



Jefferson Davis, American

William J. Cooper

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West Point graduate, secretary of war under President Pierce, U.S. senator from Mississippi-- how was it that this statesman and patriot came to be president of the Confederacy, leading the struggle to destroy the United States?

This is the question at the center of William Cooper's engrossing and authoritative biography of Jefferson Davis. Basing his account on the massive archival record left by Davis and his family and associates, Cooper delves not only into the events of Davis's public and personal life but also into the ideas that shaped and compelled him.

We see Davis as a devoted American, yet also as a wealthy plantation owner who believed slavery to be a moral and social good that could coexist with free labor in an undivided Union. We see how his initially reluctant support of secession ended in his absolute commitment to the Confederacy and his identification of it with the legacy of liberty handed down by the Founding Fathers. We see the chaos that attended the formation of the Confederate government while the Civil War was being fought, and the ever-present tension between the commitment to states' rights and the need for centralized authority. We see Davis's increasingly autocratic behavior, his involvement in military decision-making, and his desperation to save the Confederacy even at the expense of slavery. And we see Davis in defeat: imprisoned for two years, then, for the rest of his life, unrepentant about the South's attempt to break away, yet ultimately professing his faith in the restored Union.

This is the definitive life of one of the most complex and fascinating figures in our nation's history.

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