



IV. Jefferson Davis

Jefferson Finis Davis (June 3, 1808 – December 6, 1889) was a United States soldier and statesman, and was the President of the Confederate States of America during the entire Civil War which was fought from 1861 to 1865. He took personal charge of the Confederate war plans but was unable to find a strategy to defeat the larger, more powerful and better organized Union. His diplomatic efforts failed to gain recognition from any foreign country. At home he paid little attention to the collapsing Confederate economy; the government printed more and more paper money to cover the war's expenses, leading to runaway inflation.

Davis was born in Kentucky and grew up on plantations in Mississippi and Louisiana. He graduated from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and fought in the Mexican–American War as the colonel of a volunteer regiment. He served as the United States Secretary of War under Democratic President Franklin Pierce, and as a Democratic U.S. senator from Mississippi. His plantation in Mississippi depended on slave labor, like many Southern plantations. As a senator, he argued against secession, but did agree that each state was sovereign and had an unquestionable right to secede from the Union. Davis lost his first wife to malaria after three months of marriage, and the disease almost killed him as well. He had six children with his second wife, but only two survived him. He suffered from ill health for much of his life.

Historians tend to attribute many of the Confederacy's weaknesses to President Davis.[2] His preoccupation with detail, reluctance to delegate responsibility, lack of popular appeal, feuds with powerful state governors, favoritism toward old friends, inability to get along with people who disagreed with him, neglect of civil matters in favor of military ones, and resistance to public opinion all worked against him.[3][4] Davis is described as a much less effective war leader than his Union counterpart Abraham Lincoln.

After Davis was captured in 1865, he was accused of treason but was not tried and was released after two years. While not disgraced, Davis had been displaced in white Southern affection after the war by his leading general, Robert E. Lee. Nevertheless, many Southerners empathized with his defiance, refusal to accept defeat, and resistance to Reconstruction. Over time, admiration for his pride and ideals made him a Civil War hero to many Southerners, and his legacy became part of the foundation of the postwar New South.[5] Davis wrote a memoir entitled *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*, which he completed in 1881 and which also helped to restore his reputation. By the late 1880s, he began to encourage reconciliation, telling Southerners to be loyal to the Union.