

HISTORICAL

Jefferson Davis: Before He Wore Confederate Gray

David Maring

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Four Stars (out of Five)

Maring allows a candid glimpse of the human being before he rose to lead the Confederacy.

A famous gray ghost emerges from this realistic dramatization in a convincing portrayal of Jefferson Davis. David Maring focuses on the life of this controversial figure often perceived as an enemy of the United States. *Jefferson Davis: Before He Wore Confederate Gray* is a fictionalized account of the early years of an educated man who later became known as the president of the Confederacy.

Though few would award hero status to this outspoken politician, most will find his background fascinating. As expected, the stereotypical Southern gentleman shines through, yet with an unfavorable edge, due to preoccupation with his professional duty. His decision to remain faithful to Mississippi after the state's secession from the Union, and then to step forward as the head of an independent government, can only be comprehended within the context of the time in which he lived. Putting aside the immediate compulsion to attack his influential status on the wrong side of the American Civil War, the book may educate those willing to suspend condemnation long enough to learn about the events that preceded his rise to the presidency.

Illuminating Davis's formative years, romances, and subsequent marriage, Maring allows a candid glimpse of the human being as he struggled through setbacks and tragedies while simultaneously growing into the fallible yet loyal leader he became as the war commenced. A West Point graduate with a prominent political career in the House of Representatives and the United States Senate, Davis also served as secretary of war. His experience is promoted as a sterling quality, yet his knowledge made him perhaps all the more lethal to the Union.

This statement about Davis's character is perhaps more revealing than any other:

“Although he was never seen as a friend of the common man because his time spent in schools away from the activities of everyday life had made him part of an elite, most who heard him speak were impressed with his sincerity.”

In a commendable attempt to remain objective, this novel errs in its tendency to glorify Davis as a dedicated, battle-scarred hero who survived the Black Hawk War, as well as the Mexican War, rather than place him in an analytical light. Perhaps this technique is the fairest way to depict a demonized figure in history.

A black-and-white photograph of Davis graces the cover, and the blurb on the back cover extols his virtues as a public servant. Written in simple language, this title verges on suitability for young adults. The informative style is typical of nonfiction with its concise description and straightforward outlook.

A resident of South Carolina, David Maring is a former circuit judge and the author of several novels. His ancestors fought on opposing sides of the Civil War, giving him the perspective needed to understand what happens when a nation’s people unleash violence on one another.

Jefferson Davis: Before He Wore Confederate Gray is the first in a two-part series. It will be followed by *Jefferson Davis: The Conflict and Aftermath*, scheduled for release in October 2015.

Julia Ann Charpentier