

The Confederacy was formed in February 1861, with Jefferson Davis as its president. In late March, Mississippi ratified the Constitution of the Confederate States of America.

Sole President of the Confederacy

Jefferson Davis was born in Kentucky and grew up in Woodville, Mississippi. He graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point and then served seven years on frontier posts in the Midwest. In 1835 he resigned from the army, married, and joined his older brother Joseph as a planter in Warren County. Within three months, however, his bride died of malaria and Davis himself became seriously ill.

In 1845 he won election to Congress and married Varina Howell. In the Mexican War the next year, Davis commanded the First Mississippi Regiment in the Battle of Buena Vista. He returned home a wounded hero and was appointed to the United States Senate by Governor Albert G. Brown. There he opposed the Compromise of 1850, for he wanted the federal government to guarantee the extension of slavery to the Western lands recently taken from Mexico.

In 1853 President Pierce chose Jefferson Davis to be secretary of war, a job he handled with energy and efficiency. Davis then moved back to the Senate. He believed in the right to secede from the Union, but in 1861 he argued against secession, knowing it would mean war.

His days as president of the Confederacy were not happy. As the war went against the South, as the casualties piled up, and as the Union blockade took hold, Davis faced bitter criticism.

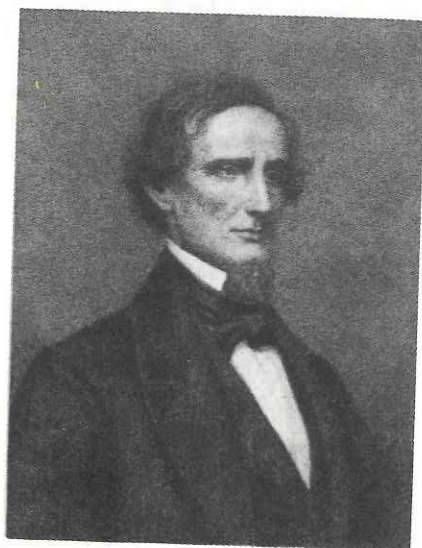
When the end came, Davis tried to escape but was captured and put in jail. He thought he would be executed, but in December 1868, he was discharged. In the late 1870s, he settled at Beauvoir to write his memoirs and a defense of his career.

In his final years he found himself no longer the target of criticism. Now he had become the hero of the "Lost Cause." He was not blamed for losing the war, but was praised as a martyr who had suffered with dignity.

In his last public speech in 1888, the 80-year-old Davis told his audience:

The past is dead; let it bury its dead, its hopes, and its aspirations; before you lies the future—a future full of golden promise, a future of expanding national glory, before which all the world shall stand amazed. Let me beseech you to lay aside all bitter sectional feelings, and to take your places in the ranks of those who will bring about a reunited country.

In the mind of Jefferson Davis, the Civil War had finally ended.



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