

Jefferson Davis

While other men in the Confederacy could have become the first President, Jefferson Davis was the most logical choice for the new nation. Had the War Between the States not violently erupted, Jefferson Davis would most likely have become the President of the United States. His resume was impressive. He was a graduate of West Point and a hero in the Mexican War. He was a United States Congressman, a United States Senator, and the Secretary of War, the most powerful, cabinet position of his era. Several Presidents of the United States mentored Jefferson Davis. First, he was instructed by his future father in law, from his first marriage, Zachary Taylor. Secondly his good friend President Franklin Pierce tutored him. In fact, Jefferson Davis and his wife, Varina Howell Davis, were the shadow president and first lady during the Pierce Administration as both President Pierce and Mrs. Pierce suffered melancholia and consumption from the gruesome death of their son Benjamin just shortly after his election. It should also be noted that even former President Tyler sided with the South and supported Jefferson Davis during the infancy of the Confederacy before his untimely death. Lastly, Davis was loved and revered so much that he was elected to the United States Senate after the Civil War, but was not seated as his citizenship was still stripped. His citizenship was not restored until the Carter Presidency in 1978.

Jefferson Davis was immediately charged with four main tasks: Create a vibrant economy; Build a working government; Build a formidable army and navy; Seek foreign recognition and support for the Confederacy. History may have judged him with mixed results, but given the tasks before him and the corresponding limited resources; his leadership ability along with an indomitable citizenry built a fledgling government and waged a spirited war that almost succeeded. He also did this despite not having the public support from his wife for the war or his ability to lead a nation.

When Jefferson Davis was apprehended after the Surrender of Appomattox, Davis was harshly captured, neglected and imprisoned, was stripped of his citizenship, and most of his property was illegally taken. Even the \$100,000 bail that was posted for him, by citizens of both the North and the South, was never returned. After the war, Jefferson Davis was a man without a country. He and his family removed to England, where he was appointed the head of a cotton exchange, but the enterprise failed. In search of income, he was allowed to return to the United States and accepted the presidency of Carolina Life Insurance Company, but it too failed in the Panic of 1873.

A difficult marriage and other personal failures further tarnished his reputation, but an angel in the form of Sarah Ellis Dorsey, a boarding school friend and rival of his wife Varina, invited Davis and his family to live on her estate, Beauvoir, which he later bought from her and then later received the remainder of her estate when Dorsey died. Thus, allowing the Davis family to have some financial security. There, at Beauvoir, Jefferson Davis restored his reputation by penning *The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy*. He also started to attend Lost Cause events like county fairs and veteran's reunions. His wife later penned her own detailed version of the Confederacy and left Beauvoir as an eternal monument to Davis and the Confederate cause. Mrs. Davis also became an ambassador for Jefferson Davis and the Confederacy after his death in 1889.

While historians will long debate the legacy of Jefferson Davis, his rise from the humble and cold prairie of Kentucky in 1808 to an American statesman was impressive and is an example of an American success story. While he argued against the concept of succession in the United States Senate before the Civil War, Jefferson Davis stood resolutely to the principles that each state was sovereign and was allowed the unalienable right to succeed from the Union whenever the government should be found not to answer the ends for which it was established."