

# Jefferson Davis

**1808–1889**

**WHY HE MADE HISTORY** Jefferson Davis was the president of the Confederacy during the Civil War.



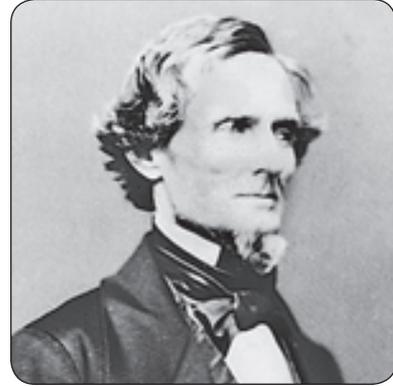
*As you read the biography below, think about how Jefferson Davis's belief in his cause led him to do all that he did.*

Jefferson Davis was a feisty statesman who defended the South before, during, and after the Civil War. He had a reputation for being hot-tempered and easily enraged, and was quick to challenge an opponent to a duel.

Davis was born in Kentucky and later moved with his family to Mississippi. Davis first attended Transylvania University in Kentucky and then transferred to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point when he was 16. After graduating in 1828, Davis joined the army and took part in several battles against American Indians.

In 1835 Davis married Sarah Taylor. Sarah was the daughter of Zachary Taylor, the future president who had been Davis's commander in the army. Three months after the wedding, the couple fell ill with fever and Sarah died. Davis was weak, but regained his health.

Davis returned to his plantation and became wealthy. He also spent this time studying history, government, and economics. In 1845 Davis married Varina Howell, and the couple had six children. Their youngest, Varina Anne, who was nicknamed "Winnie," went on to be known as the "Daughter of the Confederacy."



National Archives

**VOCABULARY**

**advocate** one who speaks in favor of a cause

In 1845 Davis was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. He resigned his seat a year later to fight in the Mexican War. During the battle of Buena Vista, Davis showed his courage and dedication, and helped win the battle. Later it was discovered that Davis fought all day with a bullet in his foot.

After the Mexican War, Davis became a U.S. Senator. President Franklin Pierce appointed Davis Secretary of War in 1853. Davis returned to the Senate in 1857 and became an outspoken **advocate** for the South. He defended state's rights and promoted the extension of slavery. When Mississippi seceded from the Union, Davis resigned from the Senate. He was elected president of the Confederate States of America in 1861.

When the Civil War ended, Davis was captured and imprisoned for treason. He was released in 1867. He later wrote *The Rise and Fall of Confederate Government* about his experiences in the South. Davis died in 1889.

### WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. Which side of the Civil War did Jefferson Davis support? Name one fact to support your answer.

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2. **Compare and Contrast** Think about what you know about the United States today compared to during Civil War times. How are things different now? Which way do you think is better?

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### ACTIVITY

3. Use your textbook, classroom resources, or an encyclopedia to find images of some flags used during the Civil War and your state's flag. Use a white sheet of paper and colored pencils or markers to create your own state flag. Write a short explanation as to what the colors and symbols mean.