous, it was a positive public reaction to him, and Davis began to believe that what he had first thought in the Pierce administration was really true, that there were enough northerners who were willing to give the southerners what the southerners saw as their rights, that the country could go on along, that things weren't going to come to an end. At the time of the Compromise of 1850 and the admission of California, Davis was very pessimistic about that. He thought the South was really in danger of becoming such a secondary force in the country that southern institutions were threatened. But in the Pierce administration he dealt with a president of New Hampshire, he had close cabinet colleagues from New York state and from Massachusetts, who were really quite candidly pro-southern in

the way they looked at the slavery issue and such, and so Davis began to feel positive. And after this trip to Maine, he was really enthusiastic about the possibilities for the future for the South because he saw a population out there, the grass roots if you will, who seemed to give him a good hearing. Ironically, he got in trouble when he was in Maine, political trouble, but not from Republicans and not from northerners, but from sectional radicals in the South, who thought that Davis's comments in the North were too mild. Davis had said things like the Union should survive. Davis had said things like people should not carelessly talk about throwing away the Union, and these radical southerners got very upset about this. And in fact, Davis's political colleagues in Mississippi, some of them recognized Davis's trouble, and they told him right away you've got to cover yourself on this. These people are saying you are not pro-southern enough. So Davis would write letters back to Mississippi, public letters to be published in the newspapers, in which he would recount his credentials as a state's righter as a pro-southerner, pro-slavery, all the while astonished that he had been caught from his left. And in Mississippi politics, this had a personal dimension, a man by the name of Albert G. Brown, who was the second most powerful politician in Mississippi. Brown was to Davis's left on the sectional issues, and Brown went after him tooth and nail, trying to say that Davis was not stern enough, not strong enough to protect the South, and Davis even went to the extreme of publishing a

little book of his speeches in New England to prove that he was saying nothing that was dangerous to the South at all. And he did act in such fashion that he maintained his position in Mississippi and in the South, but the fact that he was caught in this way indicates how far and how fast southern, some southern political feeling was going on the sectional question.

Speaker 2: What happened to Samuel Davis in 1854?

Cooper: Samuel Davis, Jefferson and Varina's first child, born in 1852, died in the summer of 1854. Uh, Davis rejoiced in this little man. After all, Davis in 1854 was a person who was 46 years old, and this was his first child. He was, uh, joyous with him. He talked about him. His wife would say he would come home from the office at the War Department to play with him, and when Samuel got sick, probably with some childhood disease – we can't know for sure exactly what he had – and he died pretty quickly, Varina recounts that she tried to nurse him, and he would smile and try to be brave and such, but the little boy died after a short illness in the summer of 1854. Davis of course, his father, was devastated. This was the first, and he waited so long for him. But child, you know, the death of children was so commonplace at that time, and though Varina had had a difficult time, uh, carrying a pregnancy up to Samuel's birth, thereafter, uh, other children

came and in, and in quick succession, and she had two more before 1860 and another one in 1861, so children came very quickly thereafter, and the Davis household was not without the patter of small feet for very long.

Speaker 2: Explain Jefferson Davis's involvement with the attack at Harpers Ferry.

Cooper: I don't know that he had any involvement.

Speaker 2: Well remember he, he was part of that committee.

Cooper: Oh he was part, you, you want me to say that.

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Cooper: All right, but I don't think it was very important, but I'll be happy to talk about it.

Speaker 2: Oh.

Cooper: If you want me to, I'll be happy to talk about it.

Speaker 2: Well why don't we go [off that?].

Other Speaker: Yeah.

Speaker 2: I will take your lead. Um, what about the resolutions of 1860?

Cooper: All right, this, you asked about the Jefferson Davis's resolutions on the territories in 1859 and '60. I think these are very important, and I think that this has, uh, been often misunderstood, the resolutions of 1860. These were resolutions that had to do with the rights of the South, the rights of slavery, and they involved the territories. Most of the resolutions were traditional Democratic kinds of things that had been going through the Congress for 20 years, and there was no concern about them, but the territorial issue was a different matter. Now, many commentators have claimed that what Jefferson Davis wanted was a slave code for the territories. That meant he wanted for the Congress to pass for the territories, uh, laws that governed slavery, just as the state of Mississippi had a slave code, or the state of Virginia had a slave code. Now there were people in the Senate, in the Congress, who wanted that, among them Albert G. Brown, uh,

Davis's nemesis in Mississippi, but Jefferson Davis never wanted that. All his resolution said was that slave-owners have rights in territories, and if these rights are ever denied, then Congress might should act. It was all governed like this, it was generalities. And Davis did not want a slave code for the territories. In fact, Davis believed two things. One, he believed that in Kansas, to be specific, the territory of Kansas, that if any question of slavery ever came up, that the territorial judges would decide on behalf of the slave-holders. He said he had good information about that. I'm sure he did. The second thing is, that Davis told correspondents that, look, we shouldn't ask for more, that we're the minority. We shouldn't go asking for what we can't get because we don't need it anyway. Davis was convinced that the federal Constitution and the Supreme Court decision in Dred Scott in 1857, plus common-law practices about property, that Southern slave owners would be secure, so why ask Congress to pass something that just would inflame passions and do no good whatsoever? And the, the, the resolutions that were eventually passed, uh, were basically what Davis asked for, except the resolution ending with the territories specifically, said those conditions don't obtain as of yet; Davis didn't want that language in there, but he didn't really care because he also believed they didn't obtain. Now, they didn't pass until after the Democratic national convention in 1860 because they were designed also to hurt Stephen A. Douglas. Davis and the Buchanan administration wanted to hurt

Douglas. They didn't want Douglas to be able to become the Democratic presidential nominee, and they were trying with these resolutions to create a platform for the Democratic party that Douglas would have to come to. Now why would this bother Douglas? Because, you see, Douglas says with popular sovereignty, there is no right of anything. The people in any territory have the fundamental right to make a decision. Davis's resolutions say that slave-owners have the constitutional right to go there, and we only need Congress to act if those rights aren't protected, but they wanted Douglas to say I can't reach that point and back away. Of course, nothing like that ever – the Charleston convention blew up. Uh –

Speaker 2: Now let's talk about the Charleston Convention.

Cooper: The Charleston Convention blew up. This is where the Democratic national convention of 1860 met in Charleston, South Carolina. A poor choice, it turned out to be, because this is the most radical city in the South on the sectional question, and the sectional tempers were volcanic in the spring of 1860 when they met. The most popular person coming in was Stephen A. Douglas, but the Democratic rules required a 2/3 vote to get the nomination. The people who were against Douglas, the Buchanan administration, Senate managers including

Jefferson Davis, thought they could stop Douglas. But what Davis himself wanted, he wanted first not to worry about a platform, to stop Douglas first. And then if you have a platform, have some meaningless kind of just generalities. Well, Davis sent an agent to Charleston to try to impress the Mississippi delegation what he wanted. Didn't get it. Uh, the, the, the convention went to platform first. The convention came apart over the platform. There were southerners who demanded protection for slavery in the platform. Northerners wouldn't give it. The southerners bolted the Convention. They went outside. They didn't go very far. I'm sure they felt they were going to be asked to come right back. But as things so often happen when people act politically, they don't always think through what might happen. The Douglas forces took the bolt as a gift from the political gods. Now they might could get Douglas the nomination. Because these people were gone, they could get 2/3 of what was left. But they were hampered because the president of the convention, one of Davis's old colleagues from the Pierce administration, man from Massachusetts, he ruled that you still had to get 2/3, even though those bolters were out there. So what happens? The bolters aren't asked back. The convention can't nominate anybody. It comes apart with a call we'll try to meet again in Baltimore in some weeks to see if we can come together. So the whole thing is, the Democratic party has exploded, and, uh, Jefferson Davis of course is quite distraught. It didn't go as he wanted it to go at all.

Speaker 2: So what happened?

Cooper: Well, when the Democrats come back together in Baltimore, they still can't make any sort of, uh, agreement to come together. They break apart permanently. I shouldn't say [pause] they break apart for that election. Uh, the, the northern majority nominates Stephen A. Douglas for president. The southern minority nominates a man named John C. Breckinridge, who was the sitting vice president, and so you have two Democrats, Douglas and Breckinridge. Jefferson Davis, of course, supports Breckinridge. He campaigns for Breckinridge. He's on a committee for Breckinridge in Washington, D.C. He goes back to Mississippi and campaigns for Breckinridge, but Davis is also a seasoned professional politician. Davis knows what the numbers are going to say. With the Democratic party divided, the chances for Democratic defeat are quite, quite great. And, uh, he was terribly concerned.

Speaker 2: So what happened in the election of 1860?

Cooper: In the election of 1860, there were four candidates, Douglas and Breckinridge as Democrats. There was a candidate named John Bell, who'd been

an old Whig, who ran on the Constitutional Union ticket. They were northern and southerners who said let's believe in the Constitution. That'll settle everything.

[cough] There was a fourth candidate, a man by the name of Abraham Lincoln, who was running as a Republican. And the Republican party was a new thing in American history. It was a sectional party. The Republican party made no effort in the slave states, no effort in the South. It wrote off the South. It said we can win a national election by taking all the free states. There were enough electoral votes. If we can get them all, we can win. So they'd run on a very powerful anti-South platform, and what they say about the South is that the South is trying to ruin the country through the territories by extending slavery into the territories.

Essentially slavery is un-American. That's horrible, we can't have that, that slavery is inefficient, and the free states are the booming states, the states where there is democracy. In the South you've got this slave oligarchy. It's backward, it's aristocratic. It's everything but what America ought to be. And, uh, the Republicans, this is their message, and they made a very astute move in their Convention. While the Democrats were coming apart, the Republicans turned against the odds-on favorite, who was a man by the name of William Henry Seward, Davis's old, uh, sick-bed companion. Seward expected to get the nomination. He was the leading national Republican, but Republican managers decided that Seward's perception, he was perceived as too radical, that he would

endanger their carrying some northern states, especially the lower half of states like Ohio and Indiana and Pennsylvania, those closer to the slave states, might vote against the Republicans if Seward were running, so they picked a man who was perceived as much more moderate than Seward, a man who they thought could carry that southern tier across what we call the Midwest now. They picked Abraham Lincoln, and Abraham Lincoln of course did carry every single free state except New Jersey. Douglas got some votes in New Jersey, but other than that, Lincoln carried every single free state. He carried no slave states, and he won the national election. He only had 40 percent of the popular vote, however, only 40 percent.

Speaker 2: Once Abraham Lincoln won the presidency, was Jefferson Davis an advocate of immediate secession?

Cooper: Absolutely not. Jefferson Davis never advocated immediate secession. Davis had always maintained that secession was constitutional. I mean, he followed the lead of those he saw as the proper formulators of congressional doctrine, Jefferson and Madison, the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions of 1798 and '99 and John C. Calhoun, and which, their argument was that the, uh, the states had created the federal government. And if the states as creators, the states had the

right to leave the Federal Government. They went in voluntarily, they could go out voluntarily, but Davis said that the time for this had not yet risen. It had never come. He didn't see it in 1860 as time. He still thought the South had sufficient power in the Union, and he thought that the South had sufficient friends in the Union, but Davis realized that he was in a, uh, walking a political tightrope because after Lincoln's election, the governor of Mississippi invited the state's congressional delegation to meet with him in Jackson to consider what the governor should propose to the legislature that was coming into special session to see what would be done. Davis got there. Of the six delegates in the congressional, six people in the congressional delegation, five attended, going with the governor. Davis found out he was the only one who was opposed to immediate secession, but he left Jackson before that conclave had completed its, uh, deliberations. He was called back to Washington to deal with President Buchanan's message to Congress, but he told them before he left that whatever they did, he would follow Mississippi's course. He was a Mississippian, that was his political base, that's where his family was, that's where his plantation was, that's where all his livelihood was. He was compelled to stand by Mississippi. He did that, I mean he, he was compelled, but he, he wanted to stand by Mississippi. He didn't want to break with Mississippi.

Speaker 2: To the bitter end Jefferson Davis was trying to keep the Union together. Describe some of those efforts.

Cooper: Well Davis went back from Jackson to Washington, uh, Jefferson Davis did. Congress met in December of 1861 [1860]. Jefferson Davis went, hoping that somehow, somehow a deal could be worked out to salvage the sentiments of the Southern states, at the same time not to deprive the Republicans of their victory. I think Davis's hope for some sort of deal rested on his relationship with William Henry Seward and his perception of Seward. Now, of course, my problem on this front is there is no evidence whatever. There, I had, I had, I was unable to find anything that passed between Davis and Seward at that time. Uh, Davis believed that Seward's commitment to anti-slavery policies was, as Mrs. Davis said, recollected, that Seward's commitment was for political purposes in large part, and it was not all morality. So Davis thought that he could make a deal with Seward, but Seward did not have a free hand. Seward was not the presidential nominee. Abraham Lincoln was. And the issue came down to the territories. There was talk about bringing in New England as a state, I mean bringing in New Mexico as a state, not New England. There was talk about an amendment to the Constitution, which ironically would have been the 13th, which would have guaranteed slavery perpetually. It would have said that slavery could

never be touched, no matter what. In fact this amendment passed the United States Congress. But the war came, and so it was never sent out for ratification. Of course, at the end of the war the 13th Amendment became the amendment that abolished slavery, so there's a great irony in that. But for the southerners, the issue was the territories because the territories, that's the future. And Lincoln sent word to Washington, no deal on the territories. We will not give at all to the territories. There was a special committee set up in the Congress, I mean in the Senate, called the Committee of 13. Davis was a member. The leader of this committee was John J. Crittenden, a protégé of Henry Clay, the man Davis had met back in the '30s, a man Davis grew close to in Zachary Taylor's time. Mr. Crittenden was a great supporter of Taylor. And Crittenden proposed a compromise in the, sort of trying to carry Henry Clay's mantle, and this compromise was as multifaceted as the Compromise of 1850, but the key element had to do with the territories, and Crittenden said because the Supreme Court in 1857 in Dred Scott had said that slavery in the territories was constitutional and we have to recognize that, and Crittenden really proposed moving the Missouri Compromise line westward, but not breaking up California, stopping at California. This was the key. And, uh, Jefferson Davis said he would support this. A couple of other major southern senators said they would support it. Were they serious, or did they say that believing the other side would say no? Uh, I can only speak with any authority

about Jefferson Davis, and I think he really would have supported this, uh, but Lincoln told the Republicans no. It got no Republican votes. Seward would not support it. The, uh, Committee on 13 reported back to the Congress in late December of 1860 that it could not make any positive recommendation on a settlement, and at that point in time Jefferson Davis lost all hope that secession and the dissolution of the Union could be avoided. At that time, meetings were held with many deep South members of Congress on trying to set up some sort of system to build a government in the South, and they agreed to have a meeting in Montgomery, Alabama, in February and have delegates from the states come and there to create a government of the states who were going out. Of course, by this time on December 20, South Carolina seceded. It was a critically important event because with the secession of South Carolina, the basic question for other southerners changes. It's not will you go out, but do we join a sister who has gone out, or do we do not. At the same time South Carolina is going out, nothing is coming from the Congress to give those people in the deep South who want to wait, who want to hold off, nothing is coming to them to say look, here's a chance. The Republicans have done this. They get nothing. Nothing is coming to them, and so the secessionists, the fire-eaters as they were called, people like Albert Brown who we've talked about, could drive straight ahead, and people like Jefferson Davis were simply flung aside and, uh, there was nothing a man like

Davis could do. He could have stood up in Washington to say I'm not going with my state. I'm gonna stay in the Union, but in terms of being devoted to Mississippi, there was, he, he, he was put in the position of, of having no choice.

Speaker 2: Talk to us about whether Mississippi seceded and when, and then Jefferson Davis's final days on the floor of the Senate.

Cooper: Well, Mississippi seceded in January of 1861. The election of the delegates was held. The delegates met, and they overwhelmingly voted to secede. Davis knew, of course, all this was happening. He was advising the governor of Mississippi on how to buy arms for the army in Mississippi, but Davis did not leave Washington until he received formal word that Mississippi had seceded, and then he went into the Congress in, in late in January of 1861, and in his farewell speech, he, well, he gave a very sad speech in which he said he was distraught that all this had happened, that losing the Union was a terrible blow. After all, you know, he thought of himself as part of the Union, and he'd, uh, taken the oath when he was a young man at 16 in West Point. His father fought in the Revolution. He had fought in the Mexican War. He'd been wounded in the Mexican War under the American flag. He was in the Congress. He was in the administration. Davis was a very deeply distraught and distressed man when he left Washington.

Speaker 2: Describe for us his selection to the presidency of the CSA.

Other Speaker: Actually let's hold, pause a little. Um -

Other Speaker: We have ****

Speaker 2: Talk to us about Mississippi seceding and Jefferson Davis's last days in the Senate.

Cooper: When Mississippi seceded in January of 1861, uh, Davis of course followed those events. He knew what was going to happen. He'd been in contact with the governor. He even advised the governor about, uh, buying arms for Mississippi, but he did not leave Washington until he received formal notification that Mississippi had seceded. And at the same time, the governor informed him that he'd been made major general of the Mississippi army, and he needed to come back and take command. At that point, Davis went to the Senate for his final appearance. He spoke with several other senators. He spoke for a very brief time, about 15 minutes probably. He, uh, gave a brief speech in which he emphasized that he was terribly distressed about what had happened, that the Union was gone,

that he realized and other southerners realized that a great deal was being given up, but they felt that honor and principle required this. He also said he hoped that the northerners would let the southerners go in peace, but if they didn't, the southerners were prepared to defend themselves. And on a personal note, he said that he carried no hard feelings with him, and he hoped no one had any toward him. If they were still there, he wanted to remove them. Uh, when his address was over, Congress, the chamber of the Senate, was crowded; people gathered around, a lot of visitors and such. And, uh, for Davis it was a terribly, terribly emotional time. Uh, he told one friend this was the saddest day of his life, and, uh, he told others that, he told Franklin Pierce, as a matter of fact, that it's like "leaves torn from the Book of Fate." And the year 1861 was always terribly important for him. The postwar years, the books that survived that he had, uh, most of them, his name is put on page 61, even in his own copy of The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government, which is in the Museum of the Confederacy in Richmond, he wrote his name on page 61.

Speaker 2: Describe for us his accession to the presidency of the CSA.

Cooper: Jefferson Davis becoming president. The Confederate States were formed in Montgomery, Alabama, in February of 1861. It was agreed that each of

the states seceded would send a delegation there. The states that sent were South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Florida, Mississippi and Louisiana. Texas actually seceded on February the 1st, but the Texas delegation didn't get to Montgomery in time to participate in these deliberations. It was decided that each state would have one vote, and so if you've got six votes, a majority is four states. There have been efforts to make, uh, this a very suspenseful election in Montgomery. I don't really subscribe to those. Uh, Davis was on what we would call everybody's short list. He brought a series of qualifications that nobody could match. Uh, southerners were worried about the possibility of conflict. Here was a man who was a trained professional soldier, had been in the army, had commanded in battle, had been a secretary of war, in the Senate had chaired the Senate Committee on Military Affairs. He was also a political leader of note. He had administrative experience as secretary of war. Nobody had the same series of, set of credentials Jefferson Davis had. Now there were other people, [clears throat] excuse me, there were other people who were notable who might have gotten it, but Davis came in and, and Davis had told the delegates from Mississippi that he would take any job that they gave him. He would accept anything that they gave him. He knew that he was being discussed for such things as commanding general in the army or possibly president. He knew all this, and when they got to Montgomery, Mississippi was for him. It turned out that several other states were for him. The

only way it could have been a contest, Georgia had the largest delegation, and Georgia had the most impressive delegation in Montgomery, but there were three major Georgia politicians. All of them were there: a man named Alexander Stephens, who would become vice president of the Confederacy; a man named Howell Cobb, who had been an important national political figure as well as governor of Georgia; and a man named Robert Toombs, who had been in the Senate, an important Georgian, but they really canceled each other out. Uh, Toombs, he had, he enjoyed the spirits a little too much. He imbibed a little too much in Montgomery. People, it turned people off. Stephens had been a little too conservative for too long. He had even voted against secession the first time in the Georgia convention, and he was to Davis's right. Davis was not a rabid secessionist, but Stephens was a little bit too much that way, and Howell Cobb, who may have been a possibility, but Cobb let it be known sort of that he didn't really want it. He wasn't eager to get it. But these three Georgians, they couldn't, the Georgia delegation couldn't agree on any one of them. Now if Georgia had said we want one of these and pushed, there might have been a contest. Davis I think still would have won, but anyway there was no contest. Nobody else got a vote but Jefferson Davis. And remember that of course this vote he's, he and then Stephens becomes his vice president. They elected provisionally. They elected to

serve for 1 year from, well really they elected to serve about 6, one year mostly, but 6 months, end they were, no let me back up.

Other Speaker: Pause, does somebody want to change the tape?

Cooper: Oh, I hate to –

PART 5

Speaker 1: Continue sir.

Cooper: Right – be sure to recognize when Davis and, ah, Stephens were chosen in Montgomery they were named provisional vice president and provisional president with an election to be held in November 1861 so that the people could choose the president and the vice president as under the Constitution just as the federal Constitution. So he was only provisional president when he was first named and Stephens was the provisional vice president. They took office immediately. They were in Montgomery in February and they tried to create a government. That's the first job they had.

Other Speaker: How did Mr. Davis take the news that he had been selected president?

Cooper: Well when Davis was notified, he was at his plantation Brierfield, ah, the news was sent to Brierfield from Vicksburg. A telegraph had come to Vicksburg. The news was sent out to Brierfield by a horse and rider. Ah, Davis was notified that he was president.

Other Speaker: I'm sorry. Can you check –

Other Speaker: Yes. I know. I know. Sorry my bad.

Other Speaker: I need this one to work.

Other Speaker: Yeah.

Cooper: Where do you want me to start?

Other Speaker: How did Jefferson Davis take the news?

Cooper: Well Davis was –

Other Speaker: What's that? We're set.

Other Speaker: Okay.

Cooper: Ah, Jefferson Davis was at Brierfield. One story has it he was tending roses, ah, whether that's true or not, but, ah, he was at Brierfield when the news came. The news was dispatched from Montgomery by telegraph through Jackson to Vicksburg and was sent by rider out to, ah, Davis then to inform him. He immediately of course sent back that he would accept; that he would leave for Montgomery promptly. Some traditions say that he told his wife he was terribly distraught and such like that, ah, he probably realized it was a heavy burden to then have responsibility but I don't think he was surprised and, um, he left promptly by steamboat to go up to Vicksburg. He could have little thought that when he left Hurricane Landing there in front of his brother's plantation in 1861 he would never again see Davis Island as a slave-owning plantation and he wouldn't see it at all until the end of a great war.

Other Speaker: [cough] Excuse me. We have been told and read that when Varina, Varina apparently looked at him while he was looking at the telegraph and she said that she thought he had gotten some terrible news about a family member.

Cooper: Yes.

Other Speaker: She subscribed to that.

Cooper: She says in a memo, I know I don't –

Other Speaker: That you can say Varina –

Cooper: Varina Davis in her memoir, it talks about Davis as looking aghast when he got the message and looking distressed, um, I'm sure there was some registry of shock on his face; anytime you learn something like that, but I don't think that, ah, it was probably as she said. Ah, Varina after all went to great pains to claim that Davis never wanted to be president of the Confederacy. She said he was never a politician and all these kinds of things and now all this comes in 1890 when her book comes out and I just, I just don't subscribe to that. I mean he knew too much about what was going on. He might have looked at it and said oh, my God, they did it, that kind of thing, and he knew he would have a terrible burden but then he, ah, he told them, he sent back the message that he was on the way and he left, ah, from Hurricane Landing on the steamboat to go to Vicksburg and he couldn't possibly have known all the many times he left from that landing this would be the last time he would ever leave as a slave-owning planter and there would be a great war fought and lost before he showed back up again. He went by steamboat to Vicksburg, then he took the train to Jackson and of course by the time he got to Vicksburg and Jackson the public knew he had been chosen and of course he was the most popular and powerful politician in Mississippi, so there was a great hoorah for him and great feting of him and, and Jackson, now to show the southern railroad system, he couldn't go from Jackson directly east to Montgomery. He had to go north from Jackson, change up in north Mississippi, get on the train, go through part of Tennessee, Middle Tennessee, which had not yet seceded, until he got over to Chattanooga, then come down from Chattanooga through Atlanta and get to Atlanta, then he goes back west to Montgomery. And the parts of his trip in the seceded states, that would be in Mississippi and Georgia and Alabama, he made a number of impromptu speeches; there were calls for him. There were celebrations all along the way. Even when he got to Montgomery that he got off the train in Montgomery after this trip, there were crowds around. It was late at night. They still called him to speak. He went to his hotel. He

went out on the balcony and he made a talk and in all of his talks he talked about the southerners coming together; that all southerners were of one mind about this now; there was great unity and he talked about a people of one destiny; a people of one concern. He's talking about slavery, that we were all in this together now. This was going to be a slave republic and, ah, of course when he got to Montgomery he had to, he had to be inaugurated and he was inaugurated – You want to stop. Okay.

Other Speaker: Tell us about the inauguration of Jefferson Davis.

[indistinct conversation]

Cooper: Well, Davis – in Montgomery, of course, Jefferson Davis would be inaugurated as the provisional president of the Confederacy. There was great fanfare and hoopla. There was a parade. There was a carriage. He went from the hotel up the hill to the state capitol. He would be inaugurated in front of the state capitol. In his inaugural address, Davis sounded one theme chiefly. It was a brief address. He said that the Confederates stood where their ancestors that stood in 1776, and they had struck for their independence against tyranny, that they were following in the footsteps of their fathers and grandfathers, that they were the true Americans, that they were descendants of liberty and this whole thing, this whole Confederate experiment, was about Americans defending liberty against oppressive tyranny.

Other Speaker: What we need to do is we need to just sit here –

Other Speaker: *****

Other Speaker: Graham Town, Dr. Cooper interview. Day 1.