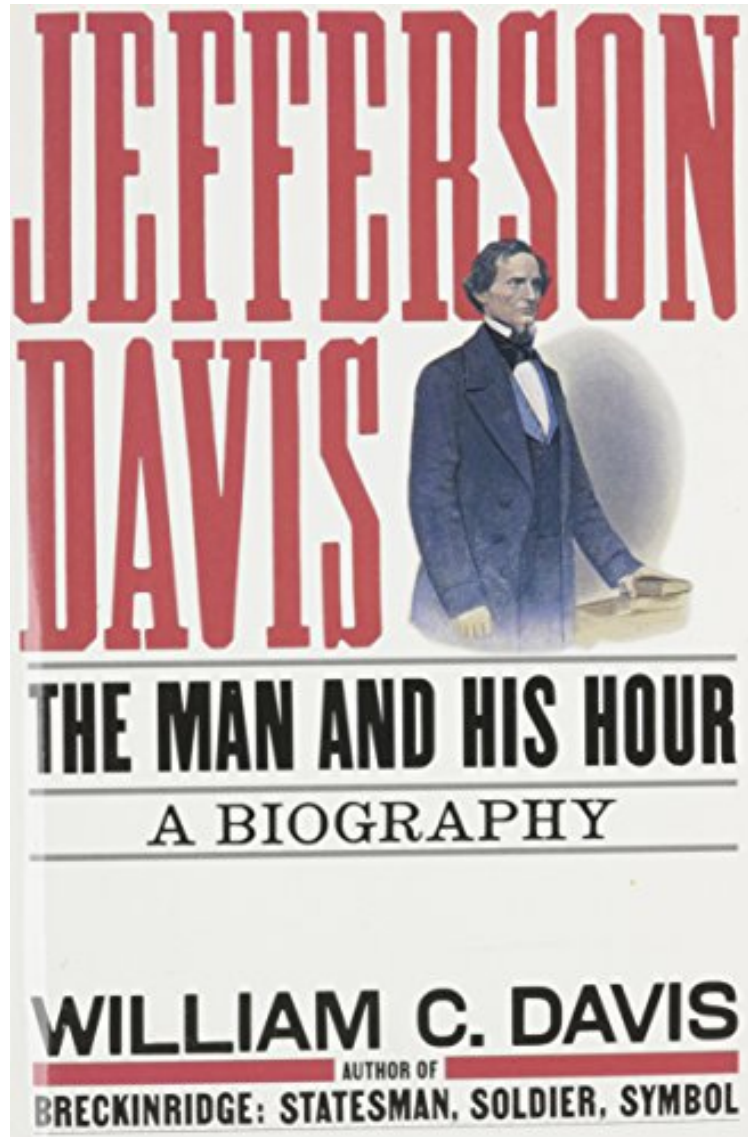


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Jefferson Davis: The Man and His Hour

William C. Davis

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From Publishers WeeklyThis portrait puts the emphasis on Davis's private warmth, public coolness, personal insecurity and indecisiveness during the Civil War. Relying mostly on contemporary sources, the author (Image of the War) explores how Davis's attitudes and values were developed at West Point and during his Mexican War service and how they were put to the test in his years as U.S. senator, as secretary of war under Franklin Pierce and as president of the Southern Confederacy. The author defends Davis (1808-1889) against the charge that he interfered with his generals, partly by showing how well he and Robert E. Lee worked together. The book also makes clear that Davis lacked managerial skill, was inflexible, could not admit making a mistake and had great difficulty delegating authority. Nevertheless, as the author points out, Davis built the systems that kept the Confederacy afloat from his inauguration in 1862 until he was captured by Union troops in 1865. This is a pragmatic but sympathetic biography that explains why Davis was respected but never loved by the citizens of the Confederate states. Illustrated. Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From Library JournalNoted Civil War author Davis now tries his hand at Jefferson Davis, long an enigma to historians. He approaches his subject sympathetically, grounding his book in the quaint notion that the Confederacy was doomed to fail (something neither Jefferson Davis in his day nor most historians today would accept) and viewing events largely through Davis's eyes. The author gives us the public man. He distills the private Davis into a few remarkably perceptive pages (the best in the book), preferring to measure his subject solely by the Civil War standard. Davis comes off as dogged and courageous, but also politically inept and narrowminded. Davis lost the West and his political bearings, though never his conviction for the cause. This new biography supersedes Clement Eaton's Jefferson Davis (LJ 10/1/77) in verve and detail, but it offers no striking new profile of either the man or his hour. Recommended for university and major public libraries.- Randall M. Miller, St. Joseph's Univ., PhiladelphiaCopyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From Kirkus sA fine, objective portrait in paradox, shrewdly detailing how Jefferson Davis's character flaws rendered him woefully unsuited to be President of the Confederacy. The author (no relation to his subject) brings to bear the military acumen one might expect from a former editor of Civil War Times Illustrated and author of more than 25 books on the Civil War and southern history, including *Duel Between the First Ironclads* and *The Battle of New Market* (both 1975). Yet his discussion of strategy is also informed by a firm grasp of Davis's extremes of character. It seemed logical in 1861 that the South would turn to Davis. He was, after all, its major military hero (as a colonel in the Mexican War, he helped win the Battle of Buena Vista); the natural successor to John Calhoun as the Senate's chief States'- rights advocate; and, under President Franklin Pierce, one of the most innovative secretaries of war ever. Yet, as early as his two courts-martial while a West Point cadet and army lieutenant, Davis manifested negative traits that proved fatal as a chief executive: anger, pedantry, vanity, indecision, and, as his future second wife noted after their very first meeting, an overbearing ``way of taking for granted that everybody agrees with him." He had the diligence and intelligence of a bureaucrat, but none of the interpersonal skills of a politician. Author Davis examines how these strengths and weaknesses affected the Confederate leader's relationships with his strong-willed second wife, Varina, and his mentor, brother Joseph; his unusually benevolent treatment of slaves; and his mismanagement of the western theater of operations, aggravated by petty squabbling with Generals Pierre Beauregard and Joseph Johnstone and foolish loyalty to incompetents like Braxton Bragg and Leonidas Polk. A dispassionate, well-researched, and skillful biography of a complex and controversial figure. (Sixteen pages of bw illustrations--not seen.) -- Copyright ©1991, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.