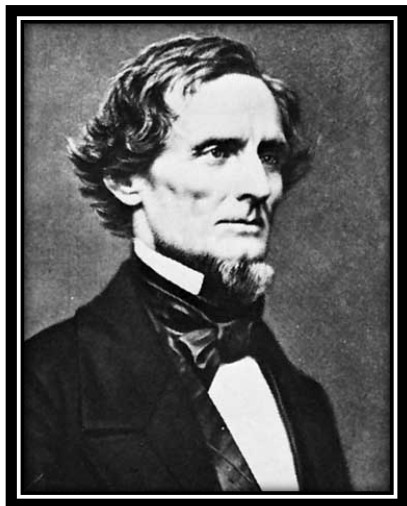


CONFEDERATE MONUMENTS: LESSON 5: BIO**JEFFERSON DAVIS**

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Source: Petersburg National Battlefield, Virginia,
<https://www.nps.gov/pete/learn/historyculture/jefferson-davis.htm>

Jefferson Davis was born in what is now known as Todd County, Kentucky, in 1808 (although Davis himself was unsure of whether he was born in 1807 or 1808). Shortly after, his family moved to a plantation in Woodville, Mississippi, where he spent most of his childhood. He attended Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky, before attending and graduating from the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, in 1828. Out of 33 cadets, Davis ranked 23rd in his class.¹

Davis served as second lieutenant in the United States military from 1829-1832. He fell in love with his commander's daughter, Sarah, who was the daughter of Colonel (and future president) Zachary Taylor. He married her in 1835. Sadly, she contracted malaria shortly after their wedding and died.²

Davis took a break from the military and spent the next few years at his plantation at Davis Bend, Mississippi. Davis was a slaveholder and worked diligently to establish himself as part of the planter class. In doing so, he remarried Varina Howell, whose family were planters. They had several children. It has been estimated that by the 1840s he owned over 70 slaves.³

Davis served a short stint in Congress as a Mississippi Representative in 1845 before fighting in the Mexican-American War, where he fought in the Battle of Monterrey (1846) and Battle of Buena Vista (1847). He earned nationwide **acclaim** and was appointed U.S. Senator of Mississippi in 1848. He had a major hand in the Gadsden Purchase and also tried to **annex** the island of Cuba to gain more territory where people could be enslaved.

In 1853, he was named Secretary of War and served that position for four years. Davis became a strong supporter of slavery and states' rights: "African slavery, as it exists in the United States, is a moral, a social, and a political blessing."⁴

In 1858, he addressed fellow Democrats at Faneuil Hall in Boston, Massachusetts. He told the crowd that he disagreed with secession yet **advocated** for states' rights. He urged the country to unite and reminded the North about its dependence on the South for its economy. He felt that abolition would weaken the economy and that secession would weaken the country's economy. He

¹ The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Rice University: <https://jeffersondavis.rice.edu/about-jefferson-davis/chronology/youth-and-education>

² Retrieved from <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/biographies/jefferson-davis>

³ Retrieved from <https://www.nps.gov/bost/the-anti-secessionist-jefferson-davis.htm>

⁴ Retrieved from <https://www.biography.com/political-figure/jefferson-davis>

also believed that Black people were inferior to White people. To Davis, slavery was necessary and beneficial for everyone involved.

On January 9, 1861, his state of Mississippi seceded from the Union after the election of President Abraham Lincoln. Davis resigned, or stepped down, from his Senate seat. Days later, on February 18, 1861, he was inaugurated the President of the Confederate States of America. Southerners thought he would be a good leader for the Confederacy because he was a good military leader and was respected during his time as a senator. Page | 2

However, some Southerners felt that he favored the rich and powerful rather than the common people. After the war, Davis was arrested and tried for **treason**. The charge was later dismissed.⁵ Davis never reentered government and instead worked in different businesses to regain some of his lost wealth. Toward the end of his life, he began to advocate for the “Lost Cause” and would tour the country speaking about the honor of the Confederacy. He died on December 6, 1889, of acute bronchitis.

⁵ Retrieved from https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/jefferson_davis_s_imprisonment#start_entry