The Death of Jefferson Davis

Kasey J. Dell

Old Dominion University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/history_etds

Part of the Social History Commons, and the United States History Commons

Recommended Citation


https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/history_etds/111

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the History at ODU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ODU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@odu.edu.
THE DEATH OF JEFFERSON DAVIS

by

Kasey J. Dell
B.A. May 2008, California State University, Sacramento

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Old Dominion University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

HISTORY

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY
May 2011

Approved by:

Carolyn Lawes (Director)

Maura Hametz (Member)

Timothy Ott (Member)
ABSTRACT

THE DEATH OF JEFFERSON DAVIS

Kasey J. Dell
Old Dominion University, 2011
Director: Dr. Carolyn Lawes

Although there are numerous studies of Jefferson Davis and countless more of the Civil War and its consequences, little work has been done to study what the death of Jefferson Davis revealed in terms of the United States’ reunification. A political non-person in the nation’s capital, Davis was never fully pardoned and did not receive full rights of citizenship in his lifetime, giving him a unique position in society. Moreover, as the former president of the Confederacy, he was a polarizing figure whose death elicited strong emotions.

The response to Davis’s death, almost twenty-five years after the Civil War ended, shows a country not completely healed from the War. White southern mourning of Davis demonstrated the various degrees of healing, or lack thereof, that followed the Civil War and the policies of Reconstruction. In the South’s rebranding of the War in its own terms, Davis transformed from a perceived political failure to an unrepentant, southern cultural icon; a martyr for the South. Conversely, in the North, many people were appalled that the South held grand memorials and widely praised Davis, while others were confused and disappointed that the South continued to dwell on the past.

By studying events in Davis’s life, perceived offenses against the South, and the cultural rebuilding of southern states following their defeat in the Civil War, the responses to the death of Jefferson Davis can be seen to reveal the uneasy atmosphere of the era.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and thank my committee chair, Dr. Lawes for spending hours and months reviewing every draft of my thesis. I would also like to show my appreciation to Dr. Hametz for agreeing to be on my defense committee, as well as providing rigorous coursework in her classes that helped prepare me for this project. I am also grateful that Dr. Orr agreed to read and critique my thesis despite having never met me or seen any of my previous work. Finally, I would like to thank Mike Culton for supporting me during this long task and encouraging me through my frustrations.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. “THE FAIR SOUTHLAND WEEPS OVER THE BIER OF HER DEAR LEADER”: DECEMBER 11, 1889</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. “THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE ‘LOST CAUSE’”: NEWSPAPER EDITORIALS OF JEFFERSON DAVIS’S DEATH</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. “WE KNOW NO SUCH MAN”: OFFICIAL REACTION TO JEFFERSON DAVIS’S DEATH</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In his final public address, Jefferson Davis referred to himself as a “man without a country.” Although in his later days Davis laid out his hope that the re-United States would set aside the bitterness and join together for the prosperity of the country, he undeniably considered himself a son of the South, not the United States.¹ Never pardoned by the United States government for his involvement in the Civil War, Davis was not granted full political rights of citizenship until President Carter restored them posthumously in 1978. Despite his loss of citizenship, Davis’s position as the former president of the Confederate States of America made his death in 1889 a major event and generated newspaper headlines in the South and the North, as well as abroad. These headlines reveal the atmosphere of the late nineteenth century and regional opinions of Davis, the divisions that remained in the United States, and the degree of healing that had occurred since the end of the Civil War.

By analyzing newspaper editorial reactions to Davis’s death, this thesis argues that the degree of emotion regarding Davis’s death largely depended on how enmeshed a region was in the re-United States. A sampling of newspapers shows no unanimous opinion or description of Davis. Northern and southern cities that were more connected, both regionally and economically, to other parts of the country on the whole did not feel the need to preserve sectional Civil War animosities. In addition, as this research shows,
many northern newspapers published articles expressing confusion and occasional minor annoyance that so many white southerners celebrated and memorialized Davis. In comparison, southern cities that did not prosper from the policies of Reconstruction were more apt to view Davis as a regional hero, a cultural symbol of defiance and white southern manhood. Alternately, some northern cities published articles demonstrating a lingering hatred for the former Confederate president, despising his continued prestige and deriding the southerners who eulogized him. However, it must be noted that many northern and southern newspapers contained similar descriptions of Davis’s background, an extension, at least in part, of the newspapers’ political affiliations. Editorial reaction to Davis’s death exemplified the differences and similarities of opinion among the regions of the United States, and illustrate that a significant number of northerners and southerners were not prepared to leave the past alone.

In the newspaper articles studied, white southern women and children, not voting class males, were portrayed as Davis’s primary mourners, a reflection of their roles in preserving and handing down culture. As a result, Davis is here studied for his cultural contribution rather than his political legacy. Had Davis died immediately following the Civil War, before his imprisonment, the policies of Reconstruction, and the rise of Lost Cause ideals, he might not have been so revered among white ex-Confederates. As this thesis argues, due to Davis’s lack of repentance and events following the Civil War, he came to be viewed and remembered as a cultural, not political, symbol for unreconstructed former Confederates.

Historians of Jefferson Davis have largely overlooked Davis’s life following his imprisonment in Fortress Monroe, mostly noting only that he died peacefully in 1889.
This may be because Davis disappeared from public life after being released, appearing only briefly in later years to speak at southern events in defense of secession and the South. As a politician, Davis ceased to matter to many people and historians. But as a symbol of unreconstructed southern manhood and Lost Cause ideals, Davis rose in prominence in the years before his death. This thesis examines Davis, the Civil War, and the history of memory to detail Davis’s history and cultural contribution to the South and to the United States, using newspapers as a medium to examine the public and official reaction to his death.

Several volumes of memorials and eulogies of Davis were published immediately after his death. *The Davis Memorial Volume* and *Life and Reminiscences of Jefferson Davis, By Distinguished Men of His Time*, both published in 1890, reflect a purely white southern point of view in praise of Davis, and contain eulogies by southern politicians, letters of condolence to Davis’s widow, and plans for grand memorials to Davis’s legacy by major southern cities. Intended for a southern audience, they show white southern attitudes towards Davis, but do not give an accurate portrayal of national opinion towards Davis.²

Early biographies of Davis contained obvious biases, with authors either praising Davis or blaming him for the Confederacy’s loss in the Civil War. In the 1950s, Hudson Strode began publishing his three volume work on Davis as well as an edited volume of Davis’s letters. His deferential work, notably the final volume, *Jefferson Davis: Tragic Hero*, assumes that the majority of southerners and northerners respected and admired Davis. Strode’s exhaustive works contain useful information and reprints of newspaper

editorials but cannot be accepted uncritically because his praise of Davis overshadows his analysis of Davis’s life. ³

More recent biographers present a more evenhanded portrayal. William J. Cooper, Jr.’s *Jefferson Davis, American* is an excellent study of Davis’ life, and includes a lengthy discussion of the years immediately following the Civil War, during which Davis became a symbol for the South and helped to shape its history and culture. Cooper’s view of Davis is sympathetic as he examines Davis’s actions in terms of his belief in the Constitution, as well as the beliefs and culture of Davis’s era. Cooper takes care to note Davis’s shortcomings, particularly his political limitations, while pointing out that despite Davis’s flaws, the Confederacy had no better alternative for president.⁴ Similarly, William Davis’s *Jefferson Davis: The Man and His Hour* analyzes the paradoxes of Davis’s personality and life, showing the reader an imperfect human. However, *Jefferson Davis: The Man and His Hour* does not study Jefferson Davis’s life after the Civil War to any great extent. William Davis argues that the former Confederate president was important because he was a symbol of the Lost Cause; otherwise, Davis’s postwar life was not markedly different from hundreds of thousands of other former Confederates, and has “little value outside the contexts of Davis’s reflections on the war and of his symbolic role as a leader of the Old South embarking into a new one.”⁵ To be sure, Davis’s later years were unremarkable, save for his status as former Confederate president. This thesis discusses Davis the man during the Civil War and his imprisonment at Fortress Monroe, and Davis the symbol after the war. Davis’s extensive

history will not be detailed in this thesis, but it is important to understand the broad spectrum of events in Davis’s life in order to grasp his legacy to the South and the United States.

In his eighty one years, Davis contributed greatly to the United States and the South. As a youth, Davis attended West Point and graduated without distinction in June of 1828; he then served as a colonel in the Mexican-American War. In 1847, Davis was appointed acting Senator of Mississippi, resigning his seat in 1851 in an unsuccessful bid for governor of Mississippi. Shortly after, he was named Secretary of War for President Franklin Pierce. When Pierce left office in 1857, Davis returned to the Senate again representing Mississippi. Davis was not a fire-eater like some of his fellow Southerners and argued for the union to remain united, although he did believe in the right of secession. After Abraham Lincoln was elected president, the southern states began to secede from the Union. Mississippi seceded on January 9, 1861, and Davis, believing he owed his primary allegiance to his state and not the nation, withdrew from the Senate. In his final speech to the Senate he argued that Mississippi was newly independent from the United States, and as a son of Mississippi, he was no longer a U.S. citizen and thus could not serve in the Senate.  

Delegates of the newly formed Confederate States of America named Davis provisional president of the Confederacy, and he was inaugurated on February 18, 1861. Many people, including northerners, were cautiously optimistic about Davis’s presidency, as he had a national reputation and considerable experience, and had been a moderate in the United States Senate. However, after accepting the presidency, Davis became an uncompromising advocate for the independence of the Confederacy. Davis’s leadership,

---

6 Cooper, Jr., Jefferson Davis, American, 345-347.
cabinet, military appointments, and uncompromising personality were widely criticized, both in the North and the South. After the South’s defeat, Davis was captured by Union troops in May, 1865, and held for two years in Fortress Monroe in Hampton, Virginia. Because the United States government did not have sufficient evidence to try Davis, and was unwilling to try the legality of secession, Davis was freed and the case against him was dropped.

Upon his release, Davis largely retired from public view. However, in 1886, Davis accepted the invitation of the mayor of Montgomery, Alabama, W.S. Reese, to lay the cornerstone for the city’s monument to the Confederate dead, after which Davis also spoke in Atlanta and Savannah. This so-called “Southern Tour” elicited a strong reaction from thousands of white southerners who turned out to cheer for him at every stop; others stood on train platforms to observe Davis’s train in the cities where he did not make a public appearance. Although Davis was largely reclusive in the last years of his life, events such as the Southern Tour revealed the affection many southerners felt for their former leader. Davis thus left a legacy for the Confederacy and the United States.

Examining the events contemporary newspapers included or ignored, reveals the personal biases and regional differences surrounding the historical memory of Jefferson Davis.

In addition to describing how Jefferson Davis’s image was understood and utilized by the public, this thesis examines how events during and following the Civil War shaped the public memory of Davis. Historians of memory have shown how memories of the Civil War influenced later actions, romanticized reunification, and helped shape regional identities. Nina Silber argues in Romance of Reunion that many northerners sought to recreate Victorian ideals through the reunification. The North had
become an industrialized society of distinct public and private spheres, while the South remained, in northerners’ eyes, “a region of refined domestic comfort.” This “feminized” view of the South, Silber finds, ensured that northerners would be able to welcome the South back into the union while asserting the North’s dominance. Additionally, following the Civil War, Silber argues that old animosities persisted. Many northerners maintained that southerners were plotting to wage another war against the Union, a belief that was enhanced by the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. To the North, the South appeared to be defiant and angry, home to unrepentant Confederates who had to acknowledge that they had been defeated by the North in order to secure a lasting peace. Thus, Silber concludes, many northerners understood Reconstruction-era policies, as well as southern resistance to these policies, in terms of gender and manhood. The objective of Reconstruction, then, became to keep southern manhood restrained while building the northern model of masculinity.

These sentiments were not popular in the South and did little to foster unity, Silber finds, and the white South sought to redefine the Civil War on its own terms. Because the ideals of virility and southern manhood dominated southern society, white southerners could not reconcile themselves to their military defeat at the hands of the North. Former Confederates therefore concluded that they had been defeated by the North’s superior numbers, which was not a reflection of the South’s military prowess or skill; southern men had been noble and chivalrous in the face of northern aggression. This thesis extends Silber’s argument by demonstrating how white southerners’ belief in

---

9 Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900*. 
their threatened manhood was displayed in the remembrances of Davis. For example, the *Charleston News and Courier* proclaimed, “to forget him [Davis] is to forget our own self-respect; to neglect to do honor to his memory is to discredit our own manhood.”

Ideals of white southern manhood also played a large part in the creation of the “Lost Cause,” of which Jefferson Davis remains a key symbol. Lost Cause ideology, which rationalized the Confederacy’s military defeat, has been studied as the foundation for the white southern interpretation of the Civil War. Several historians have studied the cultural construct of the Lost Cause as well as its enduring significance in U.S. history. David Blight describes three key themes in Lost Cause ideology: the effort to write and monitor history of the Civil War, the use of white supremacy, and the significant role of southern white women. A collection of essays edited by Gary Gallagher and Alan Nolan demonstrate the broad scope of Lost Cause writings, as historians have long debated the influence of contemporary analyses of individuals central to the Lost Cause ideology. By examining the religious symbolism in Lost Cause ideology, analyzing those often maligned in Lost Cause writings, notably James Longstreet, and studying how white southerners sought to pass on their culture and views of the Civil War to future generations, the literature on the Lost Cause is vast and multifaceted.

Many southern Civil War figures, notably Robert E. Lee, eventually gained national respect and popularity. Lee’s chivalrous behavior and gallantry in war exemplified the romanticized northern view of the South. Jefferson Davis, in comparison,

---


remained popular primarily among former Confederates. Although Davis was generally disliked in the South at the conclusion of the Civil War, the unpopular policies of Reconstruction, combined with Davis’s imprisonment and humiliation for his alleged part in Lincoln’s assassination, drew former Confederates’ sympathy and support.13

Religious symbolism played a large role in Davis’s transformation into a figure of Confederate martyrdom. Religious symbolism was especially strong in the South, and the upper echelon of the Confederate leadership became associated with religious figures and prophets. As churches in the South were among the most effective creators of public morale, the clergy promoted religious idealism in the Civil War. Ministers cited the Old Testament to defend slavery, and proclaimed that the South was fighting a holy cause. Although Davis was often criticized in the secular press, clergymen as a whole did not pass judgment on him.14 Indeed, a rector at Baltimore’s Memorial Protestant Church declared that “Davis was the sacrifice elect—by the North or by Providence—as the price for Southern atonement.”15 In the war’s aftermath, former Confederates held Davis up as a martyr, “the crucified Christ of the Southern people who had suffered on their behalf.” Although he did not suffer a martyr’s death, among former Confederates Davis’s unyielding defense of the South, its right of secession, and states’ rights propelled him towards deification.16 Charles Reagan Wilson argues that Davis symbolically acquired the South’s afflictions through his imprisonment and impending

trial. Through Davis's ill-treatment in prison, he suffered for and in place of the South. These events served as atonement for southerners and solidified Davis's place as a martyr. Wilson argues that although Davis died in 1889, "...it was as if he had not lived past 1866; reading the eulogies to him one almost concludes that he must have been tried for treason, convicted, and probably crucified." Analysis of contemporary newspaper accounts of white eulogies for Davis supports these interpretations that Davis's unwavering support for and defense of the Confederacy played an important role in the creation of the Lost Cause ideology and the South's redefinition of itself. Scholars disagree on the extent of the Lost Cause's influence. In *Ghosts of the Confederacy*, Gaines Foster deemphasizes the long term significance of the Lost Cause ideology. He argues that the ideas of the Lost Cause have become less significant over time as southerners in the twentieth century forgot the pain and suffering of the Civil War and its aftermath. Far from severing the South from the Union, Foster argues, the Lost Cause served to promote national reconciliation while championing the Confederate cause as right and honorable. The Lost Cause helped the South cope during Reconstruction but declined in significance as Lost Cause icons, such as Robert E. Lee, became widely accepted. According to Foster, Lee proved to be a better national symbol than Davis because while Lee embodied southern chivalry, Davis personified sectionalism. However, Foster does not examine Davis thoroughly, arguing instead that Southern leaders did not significantly influence public remembrance of the Civil War. Foster's analysis of Civil War memory finds that the South, in reuniting with the North, forgot

---

much of its Civil War heritage and ensured that the Lost Cause ideology became less important over time.\(^{18}\)

The connection between race and the formation of public memory has also been widely studied. David Blight argues that in order to reunite the country, certain divisive factors, namely slavery, had to be de-emphasized. Blight asserts that the pursuit of a peaceful and collaborative reunion meant the issues of slavery and the place of black Americans in society were ignored.\(^{19}\) This study does not discuss African-American responses to Davis's death, nor does it examine specifically African American newspapers. Davis's overall reputation among African Americans was not positive, given his commonly held views of white superiority and his fight to keep the southern tradition of slavery. There were examples, however, of African Americans mourning Davis and a few of Davis's former slaves recalled examples of their former master's kindness. It also should be noted that support for white supremacy in the nineteenth century was widespread; indeed, opposition to slavery rarely implied a belief in racial equality. The views of African Americans as reflected in the black press from this period warrants greater study. The focus of this thesis is on the regional differences of white northerners and southerners revealed in the mainstream white-owned press.

Newspapers are one of the best available sources for uncovering American public opinion in the late nineteenth century, a time before the invention of opinion polls. Because local newspapers influenced, and were influenced by, its readers, analyzing a paper's editorials can reveal the range of views across the nation. During the Civil War,

\(^{18}\) Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865-1913*.

newspaper reporters traveled with the soldiers and wrote weekly editorials in their home papers.

Many southern papers supported the Confederacy during the Civil War, but were less enthusiastic about its president. Although Davis had the political, military, and administrative experience southerners hoped would bring credibility and leadership to their new nation, many came to view Davis as an uncompromising micro-manager and blamed him, not the generals, for the South’s defeat. During the war, the majority of southern papers denounced Abraham Lincoln, but did not hold their own president in high regard. The southern press was less developed than in the North, and after the war many southerners opted to read the more “cosmopolitan” press of the North.20

Davis had a complicated relationship with southern newspapers. He never garnered the support of newspaper editors, and largely ignored their criticisms of him as he did not fully grasp the extent to which newspapers helped to formulate public opinion.21 On a few occasions, Davis did request that his private secretary, Burton Harrison, reply publicly to accusations in newspapers. Otherwise, Davis and his administration relied on the editorial defenses in pro-administration papers.22 Davis never sought popularity, believing in the righteousness of his cause. However, southern morale declined because Davis and his administration did not create a widespread propaganda campaign through the media. As a consequence, southerners did not understand Davis’s reasons for unpopular measures, such as conscription, and their views

---

were more strongly influenced by the regional opinions of the newspaper editors. The power of the media therefore contributed to Davis’s unpopularity during the war and his image as unwavering, unbending, and incompetent.

Richmond, Virginia, was the hub of the Confederate press during the Civil War. The city published five daily newspapers—the Dispatch, the Enquirer, the Examiner, the Sentinel, and the Whig—and these papers were in turn among the most influential sources for other Confederate papers. Their editors constantly praised the actions of Confederate soldiers and emphasized the need for solidarity in support of the cause but did not highlight Davis or the Confederate government, especially as the tide of the war began to turn against the Confederacy. Edward A. Pollard, the editor of the Richmond Examiner and a strong pro-slavery supporter and advocate of the Southern cause, took to condemning Davis as often as possible. Pollard’s diatribes further weakened southern morale, demonstrating the power of the press during the war and influencing public opinion upon its conclusion.

Healing from the Civil War was a sectional process. Northerners hoped that a full surrender would include southerners’ acceptance that the Union cause was right. Although many on both sides hoped for a peaceful reunion, sectional divisions persisted. Additionally, many northerners incorrectly believed that middle and lower class southerners had not been committed to the Confederate cause, and wholly blamed the Confederate leadership and government for the war. Davis, as the Confederacy’s president, was the target of much of this animosity. Instead of healing from the Civil

---

War as a single, reunited nation, each half looked to its own region to find meaning in the war and reunification.

Davis’s death in 1889 made headlines nationwide, as well as abroad, despite vast differences in each region’s political affiliation, personal opinions, and geography. The reaction to his death indicates the status Davis had achieved. He may have been a nonperson in the nation’s capitol, denied a memorial or a eulogy, but the newspaper headlines reveal that the nation had not forgotten him.

Davis’s death was not a cause for official mourning by most northerners, or by the federal government, though perhaps Davis would have been glad of that. He considered himself a son of the South and the South mourned its son. In eulogizing Davis, John Reagan, a Senator from Texas who had served in Davis’s cabinet, opined, “The people he served respected him for his virtues and integrity. They admired him for his ability and devotion to duty and to them. They reverenced him for the grandeur and nobility of his character. And they mourn his death with unfeigned sorrow.”

This thesis studies the symbolism surrounding public recognition of Jefferson Davis’s death to understand how far the United States had healed in the decades following the Civil War. Chapter Two sets the stage for printed reactions to Davis’s death and funeral. The descriptions of Davis’s memorial and lavish funeral procession offer insight into the tone of the proceedings as well as the particulars of how Davis was remembered. Chapter Three focuses on newspaper editorials on Davis’s death and the role he played as a cultural hero for the white south. The editorials demonstrate not clear differences between northern and southern papers but rather a wide range of responses

---

that suggest the ongoing difficulty of national reconciliation. Chapter Four analyzes the official responses to Davis’s death and finds that the views of local and national politicians depended on their degree of interaction with other parts of the country. The thesis concludes with a discussion of Davis’s death as a unique event to gauge the progress and healing of the reunited country.
By the death of Mr. Davis the southern people do not mourn the loss of the president of the confederacy, which they had strived to establish and struggled to support, as much as the loss of a great and good man, whose heart had throbbed for them for nearly half a century; had bled for them in their hour of dread defeat and desolation, and have never ceased to bless them, even to the last throb, at the last moment when the chieftain was summoned to his eternal reward.  

On December 11, 1889, Jefferson Davis was buried in New Orleans in the grandest funeral the South had ever seen. A head count from New Orleans, which was reprinted in newspapers across the nation, estimated two hundred thousand mourners in attendance. United States flags on state buildings in New Orleans were flown at half mast, and foreign ships in the harbor lowered their flags to honor the former Confederate leader. Citizens draped virtually all the buildings and houses in the city with black, white, and purple crepe in mourning. Thousands of residents and visitors crowded the streets view Davis’s bier, demonstrating the reverence that many ex-Confederates held for Davis. Although among northerners Davis remained despised or largely ignored, for many white southerners, he left a cultural legacy. They felt it their duty to organize an elaborate funeral and memorials across the South.

Jefferson Davis’s death and funeral were key moments in southern history and in the memory and healing of the Civil War. Many northerners thought it unfair that the perceived traitor survived twenty-five years after the Confederacy’s defeat in the Civil War.

2 “The Davis Obsequies,” *The Dallas Morning News* (Dallas, Texas), December 12, 1889.
War, was allowed to live peacefully at his home in Mississippi, and died in bed at age 81. Towards the end of his life, Davis resided at his Beauvoir estate along the Mississippi Gulf Coast, though he made an annual journey to his Brierfield plantation, south of Vicksburg, Mississippi, to collect rent from his tenants. November 1889 was no exception, and on November 6, Davis embarked on the steamboat Laura Lee in New Orleans. However, he became too ill to disembark at the Brierfield stop and continued to Vicksburg, where he remained overnight. The following day, he was driven to the plantation. Realizing the severity of his condition, he wrote to his wife, Varina, that he was returning to New Orleans and she immediately set off to meet him. In Bayou Sara, Louisiana, Davis was diagnosed with acute bronchitis complicated by malarial symptoms. On November 16, 1889, Davis arrived in New Orleans and was transported by ambulance to the home of Judge Charles E. Fenner, an old family friend. Davis would spend his last days in the Fenner house, while conflicting reports of his condition spread around the city.\(^3\) New Orleans officials announced the news of his death on December 6, 1889 by ringing fire bells when he died at 12:45 A.M.\(^4\)

New Orleans' mayor, Joseph Shakespeare, wasted no time inviting prominent southerners to finalize the funeral arrangements for the former United States Secretary of War and President of the Confederacy. Judge Fenner reminded these representatives that Davis had declared his desire that his funeral arrangements be handled by Confederate organizations. Thus, an Executive Committee was formed under the chairmanship of William Preston Johnston, who had served under Davis during the Civil War and remained a family friend. The committee consisted of seven members appointed by the

---


mayor, representatives from prominent Confederate and Union veterans’ associations, and representatives of the city council. The committee decided on New Orleans as a temporary burial place, as Davis’s stature and the size of the funeral required elaborate planning. It was agreed that Davis would be interred in Metairie Cemetery, which housed mausoleums for the armies of Northern Virginia and Tennessee. Representatives from both armies drew lots to determine in which mausoleum Davis’s body would be interred; the Army of Northern Virginia was victorious.

The funeral was postponed until December 11 to give out-of-state mourners and politicians time to arrive. At Varina Davis’s request, the Executive Committee asked Bishop Galleher of the Episcopal Church to preside over the funeral, for Davis was a devout Episcopalian. Bishop Galleher had served in the Confederate army, and ex-Confederates found it fitting that he lead the service. The Executive Committee and Mayor Shakespeare asked the citizens of New Orleans to decorate their houses and businesses in mourning on the day of the funeral, although many citizens had already begun to display mourning colors upon hearing the news of Davis’s death. Bishop Galleher, like many in New Orleans, draped his house with black and purple crepe; black was the symbol of grief and darkness caused by death, and purple was symbolic of the advent, the penitent, and the color of royal mourning.

Prior to the funeral, Davis’s body was displayed in City Hall and thousands of visitors and mourners viewed the body from ten A.M. until ten P.M. Davis’s casket was swathed in black plush, inlaid with bronze, and covered with cream-colored silk, with cream-colored braid decorations down the sides. In the interests of safety, the body was

7 “Sabbath of Sorrow,” *The Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, Louisiana), December 9, 1889.
protected from mourners by a sheet of glass. As Davis lay in state at City Hall, soldiers
stood guard day and night, watching as visitors uncovered their heads when they arrived
to pay their respects. City Hall’s colorful wallpaper was hidden beneath floor-to-ceiling
black curtains. Two flags were also hung: an American flag; and a Confederate flag that
had been carried during the war by the Fourteenth Louisiana Infantry and was the flag
Davis had held during the most recent Confederate reunion.  

On December 11, 1889, the day of the funeral, schools, courts, government
offices, and businesses across the South were closed in mourning, flags were lowered,
and bells tolled. New Orleans City Hall remained covered in floral offerings and black
draping, and the American flag in the front of the building flew at half-mast. At 11:50
A.M., the lid to Davis’s coffin was closed in preparation for the procession to Metairie
Cemetery. On top of the coffin were a bunch of wheat, the badges of the Army of
Northern Virginia and Army of Tennessee, Lee Association of Mobile and other
organizations, the Confederate battle flag of the Fifth Company, Washington Artillery,
the Confederate flag Davis kept at Beauvoir, a bouquet of flowers sent by Davis’s
housekeeper, and the sword he had carried as a United States soldier in the Mexican-
American War. Varina Davis asked that the relics be preserved, so the items were
removed from the lid before the casket was interred.

For the procession, the lid of Davis’s coffin was draped with the third national
Confederate flag, adopted in March 1865, and a cross of flowers made by a girls’ high
school. Shortly after noon, Davis’s coffin was carried outside, the cannon fired, and bells
began to toll. As the crowd fell silent, preachers recited Bible passages, followed by a

---

8 "In Mourning for the Venerable Leader of the Southern People," The Daily Picayune (New
Orleans, Louisiana), December 7, 1889.
choir. Bishop Galleher, at the foot of Davis's coffin, said in prayer, "a man who in his person and history symbolized the solemn convictions and tragic fortunes of millions of men cannot pass into glooms that gather around a grave without a sign or token from the surcharged bosoms of those he leaves behind." Bishop Galleher explained that with Davis's death, "a moving volume of human history has been closed and clasped." After a brief prayer, soldiers placed Davis's coffin in its caisson to begin the three mile march to Metairie Cemetery.⁹

Varina Davis and the Executive Committee had decided that Davis should have a military funeral, and strict protocol was followed. The funeral car itself was a four-wheeled artillery caisson with six bronze cannons, their mouths pointed down, crossed with muskets. American flags were furled on both sides of the funeral car. Six black horses drew the caisson, led by representatives of the Louisiana State National Guard. At 12:30 P.M., the procession began, leading a parade of ten to fifteen thousand marchers. Uniformed policemen were followed by the honorary grand marshals and divisions of soldiers. The Louisiana State National Guard marched first, followed by visiting troops from Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, Texas, and other southern states. Carriages of clergymen representing Episcopalian, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist denominations followed the military procession, and were in turn followed by the carriages of the fifty-six pallbearers. The pallbearers, who included eight southern governors and twelve former Confederate generals, played a purely symbolic role, as Davis's coffin was carried by soldiers from the Louisiana state militia. The carriage containing Davis's remains followed the pallbearers, and was in turn followed by the carriage carrying the widow, Varina Davis, and close friends. Next in the procession

were executive, judicial, and consular officials from across the South. Numerous associations marched after the politicians, including Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, and the Patriotic Order Sons of America. A small number of Union veterans, who had removed their Grand Army of the Republic badges, were also said to have marched. The parade was so extensive that it took the entire funeral procession an hour and twenty minutes to completely pass any given point.\(^{10}\)

Shortly after 3:00 P.M., the procession reached Metairie Cemetery and continued to the tomb of the Army of Northern Virginia, a large, grassy mound filled with granite vaults. The caisson reached the tomb about 4:00 P.M. The military regiments stood in double lines at parade rest around the site; inside the lines sat Davis’s widow and family and some veterans, and outside the lines stood thousands of mourners. Following a bugle rendition of “Taps,” a choir sang “I Heard a Voice from Heaven” and “Rock of Ages.” Bishop Galleher concluded the service with a recitation of the Lord’s Prayer. The Confederate flag covering the coffin was removed, and Davis’s body was placed in his tomb.\(^{11}\)

Although journalists had been dispatched from across the country to cover the funeral, newspapers used the same telegraphed information from New Orleans, rendering their descriptions of the funeral remarkably similar. But editorial opinion pieces varied by region. Some northerners were content to let the South mourn a person who had ceased to matter when he forfeited his citizenship in 1861 and claimed the office of Confederate president until 1865. Demonstrating how unimportant Davis had become for

\(^{10}\) Further details of Davis’s funeral procession can be found in “A Soldier’s Grave,” The Daily Picayune (New Orleans, Louisiana), December 12, 1889 and The New York Times (New York, New York), December 12, 1889.

many northerners, a reporter for the *Worcester [Massachusetts] Sunday Spy*, an area rich with anti-slavery and anti-Davis sentiments, were surprisingly tolerant of the elaborate memorials. The journalist, possibly expressing the sentiments of many northerners, stated,

> The feeling that inspired this remarkable tribute to the memory of the late Mr. Davis is somewhat incomprehensible at the north, for it does not seem as if the south had much to thank him for, but there is certainly no reason to quarrel with it. There is no element of disloyalty in it. Jefferson Davis as a factor in the politics of this country has been dead nearly twenty-five years, and if the people of the south choose to step aside from their ordinary vocations to march in processions when his mortal remains are consigned to the grave, it is their business not ours.\(^{12}\)

Such opinions reveal the extent to which Davis had become politically irrelevant to many in the North. However, Davis’s continued prominence among white southerners annoyed other northerners, who did not understand why ex-Confederates refused to put the past behind them, and the *Boston Globe* editorialized a widespread northern hope that, with Davis’s burial, “the Confederacy is buried.”\(^{13}\)

> Every southern state vied to be Davis’s final resting place. Four years after Davis was interred in the Army of Northern Virginia tomb at Metairie, Varina Davis decided to bury her husband at Hollywood Cemetery in Richmond, Virginia. The removal of Davis’s body from its tomb, and the ceremony with which it was received in every southern city along its final journey to Richmond, continued to demonstrate the respect ex-Confederates had for Davis, as well as his prominence as an unreconstructed symbol of the Lost Cause.\(^{14}\)

---

\(^{12}\) *Worcester Sunday Spy* (Worcester, Massachusetts), December 12, 1889.

\(^{13}\) As quoted in Collins, *The Death and Resurrection of Jefferson Davis*, 74.

The death of Jefferson Davis completed his transformation in southern opinion. Davis had become the symbol of the Lost Cause, and upon his death white southerners were able to remember and honor him, themselves, and their Confederate past. Although accepting defeat, many white southerners sought to rationalize the war and maintain a distinct, regional identity. Davis’s imprisonment and unapologetic retirement from the public eye, made him into a symbol of the unreconstructed South. Davis’s actions and beliefs resonated with disillusioned ex-Confederates who subsequently bestowed on him the title martyr. Popular opinion, revealed in newspapers, suggests that Davis’s defiance was instrumental to white southerners, who yearned for an identity distinct from the North, and annoyed many northerners, who neither understood nor welcomed such reverence. Studying the official and popular reactions to Davis’s death and funeral arrangements reveals how both sides were shaped by his legacy.

---

CHAPTER III

"THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE ‘LOST CAUSE’":
NEWSPAPER EDITORIALS OF JEFFERSON DAVIS’S DEATH

Whether Jefferson Davis was praised or despised, his death in 1889 made headlines nationwide. Many hoped that, with his passing, the dwindling but lingering sectional animosity would end, ushering in a new era of cooperation and peace. But the responses to his death highlighted the sectional differences that persisted between North and South more than twenty-five years after the conclusion of the Civil War. While northerners loathed or ignored Davis, they appeared baffled as to why some southerners mourned and praised the ex-Confederate president with such enthusiasm. However, their opinions failed to recognize the South’s reaction to Reconstruction policies as well as ex-Confederate rebranding of the Civil War through Lost Cause ideology, of which Davis was a key figure. Ex-Confederates who felt no connection to the Union admired Davis as a symbol of the Lost Cause and because of his refusal to acknowledge that the South had done anything wrong.

Northern newspapers tended to ignore Davis’s cultural influence over white southerners following the Civil War. Many northerners believed Davis could hold no sway over the South and that the majority of southerners did not approve of him while other northerners actively chose to ignore Davis’s influence over former Confederates. They believed the painful memories of the Civil War should not be brought up again and since the fighting was over, southerners should leave their memories of Davis in the past. Northerners and westerners drew from their own prejudice the idea that Davis’s postwar
speeches and writings were of no consequence to the South. They disliked Davis for his ideas and opposition during the Civil War and, in wanting to put the past behind them, chose to discount Davis. Northerners hoped ex-Confederates had also chosen to move forward, a sentiment found in numerous newspaper articles that state opinions such as, "No public man of modern times before being buried, has ever dropped into such utter significance... He was truly gone from the active world beyond recall before the grim reaper put upon him the signal for burial." However, ex-Confederates had come to view Davis as the key symbol in the emerging "Lost Cause" ideology, and Davis’s death was a significant occasion that solidified their respect for him. In the years before his death, Davis had been invited to speak at numerous gatherings both in the North and the South. His trips drew massive crowds of cheering supporters, as indicated by his Southern Tour in 1886. At the three major stops on the tour, people flocked to see the former Confederate president; in Montgomery, 15,000 people stood in light rain waiting for a glimpse of Davis, and more than 45,000 waited in Atlanta. At every stop, men and women, young and old, waited to shake hands with Davis, prompting the fear that he would be crushed by the massive crowds. Despite the toll on his fragile health, Davis continued to make selective appearances until his last year. The South’s warm reception at every occasion showed him that white southerners shared his view of their cause and appreciated his devotion to them.

Davis’s speeches garnered different reactions in the North. Many northerners were not surprised Davis did not demonstrate “any appreciation of the magnanimity displayed by the victorious North,” or attempt to further southern prosperity in the Union.

---

1 *Aberdeen Daily News* (Aberdeen, South Dakota), December 7, 1889.
They believed Davis was not capable of benevolent thoughts and that "there is much in the man to provoke sharp and unfriendly comment." In addition, northerners considered Davis to be a catalyst for spreading Lost Cause ideals. Northern papers reprinted an article from the Vicksburg, Mississippi, Commercial Herald written after Davis's speech in Montgomery, Alabama. The Herald's editor claimed that "Jefferson Davis is not of the new South, he is of the old South. He said things at Montgomery that would have been better unsaid, and did not say things which he, of all men, ought to have said." Although some white southerners were no doubt embarrassed by Davis's adamant defense of the Confederacy, the majority of southern newspaper editorials praised his Southern Tour. Such editorial admiration contrasted sharply with southern opinion at the end of the Civil War.

By the winter and spring of 1865, many Confederates had lost heart in fighting a war they had come to see as unwinnable. In April, Davis and his administration were forced to flee the Confederate capitol of Richmond in favor of Danville, Virginia, and from there they fled to Greensboro, North Carolina. Although Davis insisted this did not mean the end of the fight and the war had simply entered a "new phase of a struggle the memory of which is to endure for all ages, and to shed ever increasing lustre upon our country," few were convinced. Southerners were weary of the bloodshed and mass destruction, but Davis's unyielding personality would not allow him to reconcile with the North without full recognition of a separate southern nation. Still, although Southerners rejected Davis's plea to continue fighting, they embraced his celebration of a distinctive southern culture. As white southerner opposition to federal policies, implemented as a

---

3 "How Davis is Regarded," Springfield Republican (Springfield, Massachusetts), May 1, 1886.
4 As quoted in "Public Comment," The Troy Weekly Times (Troy, New York), May 6, 1886.
5 Cooper, Jefferson Davis, American, 563.
condition of readmission to the Union, grew, they searched for a way to explain the Civil War and preserve their Confederate identity. The “Lost Cause” offered a way to view the Civil War and rationalize the South’s defeat. Edward Pollard, editor of the *Richmond Examiner*, coined the phrase in his 1866 book, *The Lost Cause*. Pollard argued that white southerners must defend their traditions and not lose their distinct identity. Pro-slavery and an ardent supporter of states’ rights, Pollard believed slavery was the foundation of southern society. The enslavement of African Americans, Pollard asserted, allowed southern whites to produce an “extraordinary culture,” to establish “schools of individual refinement,” and to encourage social interaction. Pollard argued that the refined values of the South should not be thrown aside in favor of the “coarse, materialistic” values of the North.6 Southern traits, according to Pollard, were envied by the industrial North, which sought to eliminate the South’s “chivalry” and “gentlemanly simplicity.” He believed the war was a clash between two distinct societies, “not discordant States, but hostile nations.”7 Pollard’s analysis permitted those who embraced the Lost Cause to believe that the North had defeated the South solely because of its larger fighting force and population, and not through its military prowess. The affirmation of southern military prowess was vital to the argument that white southerners had not lost their masculinity following their defeat.

In the Lost Cause’s revision of Civil War history, Davis became a positive, cultural image. Near the end of the Civil War, Davis was despised by those who realized defeat was inevitable, and wished to see the war come to a swift end, and blamed Davis for their defeat. The southern generals were an obvious target, yet remained above

---

reproach as the symbols of white southern masculinity and gentility. However, through continually rationalizing secession and asserting the superiority of southern culture and ideas, South, as well as his postwar treatment by the federal government, in the postwar decades Davis was instrumental in how many white southerners formed their history of the war.

In early May 1865, the Confederacy was in disarray. Jefferson Davis and his advisors had fled from Richmond on April 3, before Robert E. Lee’s surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia to Union General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox on April 9, President Lincoln’s assassination on April 15, and the fall of the Confederate capitol in April 1865. Union troops pursued the Confederate president, and on May 10 overtook the Davis and his companions in Georgia. The night of his capture, Davis left his tent wearing a cloak with wide, loose sleeves and a black shawl that his wife, Varina, had given him to hide his identity. Rumors about Davis’s clothing began to circulate alleging that Davis had attempted to evade Union troops by wearing women’s clothing. Newspapers printed a telegraphic exchange between United States Secretary of War Edwin Stanton and Major General Wilson, who captured Davis, detailing Davis’s failed escape “in his wife’s clothes.” Harper’s Weekly noted that “[Davis] hastily put on one of his wife’s dresses and started for the woods, closely followed by our men, who at first thought him a woman.” Journal illustrations depicting an effeminate Davis added to the humiliation. Through the numerous songs, poems, cartoons, and articles depicting Davis as a womanly fugitive, northerners displayed their perception of a weakened,

---

8 Cooper, Jefferson Davis, American, 574.
emasculated, white southern manhood. Davis was singled out, as the head of Confederate leadership, but the attack on white southern masculinity extended to Confederate leaders as well, leading one Union soldier at Fortress Monroe to observe “we are going to have the president of the petticoat Confederacy imprisoned at this fort.”

By exhibiting Davis and the Confederacy as weak and womanly, the North asserted its physical and political dominance. Feminized portrayals of Davis in petticoats and hoopskirts contributed to the feeling of a threatened white southern manhood, angering former Confederates and prompting the desire to restore their masculine identity, which in turn led to the widespread acceptance of Lost Cause ideals.

Davis arrived at Fortress Monroe, Virginia on May 22, 1865, as a federal prisoner. He was held under suspicion that he planned the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, though he was never tried. On May 23, 1865, General Nelson A. Miles placed manacles on Davis’s ankles, intending to humiliate the former Confederate president. Davis had to be subdued by four men before being shackled, and remained in chains for five days.

Newspaper editors published numerous articles describing Davis’s punishment. The *New York Times* reported on May 27 that “I learn from a well-informed gentleman who left Fortress Monroe yesterday that Jeff. Davis has manacles on both ankles with a chain connecting about three feet long. . . Rather than submit, he wanted the guards to shoot him. It became necessary to throw him on his back and hold him until

---

12 Cooper, *Jefferson Davis, American*, 578.
the irons were clinched.”¹³ According to some newspaper accounts, the manacled Davis lay on his bed, covering himself with his blanket.¹⁴

Through such stories, newspapers implied the feminization of the Confederate South, and the North’s forced physical submission and violation of Davis. Both northerners and southerners protested Davis’s treatment, and after five days, the shackles were removed. Despite Davis’s unpopularity at the end of the war, white southerners did not wish to see the former Confederate president humiliated in this fashion, while northerners protested that the government had no reason to treat Davis so.

Ex-Confederates increasingly came to see Davis’s long imprisonment because of his unending defense of the southern cause as a form of martyrdom, a feeling that intensified during Reconstruction as they sought to rationalize their defeat and remember their distinct culture and heroes. Had Davis not been imprisoned and shackled, it is possible he would not have risen to such prominence. Indeed, at the end of the war, President Lincoln and General Grant had agreed it would be better for all if Davis escaped. Even editor Pollard, an ardent supporter of the Southern cause but a critic of Davis’s administration, believed that had the federal authorities not arrested Davis, or had not treated him harshly, it was likely “he would have remained . . . the most unpopular man in the South.”¹⁵ Instead, Davis became a representative of the Lost Cause. As a Baltimore, Maryland, journalist summed up Davis’s rather remarkable transformation,

Had he died at or soon after the close of the war his character would never have been rightly understood. The South would have respected him as its leader, but it would never have known the depth of his love for the cause.

¹⁴ Cooper, Jefferson Davis, American, 578.
¹⁵ As quoted in Collins, The Death and Resurrection of Jefferson Davis, 18.
which he had espoused, and the North would have remembered him only by the light of the prejudices and passions of war.\textsuperscript{16}

Davis’s legacy became not political but cultural as ex-Confederates honored him not for his wartime service but for his postwar sentiments.

The Lost Cause justified the South’s antebellum principles and rationalized its eventual defeat, proof that the spirit of the Old South had endured. Recognizing that they were not in a position to continue fighting the Civil War, they accepted their return to the Union even while seeking to preserve a South with a distinct cultural identity instead of a separate political identity. Although not all white southerners suffered or sacrificed equally in the Civil War, former Confederates wanted to believe they had fought together for a noble cause and coveted an idealized past. Even before the war ended, Confederates had begun to search for meaning in their defeat. Following Pollard’s example, white southerners took to fighting a “war of ideas,” and the former Confederates published numerous defenses and analyses of their beliefs and actions.\textsuperscript{17}

With Davis’s death, the white South went into mourning, lowering United States and Confederate flags to half mast and holding memorial services. Davis’ death completed his transformation in the hearts and minds of white southerners who now saw him as a symbol of their martyrdom. Such demonstrations surprised J.L.M. Curry, a politician who served in the United States House of Representatives from 1857-1861, and represented Alabama in the Confederate Congress during the Civil War. The unanimity of white southerners, and their tears and eulogies for Davis, led Curry to conclude that

\textsuperscript{16} “The South Mourns,” \textit{The Sun} (Baltimore, Maryland), December 7, 1889.

\textsuperscript{17} Michael B. Ballard, \textit{A Long Shadow: Jefferson Davis and the Final Days of the Confederacy} (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1986), 165-6.
Davis had become “the representative of the ‘Lost Cause.’”\(^{18}\) The editor of the New Orleans *Picayune* editorialized, “Let the South mourn for one who represented her more than any other.”\(^{19}\) In expressing such sentiments, the *Picayune* was not unusual.

Although many southern politicians and papers criticized Davis during the war, especially when the North began to win major battles, in death they praised him. North Carolina’s Governor Fowle issued a proclamation calling Davis “the trusted leader of the people of the state of North Carolina, in the four darkest years of her history.” He claimed, “Our entire people regard his memory with feelings of highest respect, esteem and affection…”\(^{20}\) In fact, however, during the war North Carolinians were often dissatisfied with the course of the war, so much so that the state experienced a significant minority peace movement. In August 1863, the Raleigh, North Carolina, *Standard* referred to Davis as “a repudiator, in whom no confidence can be placed, and whose efforts to establish a Southern Confederacy will be a failure.” Other Southern newspapers, such as the Richmond *Enquirer*, called upon Davis to “suppress the Raleigh *Standard* and wipe out the Supreme Court of North Carolina.” The *Standard* quickly responded by asserting that if Davis attempted to suppress their paper, he would be met with force and North Carolina would erupt in revolution. Some in North Carolina insisted that 40,000 of the original 95,000 North Carolina soldiers had already died, and proposed delegations to ensure peaceful terms with the Union, with or without Davis.\(^{21}\)

These accusations and lack of confidence in Davis were important indicators of

---


\(^{19}\) As quoted in *The Evening News* (San Jose, California), December 6, 1889.

\(^{20}\) *Aberdeen Daily News* (Aberdeen, South Dakota), December 7, 1889.

\(^{21}\) *Daily Richmond Examiner* (Richmond, Virginia), August 7, 1863.
dissention during the War, yet in the aftermath of the Civil War, such frustration with Davis was replaced by respect.

In editorializing on Davis’s death, the southern press offered tributes and lengthy articles detailing Davis’s life, his dying days, and his funeral. Still, there was some variation in their enthusiasm. Newspapers in southern cities that lacked strong ties to the Union, primarily those in the lower south, praised Davis and idealized the Old South. White southerners in these regions were more likely to fully support Lost Cause ideology and publish editorials that romanticized their culture and commended Davis for supporting it. Cities with a vested economical interest in the re-United States were less vocal in their praise for Davis, as they did not want to glorify the past at the expense of their progress. Similarly, southern politicians with ties to the nation, such as U.S. senators, offered less praise of Davis than did state and local politicians. A similar pattern emerged in the North, where newspapers affiliated with the Democrats, a national party, published more effusive accounts of Davis’s life than did newspapers affiliated with the Republicans, a mostly northern party. Newspapers with Democrat affiliations tended to sympathize more with the South. Indeed, some southern papers printed articles on the funeral, based upon telegraphic reports from New Orleans, which were almost indistinguishable from those in northern papers.

Many southern newspapers highlighted the contrasting regional opinions of Davis, along with the assertion that Davis “belonged” to the South. *The Dallas Morning News* reprinted an article from Tennessee explaining that Davis had a differing reputation among northerners and southerners. For twenty-five years after the Civil War, the article stated, Davis lived in a country “deprived of the dearest rights of citizen, the object of
love and hatred equally intense, hearing words of honor and affection mingled with
curses and calumny.” The Knoxville Journal noted that Davis was a man without a
country, as he did not have full rights of citizenship in the United States of America and
could not claim to be a citizen of the defunct Confederate States of America. Although
the Knoxville Journal and other newspapers in the South had roundly criticized Davis
during the war, “in the presence of death and the open grave, the mantle of charity will be
thrown over these things and only his good qualities will be spoken of.” A positive
history of Davis’s life, gave white southerners in the post-Civil War generation a
flattering account of their former leader.

New Orleans, the city where Davis died and was first buried, witnessed an
exceptionally emotional outpouring of support for the Confederacy’s former president.
Hundreds of thousands of mourners and journalists travelled to the city to see Davis’s
body and witness his interment. The New York Times contained a tally of visitors on a
single day to view Davis’s body as it lay in the New Orleans City Hall, concluding that
approximately 40,000 people had paid their respects. The crowd included “all conditions
of whites, blacks, ex-Confederates, ex-Federals, and even Indians and Chinamen.” It is
significant that the journalist from The New York Times noted the large number of women
and children in the crowd, as women and children are customarily viewed as central to
preserving culture and passing down traditions, and suggests that white southerners
honored Davis for his cultural contributions. However, one cannot assume the Times’s
tally included equal numbers of each ethnicity or group listed. Rather, the politically

---

22 The Dallas Morning News (Dallas, Texas), December 7, 1889.
23 “The South’s Idol,” The Knoxville Journal (Knoxville, Tennessee), December 7, 1889.
disadvantaged groups mentioned demonstrated that Davis left a cultural, not solely political, legacy.

Along with distributing multiple-page articles on Davis’s history, the New Orleans *Daily Picayune* published numerous editorials about Davis in the days following his death. One editorial seemed designed to ease the consciences of those southerners who had criticized Davis during the Civil War. By comparing the ill treatment of Davis to that of Aristides, Pericles, and George Washington, the editorial explained there had never been a great leader of an uprising who escaped criticism. Similar to Aristides, Pericles, and Washington, the journalist asserted, Davis would be praised in histories for his actions and beliefs. Under the stress and pressure of the Civil War, the southern people should not be blamed for their negative wartime opinions of Davis, for an accurate judgment of Davis could only be realized after emotions had settled. The *Daily Picayune* also printed an article whose author implored southerners to ensure that Davis’s funeral would demonstrate the South’s love and respect so that it would be “the grandest and most impressive that had ever been witnessed in this city, and should be conducted on such a scale as to show the world that the South, in the face of sectional abuse and criticisms, does not hesitate to honor in the profoundest manner the memory of the greatest of her sons.” Through the grand funeral and memorials, the southern people would be able to exhibit their love for their former leader, solidifying their revised opinion of Davis—and, by extension, of themselves.

Many southern newspapers contained articles commending those northern papers that did not vilify or publish critiques of Davis upon his death. *The Macon Telegraph* in

---

Georgia praised the “truly representative newspapers” of the North that not only gave Davis a balanced tribute, but allowed the southern people their grief without question or hostility. The article quoted the *New York Herald* as claiming, “On his death bed Jefferson Davis is safe from all but those small souled men who mistake hatred for patriotism. The true American is willing to let Mr. Davis die in peace among those who love him.”27 By reprinting this article, the journalist hoped to show the people of the South that many northerners were content to let them mourn Davis without critique. The *Macon Telegraph* did not point out that, because the *New York Herald* was affiliated with the Democratic party, its political sympathies were associated with the white South, and was not representative of northern Republican beliefs.

Newspapers from southern areas outside of the heart of the white South, reveal greater ambivalence towards Davis. Kentucky presented an interesting paradox during the Civil War. The birth state of both President Lincoln and President Davis, Kentucky was a border state with both pro-Union and pro-Confederate governments. As such, it is not surprising that Kentucky’s newspapers held contradictory views opinions on Davis’s death. *The Breckenridge News* published an article stating that, with Davis’s death, the last figure of the “great conflict” had passed away as well as a story about a meeting of ex-Confederates in Breckenridge County who claimed that Davis was a true patriot and “among the wisest and best men of this or any other age.”28 Hartford’s *The Hartford Herald* offered a balanced look at Davis’s life, calling the South’s secession ill-advised, but commending Davis’s honesty and intellect. The article acknowledged the differing opinions both in the country and in Kentucky, concluding, “he is dead, but his name is

---

27 *The Macon Telegraph* (Macon, Georgia), December 6, 1889.
28 *The Breckenridge News* (Cloverport, Kentucky), December 11, 1889.
ineffaceably written on the pages of a nation’s varied history.” Neither praising Davis as extensively as many papers in the South, nor criticizing Davis as excessively as many northern papers, Kentucky newspaper editors exhibited the variety of public opinions and the meshing of ideas of a re-unified people.

In another display of Kentucky’s conglomeration of Civil War beliefs, a Democratic paper, *The Climax*, compared Davis and Lincoln in an article entitled “The Two Kentucky Boys.” The authors pointed out the historical irony that “the victor should fall in the very hour of victory and the defeated live till almost every trace of the conflict had vanished, to die of mere old age.” The newspaper included a list of prominent people who represented “Lost Cause” and “the other side.” Noting that most of the prominent men on both sides were deceased, the article concluded that Davis was a “great man in the broadest sense of the word, and a pure man.” The paper’s coverage of Davis’s life was generally positive, but it did not include the lavish praises displayed in papers from the deep South.

In their coverage of Davis’s death, many northern papers remained hostile, although some chose to merely relate his history, the facts of his death, and the funeral arrangements. These decisions were made for numerous reasons; some journalists did not wish to criticize the dead while others did not want to bring up painful memories of Davis and the Civil War. A sample of northern papers demonstrates both sentiments within the article selection, though most expressed confusion as to why the South was in mourning for Davis and why southerners continued to support their sectionalist ideas. These accounts suggest that many northerners believed southerners were celebrating

---

29 *The Hartford Herald* (Hartford, Kentucky), December 11, 1889.
30 *The Climax* (Richmond, Kentucky), December 11, 1889.
Davis at the expense of a positive relationship with their northern countrymen. The northern newspapers examined reveals there was no definitive northern description of Davis. Although Davis was collectively praised, albeit to varying degrees, by white southerners, descriptions in northern papers revealed the sharply conflicting opinions of regions and journalists, with contradictory assessments found within a single issue.

It is not difficult to find examples of northern papers disparaging the deceased Davis. The *Chicago Evening News* built on the gendered ideas that permeated the postwar era by comparing Davis to a "wife murderer." Similarly, the *New York Tribune* published an article that expressed the hope that Davis "represented only what was worst in the southern character and that as he departs from the state, the narrow and dictatorial and vindictive spirit which he so sharply represented may also fade away." Examples such as these from northern papers demonstrate the lingering contempt some in the North harbored for Davis, which his death did not lessen. Northerners had long blamed Davis for prolonging the Civil War, and resented his staunch ongoing defense of secession. As Davis was for the most part unpunished for what many in the North argued was treason against the United States, his freedom and continued popularity in the hearts and minds of white southerners, as well as postwar prosperity and peaceful death at an old age, seemed unjust.

Boston editorials, in particular, vilified Davis. Although a considerable distance from the wartime battlefront, Bostonians had contributed greatly to the Union effort, both militarily and economically. Further, Massachusetts had championed the abolitionist movement, and animosity toward the racial beliefs of Davis and many white southerners was strong. The *Boston Journal* published an article relating the facts of Davis's life, but

---

31 As quoted in Collins, *The Death and Resurrection of Jefferson Davis*, 56.
including an opinion piece detailing the editor’s judgment of Davis, his death, and the South. While noting that traitors in other countries were hung or shot with little ceremony, the United States government showed great leniency towards Davis. Not only was he not prosecuted, but he lived undisturbed and was able to continue to speak out in defense of secession. Many northern writers found this tolerable only because they were convinced Davis had little influence on southern opinion, insisting that the crowds who turned out to hear Davis did not approve of his statements and were even occasionally embarrassed by his continual references to states’ rights. Indeed, Davis often spoke rashly; some southerners chose to view Davis’s daughter Winnie, the “daughter of the Confederacy” who had been born in the Confederate White House as a reminder of southern virility and a southern symbol in place of her father. Winnie’s significance among former Confederates grew after she accompanied her father during his Southern Tour in 1886.

Further misreading white southern sentiments, the Boston Journal asserted that “the emotional Southern temperament may be stirred for the moment by his departure, but his death will not make a ripple upon the surface of Southern politics. He simply drops out of sight, and the world, with which twenty-five years ago he ceased to have any vital sympathies, moves on without him.” The Boston public’s disregard for the profound influence Davis’s death may have on the South and southern memory exhibited the dismissive attitudes that flourished in some areas of the North.

An editorial in another Massachusetts paper, the Worcester Sunday Spy, addressed southerners’ dedication to the Lost Cause. The editor stated that the death of Jefferson

32 “Jefferson Davis,” Boston Daily Journal (Boston, Massachusetts), December 6, 1889.
33 Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy, 97-8.
34 “Jefferson Davis,” Boston Daily Journal (Boston, Massachusetts), December 6, 1889.
Davis inspired support for Lost Cause ideals, causing feelings of animosity to be brought to the surface once again. These southern reactions demonstrated to the Worcester editor that although southerners may have submitted to military force, many ex-Confederates still refused to acknowledge the correctness of the Union cause. Antebellum Worcester had been a hotbed of the antislavery movement, suggesting that the editor’s understanding of the Union cause was the abolition of slavery. That many white southerners accepted the end of slavery but continued to devise ways to ensure that African Americans remained second class citizens, indicated to some northerners that former Confederates remained unwilling to submit to Union ideals. This was unacceptable to those in the North who felt the Confederate South must yield to the righteousness of the Union’s cause. The Spy’s editor concluded that although freedom-loving people were concerned by declarations of support to the Lost Cause, a feeling of southern pride caused ex-Confederates to mourn Davis with a temporary outpouring of emotion.35

Other northern newspapers proved sympathetic to white southerners’ mourning of Davis, but expressed hope that they would progress past remembering and romanticizing the Old South. Editorial writers in Ohio, a Union state that was nonetheless politically divided, showed empathy towards Davis and the South as a whole. Conciliatory editors in Cincinnati wrote that they “neither expect nor desire that the Southern people should denounce him in his death” because “he was their leader and the representative man of their errors that they have none the less acknowledged because they have celebrated their lost cause, and occasionally displayed the flag under which they sought their own ruin and were overwhelmed with beneficent misfortune.” One Ohio editor argued that

35 Worcester Sunday Spy (Worcester, Massachusetts), December 10, 1889.
Davis’s death should be remembered with a spirit of unity and peace because Davis, towards the end of his life, was not a great figure and his influence “has not been increased by making him a martyr.” The editorial concluded with the hope that Davis’s death would provide southerners with a sense of closure for the Civil War. The absence of ardent opinions about Davis demonstrates that the Ohio region, at least, had begun to move past the anger and resentment of the war. To many northerners and re-acclimated southerners, Davis had simply ceased to matter. They believed Davis’s status as a martyr among ex-Confederates and Lost Cause supporters did not resonate beyond a small percentage of southerners.

The *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, similar to most newspapers in major cities, sent its own reporter to cover the events of Davis’s death and funeral. While most journalists reported the large number of mourners who viewed Davis’s body and the solemn respect of the citizens in New Orleans for him, the *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* related that Davis’s remains were held in “such poor state as is a surprise to many citizens.” The reporter described his depressing visit to Davis’s body, noting “where flowers are blooming in the open air, they are not abundant as offerings.” Other major northern newspapers did not describe similarly shoddy memorial adornments. It seems likely that although the tributes to Davis underwhelmed the reporter from Cincinnati, his judgments were intended to assure readers that Davis was not universally praised or venerated by the South.

---

36 “Jefferson Davis,” *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* (Cincinnati, Ohio), December 7, 1889.
37 “Jefferson Davis’ Bier,” *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* (Cincinnati, Ohio), December 8, 1889.
38 For a description of the lavish funeral events and memorials, as well as editorials from northern and southern newspapers, please see Chapter II of this thesis.
On December 11, the day of Davis’s funeral, the *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* published an article disparaging the South’s remembrance of Davis and suggesting that the acclaim Davis had received was the result of his status as a martyr among white southerners. The journalist was disturbed that thousands of school children were marched to City Hall to view the remains of Davis, “the hero of the lost cause, ‘the greatest man that America ever produced.’” Teaching children that Jefferson Davis, above all men, was to be honored and admired and that children should be willing to fight for Davis’s cause, he noted, could never yield positive results. It is also noteworthy that children were once again mentioned as being significant participants in the funeral. By transmitting history and culture to the younger generation, ex-Confederates would ensure that their version of history would survive. Furthermore, the reporter focused the article on the separation between North and South and observed that Confederate flags would be flown at the funeral. The journalist interviewed the head of the Grand Army of the Republic, who stated that the display of Confederate flags would not harm northerners because “‘the death of Davis will stop all this matter except, perhaps in the case of some crank-heads here and in the North. So far as we are concerned the death of Jeff. Davis ends the war, and, privately, I wish he had died a good while ago.’” Newspaper articles such as these demonstrate the annoyance of some in the North that white southerners were passing on their version of Civil War history instead of healing and moving past their defeat, as well as the hope that with Davis’s death the Civil War was truly over.

Where some northern newspaper editorials were tolerant of the memorials surrounding Davis’s death and some were critical, still others were neutral or indifferent.

---

39 “At the Bier of the Dead Chief of the Confederacy,” *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* (Cincinnati, Ohio), December 11, 1889.
A number of northern papers did not take the opportunity to criticize Davis, instead focusing on the healing process between the North and the South. Philadelphia’s *The North American* included letters to the editor from citizens hoping to promote sectional unity. One letter suggested the author’s belief that the South had made a mistake in honoring Davis as a “patriot” and a “‘hero’ of their ‘lost cause,’” because in so doing “they hurt the hearts of their true friends in the north.” The letter writer was willing to acknowledge Davis’s heroism in the Mexican American War, the devotedness of his wife and family, but believed the South’s grand remembrance of someone whom the vast majority of northerners viewed as a traitor only served to prolong and inflame sectional tension and infuriate a northern public that wished to move past the war.40

Connecticut’s *New Haven Evening Register* noted that although Davis would not be “cordially remembered,” he was no more worthy of a dishonored memory than thousands of others. The journalist observed that throughout the country former Confederates were regarded with compassion, and suggested that Davis deserved the same, demonstrating the healing that had progressed by this time.41 The day after Davis’s death, the editor of the *New Haven Evening Register* advocated judging Davis compassionately, and urged his readers to concentrate on the unity of the country. To support such statements, the author interviewed the United States Senator from Texas, John H. Reagan, who had served as Postmaster General in the Confederate government. As a prominent southern politician, Reagan was instrumental in attempting to persuade the paper’s northern readers that although Davis whole-heartedly believed in state’s rights, he had harbored no hostility toward the northern people. A higher sense of duty to

---

41 “Jefferson Davis Dead,” *The New Haven Evening Register* (New Haven, Connecticut), December 6, 1889.
his state compelled Davis to accept the presidency of the Confederate States, Reagan explained. Aware of the widespread hatred for Davis in the North, the article acknowledged that while many were unable to forgive Davis for his part in the rebellion, it hoped the public would sympathize with Davis’s sincere motives and pure of heart. Northerners should focus on the country’s future as a “united, industrial force, interested only in the development and prosperity of the common nation.” Reiterating that the past should be buried, the article ended with the statement that Davis would be buried alongside sectional prejudice.\footnote{\enquote{Jefferson Davis,\" New Haven Evening Register (New Haven, Connecticut), December 7, 1889.}
\footnote{Life and Reminiscences of Jefferson Davis, By Distinguished Men of His Time (Baltimore: Woodward, 1890), 264; for further examination of Grant’s funeral, as well as it’s comparison to Davis’s funeral, please see Appendix A.}}

In a memorial for Davis, Senator Reagan of Texas explained that the majority of the press, North and South, had treated Davis’s memory kindly. In comparing Davis’s death to that of President, and former general, Ulysses S. Grant, Reagan noted that the South had mourned along with the North. The same feelings of respect for “genius, for greatness and for worth, and the same feeling of Christian charity for the dead, and of sympathy for the bereaved who survive, has shown itself North as well as South for Mr. Davis.” Reagan argued that these feelings of mutual sympathy and respect would further the bonds of brotherhood between the two sections and promote the unity of the United States.\footnote{Life and Reminiscences of Jefferson Davis, By Distinguished Men of His Time (Baltimore: Woodward, 1890), 264; for further examination of Grant’s funeral, as well as it’s comparison to Davis’s funeral, please see Appendix A.} Reagan had a vested political and economic interest in the United States, being a senator, and did not wish to reignite sectional animosity at the expense of the Union. The lack of passionate acclaim in Reagan’s memorial for Davis suggests that, like other southern politicians who served in the national government, Reagan sought to promote unity and reconciliation, and illustrates how Davis’s most passionate mourners were
those outside the political sphere. Southerners with few ties to the North and the nation were thus more likely to embrace Lost Cause ideals.

The newer states of the West and the western territories were less absorbed by lingering Civil War sentiments than the eastern states. Newspapers from South Dakota, which became a Union territory during the Civil War and achieved statehood in November 1889, demonstrated similar feelings as other northern states but were much less hostile. The headline of the Aberdeen Daily News called Davis “the Renowned Secessionist,” and mentioned that “he died as he lived, the betrayer and traducer of his country.” The accompanying article was brief but not vengeful, and listed Davis’s contributions to the United States as well as to the Confederacy.\footnote{Aberdeen Daily News (Aberdeen, South Dakota), December 6, 1889.} The day after Davis’s death, the paper illustrated the surprise many northerners felt upon realizing that Davis was revered in the South with the headline “Jeff Davis seems to Have Had a Place in the Hearts of His Countrymen.” The article included only brief excerpts from papers from Washington D.C. and southern cities, suggesting the astonishment and frustration many northerners felt upon learning that despite defeat in the Civil War, Davis maintained a powerful presence in the minds of ex-Confederates.\footnote{Aberdeen Daily News (Aberdeen, South Dakota), December 7, 1889.}

Arizona, unlike South Dakota, was a territory that had been claimed by the Confederate States as a passageway to California during the Civil War, and displayed some sympathy for Davis. Although the articles in the Arizona papers consisted mostly of reprints rather than original reporting or editorializing, all included condolences for Davis and make no mention of Davis’s career in the United States government or in the
Confederacy. Instead, the papers listed cities in which there was “profound sorrow” amongst the citizens as well as how those places intended to memorialize Davis.46

Newspapers in California, whose admission as a free state in 1849 permanently relegated the slaveholding states to minority status in the Union, also displayed a variety of opinions of Davis. Many expressed strong sentiments against Davis. Stating that Generals Lee and Jackson were more revered nationwide, The Los Angeles Times argued that “the gush over Davis has almost entirely come from women, aliens, fools, and non-combatants,” suggesting that the voting class of white men did not mourn Davis and implying that Davis was mourned for his cultural contribution. In a conciliatory gesture, the editorial asserted that Davis was incorrectly blamed for the failure of the Confederacy because it was “not in the nature of things that it should succeed.”47 San Francisco’s Daily Evening Bulletin, marveling at the elaborate memorials for Davis, related a telegraph from New Orleans describing the “wonderful outpouring of the Southern people” and the funeral arrangements.48 In its discussion of Davis’s death, the Daily Evening Bulletin chose to relate the facts and reprinted various brief positive comments from newspapers across the nation.49 By neither focusing on Davis’s life nor condemning him, the Daily Evening Bulletin reported the facts without emotion.

Oregon, which had been admitted to the United States only two years before the outbreak of the Civil War and was allied with the Union, treated Davis’s death as the death of a traitor. Portland’s Morning Oregonian detailed Davis’s last day under the subheading, “Utter Collapse of a Feeble Old Man—The Last of the Rebels has

47 The Los Angeles Times (Los Angeles, California), December 7, 1889.
Surrendered—Scenes of the Death Chamber.” Although the material in the article was similar to those others written elsewhere, both North and South, the headline reveals the article’s bias, as a revered figurehead would never be referred to as a “feeble old man.”

Elsewhere in the issue, an opinion piece was more hostile. The author agreed with Edward Pollard’s description of Davis as a “man of indomitable pluck, of vanity, who by his gross favoritism and incompetency was responsible for the great disasters of the war.” The paper briefly summarized the major events in Davis’s life, such as his terms as a United States senator and his service in the Mexican American War, and only briefly mentioned he had been the President of the Confederacy, but ended by calling Davis “a narrow-minded enthusiast, of the same limited powers as Robespierre.”

A later article claimed Davis was not the cause of the war, but was a product of it. The journalist interviewed the English General Wolseley, who told him that he had never met a distinguished Confederate soldier who considered Davis fit for his position. Although this article did does not blame the war on Davis, as many papers did, its tone gives him no credit, either. The following day, an article by a different journalist defended Davis, claiming he was a better man than Franklin Pierce and Grover Cleveland. The reporter stated that Davis was a good patriot who was willing to fight courageously for a cause he believed was constitutional. This article, however, was a mere snippet, and was not given the same prominence as the more hostile articles on Davis and the South.

Western newspaper commentary viewed Davis’s role as a southern martyr in snide terms. A resolution from the Richmond, Virginia, chamber of commerce following Davis’s death asserted that Davis had been singled out as a “victim of malignant hate and
persecution” whose courage and “vicarious sufferings for the deeds of the Southern people” had endeared him to southerners. Reporting on the resolution, an editor at the Morning Oregonian was appalled that anyone would believe Davis had endured “vicarious sufferings,” and argued that Davis should have been tried and executed for treason. It was only due to the “magnanimity of the victorious North,” as well as the “defection” of President Johnson from the Radical Republicans, that he had been spared. Insisting the Southern people did not see Davis as a martyr, the editor offered blurbs from select southern newspapers to denouncing Davis for posing as an “irreconcilable unreconstructed ghost of ‘the Lost Cause.’”

Davis’s death made international headlines as well, especially in the United Kingdom. The Belfast News-Letter claimed the English people had always sympathized with the Confederate cause and that Davis was admired by prominent Englishmen such as then Prime Minister Lord Palmerston. The paper made a point of noting how close England had come to supporting the Confederacy and the many great qualities Davis had as leader and soldier. The London Herald had previously mentioned at the conclusion of the Civil War that “Successful or fallen, tried or untried, condemned or uncondemned, Jefferson Davis is to us the greatest man in America.” The notoriety of Davis and the American Civil War ensured that his death elicited reactions from nations on the periphery of the battle.

Other British headlines were not as positive. Although not hostile towards Davis, the editors often did not understand the bond white southerners felt for him. While

---

53 Morning Oregonian (Portland, Oregon), December 9, 1889.
54 The Belfast News-Letter (Belfast, Northern Ireland), December 7, 1889.
noting the public’s affection for Generals Lee, Longstreet, and Jackson, *The Pall Mall Gazette* of London doubted anyone outside Davis’s immediate circle would feel any regret as Davis did not elicit emotion or enthusiasm.\textsuperscript{56} *The Glasgow Herald* echoed this belief. Where Lincoln’s memory was “enshrined in the hearts of millions of his countrymen,” the “very existence of Mr. Davis had been forgotten save in the narrow circle of his own personal acquaintance.” Along with claiming Davis had been forgotten, *The Glasgow Herald* argued that although the federal government released Davis from Fortress Monroe without trial, his greatest punishment was his conscience, as he must have been aware of his “disastrous failure” and that he fought against “the progress of mankind.” The editorial concluded on a slightly more positive note, adding that Davis “did not fail more egregiously or discreditably than most other men in his position would have done.”\textsuperscript{57} In addition to this scornful editorial, *The Glasgow Herald* published a brief history of Davis and his demise, telegraphed from New Orleans.

Jefferson Davis’s death elicited reactions from every part of the United States and a few from abroad. Northern editorials varied widely in tone, from minor annoyance that the South would not move on, to reviving or prolonging sectional divisions through continuing to critique Davis at his death, to the occasional offer of sympathy. Southern editorials also covered a wide spectrum of opinions, though most were essentially positive. Newspapers in those areas more firmly established in the re-United States, and which had an economic and political interest in maintaining harmony, were more willing to let the past fade away and wrote less glowing accounts of Davis. In the deep South, where white southerners were less connected to the North or West, animosity toward the

\textsuperscript{56} *The Pall Mall Gazette* (London, England), December 6, 1889.

\textsuperscript{57} *Glasgow Herald* (Glasgow, Scotland), December 7, 1889.
Union and the need to defend their honor and manhood prompted effusive memorials of Davis and what he believed. Although some healing, politically and economically, had occurred since the Civil War, the reactions to Davis’s death offer a sharp lens through which to view the prejudices, confusion, and hostilities that lingered between northerners and many white southerners.
CHAPTER IV

"WE KNOW NO SUCH MAN":

OFFICIAL REACTION TO JEFFERSON DAVIS'S DEATH

In the years following the Civil War, Presidents Andrew Johnson and Ulysses S. Grant issued full pardons for many former Confederates. The United States War Department received thousands of applications for pardon by many of those exempt from the amnesty proclamations. These applications often contained character references from friends and relatives, suggestions for the president on how to reincorporate the South into the Union, pleas for universal amnesty, and, most often, apologies for support of the Confederacy. Those seeking pardons sought to reaffirm their loyalty to the United States and to acknowledge that secession had been wrong. Jefferson Davis never sought a pardon, never accepted blame for secession, which he continued to insist was constitutional, and never agreed that the South's surrender had been justified.1 Long after his death in 1889, Davis was not a full U.S. citizen.

Countless northerners expected the United States government to try and convict Davis for treason. During his two-year confinement in Fortress Monroe, from 1865 to 1867, Davis was charged with treason, and the time appeared to be ripe to place the blame for the Civil War on Davis. However, numerous problems made the trial undesirable for the federal government. Davis was charged with plotting President Lincoln's murder, a charge for which no reliable evidence had been produced. Yet for political reasons, both the Johnson Administration and the Radical Republicans, led by

---

1 J.T. Dorris, "Pardoning the Leaders of the Confederacy," The Mississippi Valley Historical Review 15, 1 (June 1928), 3-4.
Secretary of State William Seward and Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, who had leveled the charge against Davis, felt they could not drop the case. President Andrew Johnson wanted to appear as though he was holding the president of the Confederacy accountable for his actions, while the Republicans blamed Davis for starting the war. But in the charged atmosphere of the era of Reconstruction, trying Davis proved to be more complicated than imagined, while holding him indefinitely was untenable. Davis would have to be tried or released, and the Radical Republicans feared mishandling the affair would result in a scandal or an official investigation.²

President Lincoln and his moderate Republican supporters had encouraged the Union to welcome the southern states back into the Union “with malice toward none and charity for all,” including Jefferson Davis. Through this generous gesture, the moderates hoped white southerners would embrace reconciliation. Radical Republicans, however, were adamant that the South be punished for its rebellion. After Lincoln’s assassination, President Andrew Johnson attempted to follow Lincoln’s approach to reconciliation with the South and issued an amnesty for ex-Confederates, exempting those who in 1860 owned taxable property exceeding $20,000. Those excluded from the pardon would be able to apply for clemency, and many high ranking former Confederates took advantage of this system, notably former Confederate Vice President Alexander Stephens.³

Republicans grew concerned with Johnson’s liberal pardons of former Confederate leaders, fearing that although the North had won the war, it would soon lose political power in Congress to the South. President Johnson, a Democrat who had been elected with Lincoln, clashed with the Republican-dominated Congress repeatedly over

Reconstruction-era policies. Johnson supported welcoming the former Confederate states back into the Union, granting a general amnesty to those who pledged their loyalty to the Union, and allowing southern states to send representatives to Congress once ten percent of a state’s voters had sworn the loyalty oath. Radical Republicans, however, sought military governments in southern states and wanted to apply stricter terms to southern states’ readmission into the Union and Congress.  

Davis’s imprisonment escalated the struggle for control between Johnson and the Radical Republicans in Congress. While southerners sent letters to Johnson demanding Davis’s release, an equal number of northerners wrote letters demanding he be punished. Davis was eager for his day in court, confident that a trial would result in his vindication as he wholeheartedly considered his actions legal. A trial would also make secession the major issue. However, repeated court delays and bickering between President Johnson and Congress dampened Davis’s hope of appearing before a jury.

In 1868, Johnson removed from office Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, the head of the Radical Republicans with whom both Lincoln and Johnson had clashed. This act angered Radical Republicans, who noted that in so doing Johnson had violated the Tenure of Office Act, which Congress had enacted in 1867 over the president’s veto. The House of Representatives impeached President Johnson and after a trial that lasted from March to May, 1868, Johnson was acquitted by a thirty-five to nineteen vote, which was one vote short of the two-thirds majority needed to convict. Johnson remained in

---

4 Cooper Jr., Jefferson Davis, American, 599-601
5 Cooper Jr., Jefferson Davis, American, 599-601.
office, but the trial had increased the hostility between the president and Congressional Republicans.  

Bringing Davis to trial raised complicated constitutional questions that would involve the legality of secession. The Founding Fathers did not clarify the sovereign relationship between state and nation, and Davis and Lincoln disagreed over the implied nature of the relationship. Davis argued that during the American Revolution, the states joined in alliance, but retained their sovereignty. He followed the views of John Calhoun by asserting the Constitution created "the government of a community of States, and not the government of a single State or nation." Lincoln did not agree, and argued that individual states only have status within the Union; they have no other legal standing. Therefore, if a state broke from the Union, it could only do so against the law, and through a revolution. Lincoln summarized this view in his first inaugural address: "I hold, that in contemplation of universal law, and of the Constitution, the Union of these States is perpetual. Perpetuity is implied, if not expressed, in the fundamental law of all national governments..." Lincoln's interpretation troubled southerners who argued for states' rights. Although Davis strove to preserve the Union in his time as a U.S. senator, his fundamental belief in state sovereignty shaped his political decisions, and he refused to admit the South had been wrong to secede. When faced with trying Davis for treason, the federal government hesitated to place the question of state sovereignty on trial in a situation in which victory was uncertain.

By the time Davis's case came to court in Richmond, Virginia, on November 30, 1868, President Johnson had issued another amnesty proclamation. On July 4, 1868,

---

6 Cooper Jr., *Jefferson Davis, American*, 619.
Johnson granted amnesty to all former Confederates, excluding those under indictment for treason. Johnson’s proclamation deliberately omitted Jefferson Davis, as he feared that pardoning Davis would give Radical Republicans an additional reason to condemn him.

In order for Davis’s trial to proceed, Supreme Court Chief Justice Salmon Chase joined Judge John Underwood, United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, in presiding over the trial. As Underwood did not have extensive judiciary experience, the inclusion of Chase as a judge would lend credibility to the proceedings. Chase stressed that the newly implemented Fourteenth Amendment provided a way to avoid a trial. Davis’s defense seized upon this suggestion, arguing that the Fourteenth Amendment, which had gone into effect on July 28, 1868, protected Davis from double jeopardy. The third section of the Fourteenth Amendment stated that no person who had sworn an oath to defend the Constitution and subsequently participated in the rebellion could hold political office. Davis’s lawyers argued that the Fourteenth Amendment had already inflicted punishment on their client by not allowing him to hold office, but the government countered that the Constitution was not criminal law; it stated qualifications, but did not inflict any penalty. The judges could not agree on a decision, and counsel for Davis asked that the statement of disagreement be sent to the United States Supreme Court as follows:

It appeared that the said Jefferson Davis, having previously to the offenses charged in the said indictment taken an oath as a member of congress to support the constitution of the United States, the question arose whether, by the operation and effect of the third clause of the fourteenth amendment to the constitution of the United States, the defendant is exempted from indictment or prosecution for treason in levying war and participating or engaging in the late rebellion. And upon that question the opinions of the

---

8 Cooper Jr., Jefferson Davis, American, 625.
judges were opposed. And thereupon the said point is upon the request of
the said point, stated under the direction of the said judges, and certified
under the seal of the said Circuit Court to the Supreme Court of the United
States at its next session.9

The Supreme Court never decided the issue. William Evarts, the new United States
attorney general, and chief counsel for President Johnson during his impeachment trial,
decided against proceeding further, fearing that Chief Justice Chase’s argument might
convince the Supreme Court to agree with him, handing Davis a victory and the
government a setback. Evarts decided instead to enter a nolle prosequi if the defense
would agree to end the matter. On Christmas Day, 1868, President Johnson issued a
proclamation granting nearly total amnesty to all who had participated in the rebellion,
including Jefferson Davis.10 The former Confederates were returned to full citizenship
with the exception that they were unable to hold political office.11

In the end, the federal government did not try Davis for numerous reasons. A key
problem was location: the government would be forced to try Davis where his alleged
treasonous activities took place, namely, Virginia. As Davis was unlikely to be convicted
in Virginia, the government was forced to accept the outcome. In addition, had Davis
come to trial, it is likely he would have turned his charge for treason into an argument for
the legality of secession, and this was an argument the government could not risk
losing.12 Allowing Davis to go free as a political “non-person” would have to be
punishment enough, though many northerners agreed with the Radical Republicans that it
was not sufficient punishment for Davis.

9 David K. Watson, “The Trial of Jefferson Davis: An Interesting Constitutional Question,” The
Yale Law Journal 24, 8 (June, 1915), 676.
10 Cooper Jr., Jefferson Davis, American, 626.
(Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2001), 8.
12 Allen Tate, Jefferson Davis: His Rise and Fall, a Biographical Narrative. (New York: Minton,
Blach & Company, 1929), 300.
Davis’s imprisonment gave him a new sense of country and purpose. Southerners came to identify Davis as suffering for them; if Davis had committed a crime by leading the Confederacy, they too were guilty for following him. The majority of white southerners did not believe that they had done anything illegal by seceding. At the end of the war, many prominent southerners sought a pardon in order to prosper in the re-United States. Davis’s lack of repentance and his treatment by federal authorities for many came to symbolize the South’s postwar suffering. By the end of his imprisonment, Davis identified himself as a martyr for the vanquished South. In letters to his wife, Varina, Davis asserted he would be able to bear whatever trials the United States government gave him. He claimed that he would rather sacrifice himself for his country than make the trial personal, as it was “man’s dignity to bear up against trials, under which the lower animals would sink.” Reinforcing his embrace of his newfound role as martyr, Davis wrote that he hoped the federal thirst for vengeance would be “satiated by my sacrifice so that my family and countrymen would then be left in peace.”¹³

Davis’s two years in prison accentuated the differences that remained between northerners and southerners. As ex-Confederates claimed Davis as their martyr, a title Davis was more than willing to accept, northerners became infuriated that Davis was unrepentant and relatively unpunished for his actions. Davis’s inability to hold political office was not enough to appease northerners’ resentment. They continued to blame Davis for the Civil War, for the anger of many post-war white southerners, and for embodying Lost Cause ideals.

After Davis’s acquittal, many southerners hoped he would apply for a pardon, which would make him eligible to run for political office. Davis, though, largely stayed

---

¹³ Cooper Jr., Jefferson Davis. American, 591.
silent on political issues and disputes. Although he realized that he would likely be
elected to either house of Congress, he continued to insist that his goal was to serve
Mississippi. The Mississippi legislature honored Davis on March 10, 1884, and in a
speech before a joint meeting of both houses, Davis reaffirmed his love for his home
state, claiming that his primary loyalty lay with his state, not his country. He stressed
that the South now must promote the general welfare of the Union while not forgetting its
past:

The people of the Confederate States did more in proportion to their
numbers and means than was ever achieved by any in the world’s history. Fate decreed that they should be unsuccessful in the effort to maintain
their claim to resume the grants made to the Federal Government. Our
people have accepted the decree; it therefore behooves them, as they may,
to promote the general welfare of the Union, to show to the world that
hereafter, as heretofore, the patriotism of our people is not measured by
lines of latitude and longitude, but is as broad as the obligations they have
assumed and embraces the whole of our oceanbound domain.

Davis also emphasized that southerners must take care to “never question or teach your
children to desecrate the memory of the dead by admitting that their brothers were wrong
in the effort to maintain the sovereignty, freedom and independence which was their
inalienable birthright.” Reaffirming his belief in the constitutionality of secession, and
solidifying his place as a traitor and rebellious inciter in the minds of northerners, Davis
maintained,

’Tis been said that I should apply to the United States for a pardon, but
repentance must precede the right of pardon, and I have not repented.
Remembering as I must all which has been suffered, all which has been
lost, disappointed hopes and crushed aspirations, yet I deliberately say, if
it were to do over again, I would again do just as I did in 1861.
Davis further indicated that sectional hatred had deprived him of the political privileges that were given to all others “without distinction of race, color or previous condition.”

Davis had been excluded from the general amnesty, and refused to apply for a presidential pardon that would restore his political rights. Pride, a belief in the correctness of his cause, and an understanding that he represented the Confederate South kept him from admitting any fault.

Davis’s friends in Mississippi suggested they might elect him senator despite his disfranchisement. Davis, however, refused to be considered, stating that “insult and violence, producing alienation between the sections, would be the only result.” When he died in 1889, Davis did not have the full rights of citizenship. Although Presidents Johnson and Grant issued numerous pardons for Confederates, Davis and a few other leading former Confederates had been excluded. Davis was not pardoned until President Jimmy Carter granted him one through a Joint Resolution of Congress (Public Law 95-466), which was approved on October 17, 1978. This reconciliation, following Robert E. Lee’s citizenship restoration earlier in the decade, completed the Confederate amnesty.

Although Davis continued to support secession, during his later years he increasingly spoke of reunion. In addition to giving his blessing to his daughter Winnie’s engagement to a Yankee, Davis began to tell southern audiences that they should acknowledge their place in the United States. He repeatedly reaffirmed his loyalty to

17 Winnie, considered the “Daughter of the Confederacy” because she was born in the Confederate White House, ended up not marrying the Yankee, through no suggestion by Davis. For a
Mississippi, but acknowledged its place in the larger sphere of the United States, and sought to better its standing, economically, socially, and educationally within the country.  

Davis gave his final public address in Mississippi in 1888 in which he encouraged national unification. He spoke to a group of young men, telling them their youth was the reason he agreed to the speaking engagement. Although youth and women would be portrayed as Davis’s primary mourners when he died the following year, Davis only agreed to give the speech after learning that his audience would be young men. In his prior public speeches, Davis had argued that southerners must ensure that their version of history was handed down to the next generation, and in this speech to young men, Davis offered down a defense of the Confederacy and himself. He mentioned that he was unable to call those present his fellow citizens, but was grateful to call them his friends as he considered himself “a man without a country.” In his strongest statement promoting peace and reunion, Davis said, “the past is dead; let it bury its dead, its hopes and aspirations.” He invited those present to “lay aside all rancor, all bitter sectional feeling, and to make your places in the ranks of those who will bring about a consummation devoutly to be wished- a reunited country.”

Davis argued that the Confederate past should be remembered but not dwelled upon, and that peaceful and harmonious coexistence should be their main goal. Explaining that fighting could not continue because the South was overwhelmed by the larger Union force, Davis insisted he was content to plead for unification and peace without admitting guilt or encouraging

newspaper article relating the broken engagement, see The New York Times (New York, New York), October 14, 1890.

18 Cooper Jr., Jefferson Davis, American, 699-700.
19 Cooper Jr., Jefferson Davis, American, 700.
20 Cooper, Jr., ed., Jefferson Davis: The Essential Writings, 437.
southerners to forget their past and culture.

During Davis's final illness in November 1889, a discussion erupted both in Washington, D.C., and among the general public as to the expected official United States reaction to his death. Representative Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts pointed out the political savvy of pardoning Davis, claiming "I can conceive of nothing that would be more beneficial to the Republican party at this time than to revise the record of Jeff Davis. It would bring back to the Republican ranks thousands of men who have since the war drifted into the Democratic party." Lodge's remarks were published in the *Boston Daily Journal* along with his assertion that the Southern people were too wise to make Davis an issue and that it was unlikely Davis would ask to be pardoned.\(^{21}\)

The Washington, D.C., *Capitol* suggested Congress remove the political disability from Davis as an act of kindness, a purely symbolic gesture of generosity. Restoring Davis's rights would ensure that the United States flag over the War Department would be lowered upon his death, as was customary in honoring former department heads. The *Philadelphia Inquirer*, though, pointed out that the flag lowering was all a pardon would accomplish. It is also debatable whether or not Davis would have accepted a pardon. His status as a celebrity and symbol in the South was linked to his being unrepentant and unpardoned. Had Davis been pardoned, the pardon itself would have been controversial and his death would have been less significant. He would have received full honors from the United States government, but his death would not have provided the occasion for white southern unity. The editor at the *Philadelphia Inquirer* concluded that as the ineligibility was of no great concern to Davis while he was in good health, it must be of

---

no importance to him near death: “the suggestion partakes of sentimentality, and whatever Jefferson Davis has been he has not been sentimental.”

Another Philadelphia paper The North American, concurred and commented, “the friends of Jefferson Davis should feel thankful that he was not hung twenty-five years ago.”

Davis died on December 6, 1889 without having had his full rights of citizenship restored.

On the morning Davis died, James A. Shakespeare, mayor of New Orleans, sent United States Secretary of War Redfield Proctor a telegram informing him of Davis’s death and reminding him that Davis had once been the Secretary of War. As Americans waited to see if the United States government would lower its flag to honor Davis as a former Secretary of War, Secretary Proctor responded with a widely reprinted telegram:

WAR DEPARTMENT WASHINGTON-  
Hon. James A. Shakespeare, Mayor, New Orleans: Your telegram informing me of the death of Mr. Davis is received. In refraining from any official action thereon, I would not and hope I do not add to the great sorrow of his family and many friends. It seems to me the right course and the best one for all. You will, I am sure, understand that its adoption is prompted also by the sincere wish and purpose to act in a spirit of peace and good will which should fill the hearts of all our people.

REDFIELD PROCTOR,  
‘Secretary of War.’

Few seemed surprised. Shakespeare’s reply to Proctor was not widely published and it is arguable whether or not Shakespeare’s sentiments existed:

“Hon. Redfield Proctor, Secretary of War:  
Sir- I have the honor to acknowledge receipt of your telegram replying to mine announcing the death of the Hon. Jefferson Davis, formerly Secretary of War of the United States. Permit me to say that the kindly expressions therein do honor to the man, and will go far toward removing the sting inflicted in our people’s hearts by the fact that the secretary

---


24 Rocky Mountain News (Denver, Colorado), December 9, 1889.
cannot display from the War Office the customary official signal of respect to a dead predecessor.
Respectfully your obedient servant,
Joseph A. Shakespeare, Mayor.\textsuperscript{25}

The official decision to ignore the death of Davis was made on the grounds that he had never been granted full rights of citizenship. To appease their constituents, southern senators and politicians, who had prospered in the re-United States and had no reason to glorify Davis, issued public statements to the press praising Davis’s actions as United States Secretary of War. The flag at the U.S. War Department remained at full mast, and Davis’s official portrait in the War Department was not draped with crepe, as was customary.\textsuperscript{26} In a statement to the press, Proctor explained, “I see no occasion for any action whatever. It would subserve no good purpose that I can see. It is better to let the matter rest in oblivion’s sleep if it will and to relegate it to the past than to do anything that would revive memories best forgotten.”\textsuperscript{27} City officials in New Orleans, where more than 100,000 viewed Davis’s body, told reporters that under the “peculiar circumstances,” Secretary Proctor’s response to Mayor Shakespeare’s telegram was graceful and conciliatory.\textsuperscript{28} This reaction was not widely published and did not influence other reactions to Proctor’s statement.

Public opinion remained divided. Many northerners despised Davis, and those who did not ignored him, hoping that, with his death, the painful memories of the Civil War would die as well. In comparison, white southerners’ praise for Davis grew alongside the rise of Lost Cause ideals. Proctor’s decision created an outcry among ex-

\textsuperscript{25} J. William Jones, \textit{The Davis Memorial Volume} (Richmond, Va: B.F. Johnson & Co., 1890), 510.
\textsuperscript{26} Donald E. Collins, \textit{The Death and Resurrection of Jefferson Davis} (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 58.
\textsuperscript{27} “Jefferson Davis,” \textit{The Knoxville Journal} (Knoxville, Tennessee), December 7, 1889.
\textsuperscript{28} “Mr. Davis,” \textit{Boston Daily Journal} (Boston, Massachusetts), December 10, 1889.
Confederates who saw the lack of official recognition of Davis as a snub to the South. Sectional views of Davis solidified his place in the white southern memory and his death exemplified the differences between North and South.

The northern press overwhelmingly commended Proctor’s decision to keep the flag at full mast. Without referring to sectional hatred, the editorials mostly commented that because Davis was not pardoned, and had not asked to be, he was not a citizen at the time of this death and therefore should not be honored. Some northerners, though, chose to honor Davis anyway.

Editorials in Boston, always unsympathetic towards Davis, lauded Proctor. They argued that Davis had forfeited his citizenship in 1861 when he left his seat in the United States Senate to lead the Confederacy. The *Boston Daily Journal* explained that friends of the Union would agree with Proctor when he stated that “‘We know no such man. It is better to forget such things. It is better to let them pass from our minds.’”29 The Home Market Club in Boston made the news in other states by applauding Proctor’s decision. The group was ostensibly non-partisan, leaving some newspaper editors to comment that dislike for the Confederate “insurgents” must be common to all political creeds.30

A journalist from *The New York Herald* claimed that the thousands of employees at the War Department were aggrieved at Proctor’s decision, not because they resented the snub of Davis but because they were not given the day of Davis’s funeral off, as was customary. *The New York Herald*, like many Democratic newspapers, published interviews of congressmen who had known Davis during his time as a United States senator. The journalists interviewed Congressman Spinola of New York, who worked

---

29 “South in Mourning,” *Boston Daily Journal* (Boston, Massachusetts), December 7, 1889.
30 *The Daily Inter Ocean* (Chicago, Illinois), June 2, 1890.
with Davis in the Pierce administration and in the Senate, and Mr. E.V. Murphy, a Senate stenographer. Both men praised Davis’s behavior and kindness during those days, but agreed he took the wrong path when he joined the Confederacy. Such statements reveal that for some Democrats in the North the condemnation of Davis’s wartime actions did not erase his earlier wisdom and kindness.31

In Pennsylvania, The North American published an editorial on the question of Davis’s citizenship. Prefacing the remarks by claiming that “we can contemplate the departure of Mr. Davis without any lurking bitterness springing up from the past,” the editor underscored Davis’s role as a cultural symbol, noting “socially and in his domestic life he was all that was and is desirable.” The editor concluded that when Davis chose to follow Mississippi and secede from the Union, he was cast out of the hearts of the American people, and in political terms, “Davis and his colleagues ceased to live, because they ceased to be American citizens.”32 As such, Davis’s physical death did not warrant official honors.

Newspapers in Pennsylvania also suggest that Secretary’s Proctor’s polite telegram to Mayor Shakespeare was not always supported in the North. A reprint from The New York World claimed that Proctor was “abused like a pickpocket.” Proctor’s wording “was couched in genteel language. It is characterized as a namby-pamby letter.” Acknowledging Proctor’s awkward position, the article stated, “Mr. Proctor may now learn how utterly impossible it will be for him to please the fools and fanatics of his own party.”33

33 “Secretary Proctor’s Assailants,” The Macon Telegraph (Macon, Georgia), December 13, 1889.
Not all northern papers exhibited hostility towards Davis or approval of Proctor’s decision. Despite the veiled hostility towards the South displayed in the majority of its articles, Ohio’s *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* published a relatively evenhanded account of the flag lowering at Davis’s funeral, commenting that, “I for one can not see wherein our Southern people have made any mistake to-day. They have buried their hero and buried their cause…” The journalist expressed his opinion that with Davis’s death, ex-Confederates would bury their allegiance to the Lost Cause as well. Although conceding that the death caused an emotional outpouring, he believed that white southerners should take this as an opportunity to move past their sectional differences. The journalist also commented that it was odd to see the United States flag flying at half mast in New Orleans in honor of someone who was not a United States citizen and who fought to destroy the government. Along with the national flag being lowered in New Orleans, all foreign ships in port had their flags at half-mast, and British Captains and officers took part in the procession. Asserting that the Civil War finally ended with the death of Jefferson Davis, the journalist revealed confusion and annoyance at honors being paid to Davis’s memory.

Western newspapers generally had a positive reaction to Proctor’s decision, viewing Davis as an unreformed traitor and reprinting articles from New England newspapers. Editors in Colorado questioned why, after Davis tried to destroy the United States, the flag should be lowered in his honor. San Francisco’s *The Daily Evening Bulletin* reprinted material from Albany, New York, stating that the flag should not be

---

34 “Amid Cannon’s Roar,” *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* (Cincinnati, Ohio), December 12, 1889.

35 *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado), December 6, 1889.
lowered, pointing out that Republicans had complained bitterly when the flag had been lowered for former-Confederate “Jake” Thompson, a former Secretary of the Interior.36

*The Los Angeles Times* was critical of the honor southerners accorded Davis. The editor claimed that southerners who did so promoted sectionalism and deserved censure, because no section of the country should be allowed to foment strife or ill-feeling. Southerners should realize, the editor argued, that Davis was the recipient of remarkable clemency from the United States government, and his friends and supporters should remain silent at his death to “let bygones be bygones.” The editor defended Proctor’s decision and concluded “it is time that this ill-considered gush should cease.”37

Portland’s *Morning Oregonian* pointed out that Davis’s flag was not the stars and stripes, and therefore the flag should not be lowered. However, the issue was given only a brief mention, as it was clearly assumed that it did not warrant debate or discussion.38 The western states were not as involved in the Civil War as the eastern states, and editorials were generally not as damning of Davis as their northern peers.

At the conclusion of the Civil War, southerners attempted to preserve their honor while accepting defeat. Jefferson Davis was central to those beliefs, and white southerners were emotionally attached to him, even more so than they had been during the war. Southern editorial reactions to Proctor’s decision, however, did not exhibit hatred towards Proctor or the United States government. Instead of airing their grievances with the federal government or the policies of Reconstruction, the southern press, for the most part, sought to portray Davis as an honored son of the South. They

---

37 *The Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, California), December 11, 1889.
38 *Morning Oregonian* (Portland, Oregon), December 7, 1889.
were able to accept the flag at full mast at the United States War Department because of the extensive flag lowering throughout the South to mourn the former Confederate president. The South claimed Davis as its own and honored him through its regional actions.

There were prominent citizens and journalists in the South who understood that Proctor’s decision was not intended to alienate the South. The New Orleans Picayune, commented, “We are strongly led to the conclusion that the secretary of war, so far from intending wrong, has adopted what he believed, and what we believe, was a wise and conservative course in the premises.” Had Proctor ordered the flag be lowered for Davis, the Picayune suggested, it is likely it would have infuriated northerners. Proctor’s decision did not come as a surprise to many and official responses were more tolerant than public reactions from white southerners. This article did not, however, hinder the grand plans that the city of New Orleans for Davis’s funeral. Conciliatory statements to the press demonstrated that a level of unity and tolerance existed between North and South. However, the actions and beliefs of ex-Confederates show that Davis was a respected and honored son of the South.

Conversely, many southerners understood Proctor’s decision as a statement that the South was still not a full and equal part of the Union, which strengthened their opinion that the South should be left alone to mourn. Newspaper articles combined the seemingly contradictory ideas of outrage at the perceived official rejection of Davis with statements declining northern condolences. White southern pride demanded the South mourn Davis, but also led the ex-Confederates to refuse to ask for sympathy. In

---

39 As quoted in “Was Jefferson Davis a Citizen,” The Knoxville Journal (Knoxville, Tennessee), December 10, 1889.
particular, Davis’s home state of Mississippi strongly objected to the perceived lack of respect. *The Biloxi Herald* insisted that the refusal to lower the flag “cast a stigma” upon Davis and southern leaders and insisted that the South wished to be left alone in its sorrow. Lowering the flag would have demonstrated the reunification of the United States because Davis had been an exemplary Secretary of War, *The Biloxi Herald* argued, and “there is nothing of petty malice and sectional hate that can tarnish the fame of Jefferson Davis. That will be bright and luminous long after the action of Secretary Proctor has passed from the memory of men.”

Davis’s death and the reactions of some Mississippians highlighted the ongoing conflict between region and nation. The anger that white southerners felt towards northerners, stemming from their loss in the Civil War and policies of Reconstruction, showed through their reaction to Proctor’s statement. Davis’s death provided these ex-Confederates with an outlet to vent their frustration.

A group in Aberdeen, Mississippi, protested Proctor’s decision by hanging him in effigy on a federal building in the city, and whipping an Indiana man who attempted to take the effigy down, prompting a North Carolina newspaper to ask, “if it gave any pleasure to the gentlemen at Aberdeen to hang Secretary Proctor in effigy, why should Secretary Proctor or anybody else object?”

In January 1890, the U.S. Senate investigated the Aberdeen incidents. Mississippi Senator James George condemned the hanging, but pointed out that President Benjamin Harrison had been hung in effigy in Indiana and President Grover Cleveland had been hung in effigy in Kansas. In neither case was federal action taken. Senator George interpreted the Senate hearing and

---

40 "The Warrior at Rest," *The Biloxi Herald* (Biloxi, Mississippi), December 14, 1889.
41 *The News and Observer* (Raleigh, North Carolina), January 23, 1890.
proposed legislation to require Mississippi to pay reparations to the Indiana man as a “crusade against the white people of Mississippi.” Senator George also questioned the constitutionality of the federal government interfering in internal state affairs. Northern senators responded that although the North had no animosity towards the South, the Aberdeen affair demonstrated the South’s ongoing lawlessness and lack of decency, “of which the country had for many years occasion to complain.” Northern senators suggested that if there were no laws already in place to “punish, in any state, any infraction of the rights guaranteed by the constitution, it was high time that such laws were passed.”

But not all white southerners were as angry as those in Aberdeen. One journalist in Tennessee argued that Davis “would be shocked in his grave at the want of dignity of this imbecile friend who so belittles the secretary of war.” Far from being unkind to Davis’s memory, the journalist insisted that the outpouring of emotion from the press, northern and southern, was overwhelmingly kind and charitable. Davis was remembered in the South for his courteous actions and refinement, not for his political beliefs. The next day, the same Tennessee newspaper defended Proctor’s decision. Had Proctor ordered the flag be lowered, the article stated, “he would have shown unfitness for his office—that he is wanting in a proper sense of respect for the government he represents, and for the star spangled banner itself” because it was by his own choice that Davis was not a citizen.

---

42 Aurora Daily Express (Aurora, Illinois), January 29, 1890.
43 “Jeff Davis Eulogized,” The New Haven Evening Register (New Haven, Connecticut), January 29, 1890.
44 “Jefferson Davis,” The Knoxville Journal (Knoxville, Tennessee), December 18, 1889.
45 “Hon. Proctor and Mr. Jefferson Davis,” The Knoxville Journal (Knoxville, Tennessee), December 19, 1889.
At the state level, the governors of the southern states eulogized Davis, and their comments were published both in the press and in books. Claiming Davis as one of their own, but also realizing the need to unite the country, Georgia Governor and former Civil War General John B. Gordon wrote, "Mr. Davis is dead. The grief is ours, full and sacred. His fame belongs not only to the South, but to his country and to Christendom. Ours it is to cherish. Ours the still higher privilege of taking care of that memory by taking care of those who were impoverished in our cause." At a reunion of Confederate veterans in New Orleans, Governor Gordon spoke again of southern bravery and national unity. Although agreeing that the legacy of Davis belonged to the entire country, not only the South, Gordon argued that "Southern manhood" demanded tribute to Davis. Governor Daniel Fowle of North Carolina followed Gordon's speech by stating that Secretary of War Proctor had insulted the South. Governor Fowle described Davis's heroic efforts in the war with Mexico, culminating with a description of a widely circulated image of Davis holding the American flag on the battlefield. No doubt speaking with wounded pride, Fowle called upon southerners to agree that when a monument to Lincoln is raised, the nation should raise an equally high monument to Davis. On a more conciliatory note, Governor Fitzhugh Lee of Virginia wrote that, "We are again citizens of the United States. Once more Virginia is equally interested with the other States in promoting the glory of a common country; but such citizenship does not require us to treat as unknown the records of the past." Proctor's decision not to lower the United States flag offended these southern politicians and strengthened their resolve to honor Davis in their states.

46 Life and Reminiscences of Jefferson Davis, By Distinguished Men of His Time, 271-2.
47 "Jefferson Davis," The Clarion-Ledger (Jackson, Mississippi), December 19, 1889.
48 Jones, The Davis Memorial Volume, 586.
In the United States Supreme Court, Associate Justice Lucius Q. C. Lamar remembered Davis with controversial words. Born in Mississippi, Justice Lamar had served as a diplomat in the Confederacy. To the disgust of many northerners and westerners, Justice Lamar claimed “Jefferson Davis constituted an exemplar for our youth who aspire to high and heroic things” and “the historian of after years, looking down the perspective of the past, will see Jefferson Davis the colossal figure of his time.” Lamar stated that Mississippians believed Davis suffered for their sake, and viewed Davis as a “man of intellect, honor, and statesmanship. He was the friend and sympathizer of young men, whom he was always ready to aid.”

These positive sentiments were not well received by those who believed Davis to be a traitor, and some editorials argued that anyone who expressed such beliefs should not be a Supreme Court justice. It comes as no surprise then, that few southern politicians with national ambitions spoke positively of Davis in public, and certainly not to any degree that would inspire the wrath of half of the country.

Southern government officials issued proclamations to the press declaring that businesses would be closed and flags would be flown at half mast the day of Davis’s funeral. Governor Gordon of Georgia sent telegrams to the governors of the southern states suggesting they proclaim the day of Davis’s funeral a day of public mourning. Atlanta officials, upon hearing the news of Davis’s death, sent a sculptor to New Orleans to make a death mask of Davis to serve as a basis for a statue of Davis. South Carolina,

---

49 Morning Oregonian (Portland, Oregon), December 8, 1889.
50 The Daily Inter Ocean (Chicago, Illinois), December 7, 1889.
51 As observed in The Galveston Daily News (Houston, Texas), January 10, 1890.
the first state to secede, issued a resolution claiming that the South had lost “its most distinguished citizen,” and lowered state flags to half mast, tolled bells, and draped the state house in mourning. The resolution also stated that Davis should be “held in honorable and loving remembrance by the people of the whole country, but especially by those of the South” as an honorable and able statesman. This statement demonstrates the strong emotions that Davis’s death elicited from white southerners; ex-Confederates honored Davis as a distinguished southerner. Along with proclamations of the greatness of Davis’s career and his place in the hearts of southerners and the history of the South, southern officials also requested that Davis be buried in their state. Such a reaction is a marked contrast to the federal response. The support that the southern politicians showed Davis reveals their loyalty to and pride in both Davis and the cause he represented.

Many southern United States politicians issued condolences to Davis’s widow that reveal vast differences between the reactions of politicians at the state and national levels. Governor Fitzhugh Lee of Virginia, a relative of Confederate General Robert E. Lee, wrote of Davis, “The Southern people loved him because he suffered for them. They are prepared to protect and guard his memory from the fierce winds of prejudice, in saying to all those who hated him and whose hearts are consumed at this hour by sectional animosity: ‘If this be treason make the most of it.’” In contrast, politicians at the national level, who were politically connected to northerners as well as southerners, were more apt to be conciliatory in their remembrances of Davis. They highlighted Davis’s service in the United States military and government rather than his actions in the

---

54 Bancroft, The Life and Death of Jefferson Davis, Ex-President of the Southern Confederacy, 99-100.
55 “Jefferson Davis,” Boston Daily Journal (Boston, Massachusetts), December 7, 1889.
56 Bancroft, The Life and Death of Jefferson Davis, Ex-President of the Southern Confederacy, 106.
Confederacy or after the Civil War. Prominent Mississippians in Washington, D.C., headed by Supreme Court Justice Lamar, sent a telegram to Davis's widow assuring her that Davis held a place in the minds and hearts of southerners. Although the letter reveals their pride in the former Confederate president, it exhibits no animosity towards the North. The letter listed Davis's accomplishments as a United States soldier, a statesman in the War Department, leader of his party in Congress, guiding spirit of the South, and "vicarious sufferer for us and his people in defeat." Similarly, E.C. Whitehall, a former Confederate general and United States Senator from Mississippi after the war, wrote from Washington, D.C., urging Mrs. Davis to realize that her "husband's hold upon the affections of the people in his last days was even stronger than in the time of his great power." In their telegrams and statements to the press, politicians paid their respects to Davis as a southern leader and a as rallying figure for the white South, and praised his contributions to the United States. However supportive these statements were of Davis and the South, many politicians now had a vested interest in the United States and were in no position to further sectional conflict.

Some Americans insisted "so far as national honors are concerned none will be paid to his memory," but numerous white southerners wished to pay him homage and lowered the national and state flags. Governor Gordon of Georgia issued a proclamation promoting southern unity by organizing solemn memorial services for Davis across the South at the time of his funeral. To these Americans, Davis was a son of the South and would be honored despite the snub from Proctor and the United States.

---

57 Hudson Strode, Jefferson Davis: Tragic Hero, the Last Twenty-five Years 1864-1889 (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1964), 515.
58 Life and Reminiscences of Jefferson Davis, By Distinguished Men of His Time, 473.
59 Rocky Mountain News (Denver, Colorado), December 6, 1889, emphasis added.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

If there had been any doubt of the warm place held by Mr. Jefferson Davis in the hearts of the southern people it must have been dispelled by the spontaneous expressions of sympathy and regard in every part of the southland drawn forth by his not unexpected demise. It is not adulation nor hero worship, but simply genuine esteem and affectionate regard.1

Southern eulogies of Jefferson Davis generally did not include discussions of his political beliefs or actions but remembered the former Confederate president as a cultural symbol of the South. In The Dallas Morning News, ex-Confederates insisted their remembrances of Davis were not “hero worship.” Ironically, had Davis died immediately following the Civil War, it is likely that he would not have risen to such prominence, for his presidency was widely criticized. Davis was instrumental in the creation of the Lost Cause ideology in the postwar era because of his unyielding support for the Confederate cause. Newspaper articles that detailed Davis’s death and funeral reveal what his contemporaries, both northern and southern, believed would be his legacy and place in American history.

The emotional outpouring from white southerners after Davis’s death expressed admiration for the former Confederate president. Although a considerable number of southerners disliked Davis at the end of the Civil War, decades of Reconstruction policies and the feeling that the South remained a less respected part of the union prompted a significant shift in their views. As Radical Republicans grew in power in Congress, and as military districts were established in the South, thousands of ex-Confederate officials lost their ability to vote or hold office, Davis included.

1 “Jefferson Davis,” The Dallas Morning News (Dallas, Texas), December 10, 1889.
By perceiving that the United States government continued to impose radical reforms on their region, many white southerners turned to Lost Cause ideals. The Lost Cause permitted them to continue to fight a “war of ideas,” so that despite the material losses of the Civil War, ex-Confederates retained their belief that the South remained the superior society. Lost Cause ideology accepted southern military defeat at the hands of the North’s larger population, and enshrined the white South’s memories, heroes, tears, and dead.\(^2\) Jefferson Davis, who had not emerged from the war as a hero, nonetheless became a rallying point for Lost Cause supporters. Davis’s postwar imprisonment and embrace of the southern martyr label ensured the enduring high regard of many white southerners. His uncompromising personality and continual defiance, so unappreciated during the war, were redefined as a positive attributes in the defeated South.

Although other southern war figures came to be seen as heroes in the North as well as the South, Davis’s appeal was purely southern. In rallying to Davis’s memory and eulogizing him as a cultural icon, ex-Confederates were able to celebrate themselves and their past. Analysis of the memorials reveal the extent of the enthusiasm that Davis’s memory invoked depended on the degree to which a region or an individual had been reintegrated into the United States. White southerners who believed that their way of life had been destroyed were much more likely to celebrate the memory of Davis and the Old South in their longing for what they perceived to have been as better days. Those who had become economically or politically connected to the North were less interested in reviving sectional differences or in drawing upon Davis’s memory.

Southern politicians who were once again representing their states in the United States Congress memorialized Davis upon his death, albeit to a less passionate degree

than many ex-Confederates. Their letters to Davis’s widow, Varina, demonstrate that although they sympathized with the sorrow of white southerners, they were interested in promoting national unity. Having benefitted from the reunification of the United States, these southern politicians saw no need to draw upon the memory of Davis to relive a memory of the past. Editorials in southern newspapers reveal that, in general, white southerners were united in their positive view of Jefferson Davis.

Northern opinion of Davis remained divided. The animosity towards Davis at the end of the Civil War, and the cries for his punishment, had been replaced by bitterness and resentment at his many years of freedom and by his continued prominence in the reconstructed South. These sentiments were manifested in the numerous hostile editorials that greeted the announcement of Davis’s death and the outpouring of southern emotion. However, not all northerners agreed, and many northerners were willing to concede respect for Davis’s career as a United States military colonel, former Secretary of War, and U.S. senator. Northern editorials did, however, routinely wonder at the South’s grandiose tributes to Davis, arguing that these did little to promote national unity and suggesting that white southerners honored Davis at the expense of cordial relations with the North.

Other northerners ignored Davis, for although they blamed him for the war, his status as a Lost Cause symbol was not central to their view of the reunited country or the war itself. But Northerners were often annoyed that southerners seemed unwilling to put the past behind them. Northern editorials therefore demonstrate the confusion and disdain many northerners felt for the ongoing reverence shown to Davis in the South.
Secretary of War Proctor's decision to keep the flag at full mast upon Davis's death was not widely criticized. Northerners concurred that, as Davis was not a full United States citizen, he should not receive honors befitting a former secretary of war. The northern editorials discussing Proctor's decision were often brief, as northerners did not believe that the matter deserved great discussion. Davis was unpardoned and unrepentant at his death and therefore it was only fitting that the flag remained at full mast. Effusive praise for Davis from southern politicians, however, occasionally drew the ire of the North. These reactions also confirm that Jefferson Davis remained a positive symbol only among southerners.

In spite of Proctor's decision, white southerners arranged memorials for Davis and lowered flags. Through their flag lowering, bells tolling, and public demonstrations of sorrow, ex-Confederates banded together to celebrate Davis and the Old South. The general acceptance of Proctor's decision in the South demonstrated that southerners were content to mourn Davis as one of their own, in part because, unlike other former Confederates, he did not attain national recognition or approval following the war. White southerners did not ask for sympathy from northerners, but instead celebrated the fact that their praise of Davis distinguished them from their countrymen.

Analysis of newspaper editorials and the evidence of attitudes toward Davis upon his death in 1889 reveal that Jefferson Davis continued to divide the nation. Davis never sought positive recognition or approval from the North, nor was he granted such. However, in the tumultuous years of Reconstruction and beyond, white southerners who saw their way of life changing uncontrollably felt the need to cling to symbols of their past that represented what was in their view a better time. To those who did not feel
accepted, Davis provided a rallying point to relive the past and to reassert southern honor and manhood.

Davis's death was a significant moment for how northerners and southerners remembered the Civil War. As the representative of the unreconstructed Confederacy, Davis's passing symbolized the end of the Confederacy. With his death, many northerners hoped that the sectional differences and lack of repentance that he embodied would fade. In fact, his death illuminated the distinct role Davis played in the United States. By honoring Davis, the white South celebrated its separate memories of the Civil War, a pattern that was repeated in subsequent memorials of the wartime dead. Through the erection of monuments and statues to white southern heroes, ex-Confederates renewed the memory of the Old South and honored those who served them without questioning. Davis's death therefore exposed the sectional differences that remained in the United States, and the separate memories and emotions that the Civil War evoked.
References

Primary


Davis, Varina. *Jefferson Davis Ex-President of the Confederate States of America, A Memoir By His Wife.* New York: Belford, 1890.


Periodicals

*Aberdeen Daily News* (Aberdeen, South Dakota), December 6, 1889.

*Aberdeen Daily News* (Aberdeen, South Dakota), December 7, 1889.

“Amid Cannon’s Roar.” *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* (Cincinnati, Ohio), December 12, 1889.


“At the Bier of the Dead Chief of the Confederacy.” *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* (Cincinnati, Ohio), December 11, 1889.

*Aurora Daily Express* (Aurora, Illinois), January 29, 1890.


*Daily Richmond Examiner* (Richmond, Virginia), August 7, 1863.


*Glasgow Herald* (Glasgow, Scotland), December 7, 1889.


“Hon. Proctor and Mr. Jefferson Davis.” *The Knoxville Journal* (Knoxville, Tennessee), December 19, 1889.

“How Davis is Regarded.” *Springfield Republican* (Springfield, Massachusetts), May 1, 1886.

“In Mourning for the Venerable Leader of the Southern People.” *The Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, Louisiana), December 7, 1889.


“Jefferson Davis’ Bier.” *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* (Cincinnati, Ohio), December 8, 1889.

“Jefferson Davis.” *Boston Daily Journal* (Boston, Massachusetts), December 6, 1889.

"Jefferson Davis." *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* (Cincinnati, Ohio), December 7, 1889.


"Jefferson Davis." *Daily Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco, California), December 6, 1889.

"Jefferson Davis Dead." *The New Haven Evening Register* (New Haven, Connecticut), December 6, 1889.

"Jefferson Davis." *The Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson, Mississippi), December 19, 1889.

"Jefferson Davis." *The Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, Louisiana), December 8, 1889.

"Jefferson Davis." *The Dallas Morning News* (Dallas, Texas), December 10, 1889.

"Jefferson Davis." *The Knoxville Journal* (Knoxville, Tennessee), December 7, 1889.

"Jefferson Davis." *The Knoxville Journal* (Knoxville, Tennessee), December 18, 1889.


"Lamented." *The Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, Louisiana), December 8, 1889.

*Morning Oregonian* (Portland, Oregon), December 6, 1889.

*Morning Oregonian* (Portland, Oregon), December 7, 1889.

*Morning Oregonian* (Portland, Oregon), December 8, 1889.

*Morning Oregonian* (Portland, Oregon), December 9, 1889.


"Mr. Davis." *The Boston Daily Journal* (Boston, Massachusetts), December 10, 1889.


*Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, Colorado), December 6, 1889.
Rocky Mountain News (Denver, Colorado), December 9, 1889.

"Sabbath of Sorrow." The Daily Picayune (New Orleans, Louisiana), December 9, 1889.

"Secretary Proctor's Assailants." The Macon Telegraph (Macon, Georgia), December 13, 1889.


The Belfast News-Letter (Belfast, Northern Ireland), December 7, 1889.

The Breckenridge News (Cloverport, Kentucky), December 11, 1889.


The Climax (Richmond, Kentucky), December 11, 1889.

The Daily Inter Ocean (Chicago, Illinois), December 7, 1889.

The Daily Inter Ocean (Chicago, Illinois), June 2, 1890.

The Dallas Morning News (Dallas, Texas), December 7, 1889.

"The Davis Obsequies." The Dallas Morning News (Dallas, Texas), December 12, 1889.

The Galveston Daily News (Houston, Texas), January 10, 1890.

The Hartford Herald (Hartford, Kentucky), December 11, 1889.

The Los Angeles Times (Los Angeles, California), December 7, 1889.

The Los Angeles Times (Los Angeles, California), December 11, 1889.

The Macon Telegraph (Macon, Georgia), December 6, 1889.

The News and Observer (Raleigh, North Carolina), January 23, 1890.

The New York Herald (New York, New York), August 9, 1885.


The New York Times (New York, New York), October 14, 1890.


The Pall Mall Gazette (London, England), December 6, 1889.


“The South Mourns.” The Sun (Baltimore, Maryland), December 7, 1889.

“The South’s Idol.” The Knoxville Journal (Knoxville, Tennessee), December 7, 1889.

“The Warrior at Rest.” The Biloxi Herald (Biloxi, Mississippi), December 14, 1889.

“Was Jefferson Davis a Citizen.” The Knoxville Journal (Knoxville, Tennessee), December 10, 1889.

Worcester Sunday Spy (Worcester, Massachusetts), December 10, 1889.

Worcester Sunday Spy (Worcester, Massachusetts), December 12, 1889.

Internet Sources

Biographical Directory of the United States Congress.

Secondary


_____. Beyond the Battlefield: Race, Memory & the American Civil War. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002.


Union General and twice-elected United States President Ulysses S. Grant died four years before Jefferson Davis, on July 23, 1885. His funeral procession on August 8 included ex-Confederates marching alongside former Union soldiers, and both northern and southern newspapers published glowing accounts of Grant’s life. Grant’s lenient actions at the conclusion of the Civil War and the inclusion of white northerners and southerners in his funeral demonstrate the marked differences in the legacies of Grant and Davis.

While many hoped Davis’s death would bring closure to the Civil War, Grant’s death was seen as closing a painful chapter in U.S. history, permitting another step toward reconciliation. Grant and Davis were both remembered not for their presidencies, but for their sectional and national contributions. Grant’s presidency raised the hopes of many, but his administration and leadership was beset by scandal and widely criticized. Upon Grant’s death, northerners and southerners did not eulogize his actions as president, but remembered him for his compassion as a general, especially upon the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox on April 9, 1865. Grant’s death and memorial offer evidence of the growing connection between white northerners and southerners, as the majority of people from both regions used the occasion to explore common ground. These responses demonstrated that the role of slavery in the Civil War had been deemphasized in order to focus on the similarities between white countrymen. The shared emotion between white northerners and southerners was not possible at the time of President Lincoln’s assassination twenty years earlier.
In a marked contrast from the laudatory eulogies of Davis in the South, and the widespread respect from northerners and southerners for Grant, Lincoln’s funeral was commemorated only in the North. Historian Joan Waugh compared the outpouring of emotions for Lincoln and Grant, as well as what each represented. She argues that Lincoln stood for the principles that the North fought for, the Union: emancipation and reconstruction. The white South did not mourn Lincoln, although most were at least outwardly respectful. In contrast, ex-Confederates joined northerners in mourning Grant. Waugh notes that prominent speakers universally praised Grant for his generalship and presidency. But where northern eulogies of Grant described both Grant and Lincoln as preservers of the Union, southern eulogies did not mention Lincoln.¹

United States Senator and former Confederate Cabinet Member John Reagan also noted the widespread respect for Grant. During the last days of Grant’s illness, Reagan acknowledged that southerners sympathized alongside northerners and claimed that upon Davis’s death, both North and South would share “respect for genius, for greatness and for worth, and the same feeling of Christian charity for the dead, and of sympathy for the bereaved who survive, has shown itself North as well as South for Mr. Davis.”²

Grant’s funeral on August 8, 1885, in New York included a 50,000 person procession. In the spirit of reconciliation, ex-Confederate military units were given places in the funeral procession alongside northern regiments. The funeral inspired newspaper headlines such as “The Reunited Republic Buries General Grant,” “If the War Did Not End in 1865, It Certainly Ended Yesterday,” and “The Nation’s Tears. North,

¹ Joan Waugh, “‘Pageantry of Woe:’ The Funeral of Ulysses S. Grant,” Civil War History 51, 2 (2005), 156-7.
South, East and West Observing the Funeral Day,” which emphasized Grant’s popular leadership in the Civil War rather than his oft-maligned presidency.” In contrast, the majority of those participating in Davis’s funeral processing were white southerners, and although Davis was honored as a former U.S. soldier, the display of Confederate flags and the composition of the crowds demonstrated that Davis’s popularity was confined to the South.

As Grant was dying, the Boston Globe sent its New Orleans correspondent to interview Davis, hoping to publish Davis’s critique of Grant’s generalship. Davis declined. Instead, he sent,

Dear Sir- Your request in behalf of a Boston journalist for me to prepare a criticism of Gen. Grant’s military career cannot be complied with for the following reasons:
1. Gen. Grant is dying.
2. Though he invaded our country, it was with an open hand, and, as far as I know, he abetted neither arson nor pillage, and has since the war, I believe, showed no malignity to Confederates either of the military or civil service.
   Therefore, instead of seeking to disturb the quiet of his closing hours, I would, if it were in my power, contribute to the peace of his mind and the comfort of his body.

Jefferson Davis

Davis’s courteous response to an invitation that would likely serve to further inflame regional animosity demonstrates his respect for Grant as well as the sectional healing that had occurred since the Civil War. It is also a stark contrast to the official treatment that Davis received from some former Union soldiers and from journalists upon his illness and death.

---

4 Life and Reminiscences of Jefferson Davis, 265.
The vast majority of southerners shared Davis’s compassion towards Grant. Although there were some demonstrations in the South against Grant and backlash for politicians’ participation in memorial services, white southerners were on the whole conciliatory and sympathetic, and the outpouring of empathy from ex-Confederates surprised many northerners. Instead of focusing on Grant’s military campaigns against the South or his presidential policies dealing with Reconstruction and the inclusion of African Americans into Congress, white southerners mourned his “Christian compassion” towards former Confederates. In New Orleans, the city where Davis died and was initially buried, newspapers praised his leniency towards former Confederates. The Picayune, widely cited for its tributes to Davis as well as its conciliatory attitude towards Secretary Proctor’s telegram, published, “Brethren of the North and South, let us join mournful hands together around that newly-opened grave.” The Times-Democrat, explored the reasons ex-Confederates respected Grant, writing “Every soldier heart in this wide land will pray God this morning that the generous measures he [Grant] meted to his foe in time of victory may be remembered and meted again to Ulysses S. Grant in this is hour of defeat and judgment.” Ex-Confederates remembered Grant’s lenience with the Confederacy upon General Lee’s surrender at Appomattox and they mourned him when he died.

The compassion that white southerners remembered stemmed from the surrender of Confederate troops under Robert E. Lee on April 9, 1865. Lee disagreed with Davis’s plea to continue fighting, believing it would result in unnecessary bloodshed. Realizing that his army was outnumbered, Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia to

---

5 Waugh, “‘Pageantry of Woe,’” 163.
General Grant. Grant insisted on a formal surrender, and met with Lee to discuss terms, but instead of being jailed or hanged as traitors, the Confederate soldiers were treated generously. The soldiers were allowed to return to their homes after pledging their loyalty to the United States and promising to not take up arms against the country again, and the officers were allowed to keep their side-arms and private horses and baggage.7

Because of Grant's compassion at Appomattox, ex-Confederates had good reason to respect Grant and mourn his passing. In contrast, Jefferson Davis did not have the same national prestige because, despite his time serving the United States government and military, he appeared unrepentant and relentless to northerners, never admitting fault for the Civil War, and constantly defending the South. Davis could not command national respect because northerners had no reason to respect him, and northerners evinced widespread indifference at his death.

7 Charles William Eliot, American Historical Documents 1000-1914, With Introductions, Notes and Illustrations (New York: Collier & Son, 1910), 447.
Kasey Dell received her Bachelor’s Degree from California State University, Sacramento in May 2008 where she majored in History and minored in Religious Studies. While attending, she was inducted into the History honor society Phi Alpha Theta. Following her degree at CSUS, Ms. Dell attended Old Dominion University, working as a Graduate Teaching Assistant while completing coursework for her Master’s Degree in History. Following the completion of her degree, Ms. Dell hopes to pursue a research career.