



Jefferson Davis, Confederate President

Herman Hattaway, Richard E. Beringer

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He was one of the most embattled heads of state in American history. Charged with building a new nation while waging a war for its very independence, he accepted his responsibilities reluctantly but carried them out with a fierce dedication to his ideals. Those efforts ultimately foundered on the shoals of Confederate defeat, leaving Davis stranded in public memory as both valiant leader and desolate loser.

Now two renowned Civil War historians, Herman Hattaway and Richard Beringer, take a new and closer look at Davis's presidency. In the process, they provide a clearer image of his leadership and ability to handle domestic, diplomatic, and military matters under the most trying circumstances—without the considerable industrial and population resources of the North and without the formal recognition of other nations.

Hattaway and Beringer examine Davis's strengths and weaknesses as president in light of both traditional evidence and current theories of presidential leadership. They show us a man so respected that northern colleagues regretted his departure from the U.S. Senate, but so bent on Southern independence he was willing to impose unthinkable burdens on his citizens—an apologist for slavery who was committed to state rights, even while growing nationalism in his new country called for a stronger central government.

In assessing Davis's actual administration of the Confederate state, the authors analyze the Confederate government's constitution, institutions, infrastructure, and cabinet-level administrators. They also integrate events of Davis's presidency with the ongoing war as it encroached upon the South, offering a panoramic view of military strategy as seen from the president's office. They tell how Davis reacted to the outcomes of key battles and campaigns in order to assess his leadership abilities, his relations with civilian and military authorities, and—his own personal competency notwithstanding—his poor judgment in selecting generals.

Rich in detail and exhilaratingly told with generous selections from Davis's own letters and speeches, Hattaway and Beringer provide the most insightful account available of the first and only Confederate presidency—suggesting that perhaps it was the Confederate government, rather than Davis himself, that failed. More than that, it shows us Jefferson Davis as an American leader and offers a new appreciation of his place in our country's history.

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