

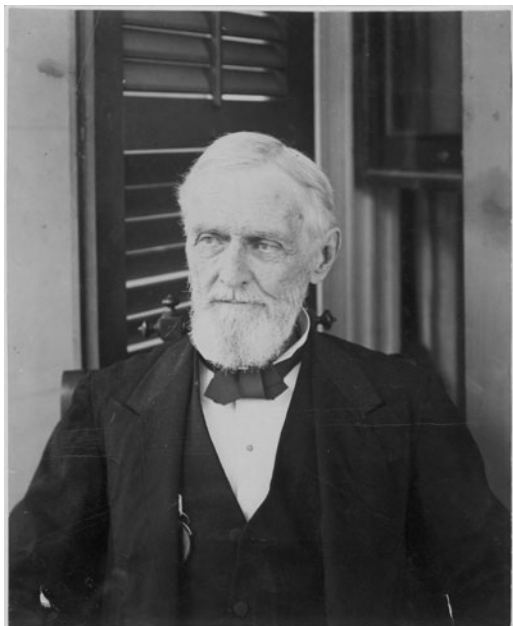
## “Not Buried Yet”: Northern Responses to the Death of Jefferson Davis and the Stuttering Progress of Sectional Reconciliation

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This article, the first detailed scholarly assessment of northern responses to the death of former Confederate President Jefferson Davis in December 1889, contributes to ongoing academic debates over the troubled process of sectional reconciliation after the Civil War. Southern whites used their leader's funeral obsequies to assert not only their affection for the deceased but also their devotion to the Lost Cause that he had championed and embodied. Based on an analysis of northern newspapers and mass-circulation magazines in the two weeks after Davis's death, the essay demonstrates that many northerners, principally Republican politicians and editors, Union veterans, and African Americans, were outraged by southerners' flagrant willingness to laud a man whom they regarded as the arch-traitor and that they remained opposed to reconciliation on southern terms. However, despite continuing concerns about public displays of affection for the Confederacy evident at the time of Davis's reinterment in Richmond in May 1893, northern opposition to the Lost Cause waned rapidly in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Full-blown sectional reconciliation occurred after the Republicans gave up on their efforts to enforce black voting rights in the South and President William McKinley's imperialist foreign policy necessitated, and to some degree garnered, support from southern whites. The death of Jefferson Davis, therefore, can be seen as an important event in the difficult transition from a heavily sectionalized postwar polity to a North-South rapprochement based heavily on political pragmatism, sentiment, nationalism, and white supremacism.

Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederate States of America, survived his proslavery republic's military defeat at the hands of the North for nearly a quarter of a century. He died in New Orleans in the early hours of December 6, 1889, at the age of eighty-one after contracting influenza on a business trip up the Mississippi River (fig. 1). His demise stirred strong feelings in many parts of the United States. At Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, black students reportedly sang “derisive” songs while the town's white citizens attended a memorial service for the deceased.<sup>1</sup> In Charleston, West Virginia, a local Democratic attorney struck a federal marshal who had asserted that Davis should be buried in disgrace in a potter's field.<sup>2</sup> And in Aberdeen, Mississippi, a young midwesterner was “publicly horsewhipped” and run out of town after cutting down an effigy of U.S. Secretary of War Redfield Proctor.<sup>3</sup> Proctor, a



**Fig. 1** Jefferson Davis in old age, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/pmsca.23865/>.

Union veteran from Vermont, had angered many southerners by refusing to lower his department's flag to half-mast as a gesture of respect for the former president. In death, as in life, Jefferson Davis was the focus of considerable controversy.

A remarkable burst of collective southern mourning ensued in the days after Davis's passing. He lay (informally) in state for three-and-a-half days in New Orleans City Hall and was interred in a temporary tomb after an imposing military funeral. Embracing the deceased as one of their own, hundreds of thousands of white southerners attended not only these events but also local memorial ceremonies timed to coincide with the main funeral service. Northerners' diverse and often startled reactions enable historians to delineate the state of sectional relations in the late Gilded Age. These responses demonstrate the extent to which Civil War memories continued to influence northerners' perceptions of their defeated opponents and to obstruct the ongoing process of sectional reconciliation, the pace of which continues to provoke debate among modern historians.

Scholars including Nina Silber and David W. Blight have posited the idea of a contested but broadly linear reconciliation between northern and southern whites—one that was well underway by the 1880s. They also contend that white northerners participated in a cultural surrender to the Lost Cause, which contributed to the subordination of African Americans.<sup>4</sup> This view is broadly shared by K. Stephen Prince who describes the country's "retreat from Reconstruction" as "a national affair" and Jim Crow as "the nation's shame."<sup>5</sup> Other historians, however, among them William A. Blair, John R. Neff, Caroline E. Janney, and M. Keith Harris have pointed to the mass of Union and Confederate dead as a major stumbling block to intersectional amity in the late nineteenth century. In their view, reconciliation was as much a political as a cultural process—one that, according to Janney at least, was far from complete by the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

Relatively little has been written on Jefferson Davis's death and even less on its significance for sectional reconciliation.<sup>7</sup> By probing northern attitudes to public displays of affection for Davis (displays that confirmed the Lost Cause would outlive its original progenitors), this essay reveals that North-South relations were still in a fragile state a quarter of a century after the Civil War had ended.<sup>8</sup> However, it also shows that northerners were divided (largely, though not entirely, along party lines) over how to respond to open celebrations of the Lost Cause and becoming increasingly opposed to sectional rhetoric. By the time Davis's remains were interred permanently in Richmond, Virginia, in May 1893, there was growing evidence that regular Republicans, many Union veterans excepted, no longer regarded public displays of affection for Confederate heroes as a threat to the safety of the nation.

Reconciliation between North and South after the mass killing of 1861–65 depended on two major developments. The first was a decisive shift in the way that defeated white southerners understood their place in a nation transformed not only by war but also by industrial capitalism. During what David Blight refers to as “[t]he diehard era” of the Lost Cause in the 1870s, former Confederate leaders like Jubal A. Early and elite southern white women belonging to Ladies' Memorial Associations fashioned an inward-looking memory of the “War of Yankee Aggression” that was permeated with grief for the southern dead and hostility toward crowing northerners.<sup>9</sup> This bitter collective memory constituted a major obstacle to sectional reconciliation. Only after the restoration of home rule in the 1870s did ordinary Confederate veterans start engaging in open remembrance of the war. Their involvement, assisted by younger southern women who eventually formed the United Daughters of the Confederacy in 1894, contributed to a more public phase of the Lost Cause, which mingled remembrance of the glorious dead with an unrepentant assertion of the authentically American heroism and patriotism of the South's wartime generation.<sup>10</sup> What historian Gaines Foster terms “the Confederate celebration” was conducive to sectional reconciliation because it supplied tropes such as masculine courage and political principle that were critical points of mutual appreciation between northern and southern whites.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, southern authors such as Thomas Nelson Page and Joel Chandler Harris began to write nostalgically about the Old South, their stories finding enthusiastic readers on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line. Jefferson Davis's death occurred in the midst of these developments—just as the Lost Cause was blossoming into a genuine civil religion that would challenge most northerners' desire to embrace white southerners as fellow Americans on their own terms.<sup>12</sup>

A second precondition, however, had to be met before something approaching a complete reconciliation could be achieved. Northerners would have to acknowledge their former enemies' increasingly strident claims to have acted as patriotic Americans during the Civil War era in order to imagine them as modern-day compatriots. In this respect, while K. Stephen Prince is right to suggest that “the story of the South needed to be rewritten” before reconciliation could be finalized, the most important story was not one about slavery or southern material progress since the war, but one of trust.<sup>13</sup> Although most northerners wanted to believe that Jefferson Davis was an exceptional figure and that the Lost Cause would be buried with him, key Republican constituencies such as white Union veterans and blacks still doubted ordinary white southerners' attachment to the American republic. In late 1889, many northerners angrily denounced the ex-Confederates' outpouring of affection for their deceased “chieftain” and demonstrated their continuing opposition to a present built upon forgiveness, forgetting, and white supremacy.

II

Jefferson Davis had a checkered career in middle and old age.<sup>14</sup> He could (though he never did) count himself a lucky man. While he was never tried for waging war on the United States, for sanctioning the brutal treatment of Federal prisoners of war in squalid stockades like Andersonville, or for conspiring in the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, many northerners considered him guilty on one or more of these counts and held fast to the belief, long after his release from prison in 1867, that the man they regarded as the arch-traitor should have been hanged for these putative crimes. Instead of spending his final years in exile like another failed “rebel” leader, Charles Edward Stuart, Davis spent most of his postwar career in his homeland.<sup>15</sup> More realistic and self-disciplined than the Young Pretender (who plotted revenge against the British state for several years after the collapse of the Jacobite rising in 1745), the Confederate president discounted any idea of renewing the southern revolt. However, he remained convinced of the rectitude of his actions and made little attempt to conceal his entrenched convictions. In August 1873, in the midst of fierce battles over Reconstruction, he claimed that southerners had been “cheated rather than conquered, and could we have foreseen the results of the surrender, we would have been free to-day.”<sup>16</sup>

Such unguarded pronouncements did nothing to undermine Davis’s unique postwar reputation in the North as the supreme embodiment of the southern rebellion. Like Bonnie Prince Charlie, he remained a target of particular interest and ire for the victors. In spite of northern voters’ waning support for Reconstruction, regular Republicans held fast to their long-held belief that secession had been the work of a cabal of wealthy southern slavemasters (the so-called Slave Power) and that Davis was the leader of that nefarious group. Keen to sustain a historical narrative of the War of the Rebellion that placed the Republican Party in the vanguard of the great Union cause, they had no compunction in using him as an instrument to stoke sectional prejudices.<sup>17</sup> In January 1876, for example, Congressman James G. Blaine of Maine, a Republican presidential aspirant, launched a blistering attack on Davis in the U.S. House of Representatives during a debate over whether Congress should remove the remaining officeholding disqualifications from a handful of high-ranking Confederates. Moving to exempt Davis from any amnesty legislation and thereby formalize his exceptional status, Blaine denounced the former president in threatening terms as the “author ... of the gigantic murders and crimes at Andersonville.”<sup>18</sup>

After failing in several business ventures, Davis was fortunate to attract the sympathy of a wealthy southern novelist named Sarah Dorsey. A committed Confederate, Dorsey offered the president a place to stay at Beauvoir, her plantation home on Mississippi’s Gulf Coast. She died in 1879, deeding Beauvoir to Davis in her will. It was there that Davis composed his distinctive contribution to the literary canon of the Lost Cause, *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*, which was published in 1881. In this self-justifying, two-volume work, he denied that slavery had been the main cause of the sectional fracture and blamed power-crazed Republicans for the Civil War. He also reiterated his long-standing view that secession was an established right under the federal Constitution. “I recognize the fact that the war showed it to be impracticable,” he wrote, “but this did not prove it to be wrong. ...”<sup>19</sup>

Davis’s one-sided book impressed few northerners, the majority of whom remained wedded to a seemingly robust account of the Civil War that denigrated Confederate treason and lauded the courage and patriotism of Union soldiers.<sup>20</sup> One hostile reviewer

denounced it as “factitious history” and arraigned the white South’s burgeoning efforts to counter the victor’s narrative with Lost Cause falsehoods.<sup>21</sup> A particularly vicious cartoon in the satirical magazine *Puck* depicted Davis, “a live jackass,” standing in the “Secession Cemetery” holding a book entitled “History of Treason by an Ex-Traitor.” By way of comparison, the left-hand side of the picture featured a monument of the “dead hero” Abraham Lincoln carrying a copy of the Emancipation Proclamation and the inscription “With charity for all[,] with malice toward none” at the base (fig. 2).<sup>22</sup>

Negative verdicts on his book did not end Jefferson Davis’s efforts to place himself and the Confederacy on the right side of history. Fully aware that many northerners still loathed him, he told a gathering of Mississippi legislators in March 1884 that he would not seek restoration of his U.S. citizenship because he had nothing to be sorry for. Embracing the language and symbolism of Christianity that suffused the evolving Lost Cause, he stated that he had not repented. Remembering all that had been suffered and lost, he continued, “yet I deliberately say, if it were to do over again, I would again do just as I did in 1861.”<sup>23</sup> His austere demeanor and contested presidency made him a difficult figure for southerners to romanticize (a more difficult one certainly than military heroes like Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee). However, growing numbers of them took him to their hearts after the war, their sympathies enlisted by his incarceration in Fortress Monroe, his postbellum conviction that neither he nor they had sinned by rejecting the authority of the United States government, and his dignified response to Republican attacks. They therefore received him warmly on his public visits to Alabama and Georgia in 1886 and 1887 and, grieving for loved ones as many continued to do, they responded positively when he exhorted them to remember the sacrifices of the late conflict and to revere the principles of constitutional liberty for which the Confederates had avowedly fought.<sup>24</sup>

### III

The news of Jefferson Davis’s death attracted enormous attention outside the South. It was bound to, not only because of his unique historical reputation but also because Civil War-era memories continued to influence national politics after Reconstruction. By late 1889, the Republican administration of Benjamin Henry Harrison, a pious Union veteran from Ohio and staunch protectionist, was trying to shore up its base ahead of the midterm congressional elections the following year. That base was fragile. Harrison had lost the popular vote in 1888 and his opponents—resurgent Democrats (many ex-Confederates among them), elite liberal reformers, organized industrial workers, and agrarian radicals—posed a major threat to Republican hopes of maintaining control of the federal government. Casting about for ways to consolidate its power, the administration’s supporters explored a number of different avenues. These included the swift admission of new western states to the Union (a policy that would contribute heavily to the massacre of Plains Indians at Wounded Knee in December 1890) and renewed attempts to stop southern Democrats from keeping black Republicans away from the polls.<sup>25</sup> Plans to step up federal enforcement of black voting rights in the South had already induced Alabama Congressman Hilary A. Herbert to prepare a collection of essays designed to prevent any repeat of Reconstruction.<sup>26</sup> While Herbert’s efforts were certainly rooted in regional fears that federal power might yet obstruct the restoration of white supremacy, he also intended his projected volume to exploit national concerns that Reconstruction had inhibited the country’s economic recovery after the

Editorial Cartoon 1 -- No Title  
*Puck* (1877-1918); Jun 22, 1881; 9, 224; American Periodicals  
pg. 267



**A DEAD HERO AND A LIVE JACKASS.**

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Fig. 2 "A Dead Hero and a Live Jackass," *Puck*, June 22, 1881, p. 267, Proquest American Periodicals Database.

war. In contrast, Republican efforts to enforce the Fifteenth Amendment gave party strategists hope not only that they could revive the GOP's black southern base but also that they could sustain memories of the War of the Rebellion that continued to mobilize large numbers of Union veterans in the crucial political battleground of the Midwest.<sup>27</sup>

The news of Jefferson Davis's death made the front pages of the staunchly partisan press in the Northeast, the Midwest, and the Far West on December 6 or the following day. Editors' choice of headlines ran the gamut of opinion: "A TRAITOR DEAD," "JEFF DAVIS IS DEAD," "JEFFERSON DAVIS DEAD," "LET HIM REST," they proclaimed.<sup>28</sup> Front-page story lines described the president's final moments and included biographical sketches of his long career—as a soldier in the conflict against Mexico, as Secretary of War in Franklin Pierce's cabinet, as a states' rights U.S. senator from Mississippi, as the president of the southern Confederacy, and as a leading architect of the Lost Cause. Many papers featured illustrations of the elderly Davis and explained that preparations for an impressive funeral were already underway in New Orleans.

The southern president's demise necessitated an official response from the Harrison administration. Secretary of War Proctor quickly staked out an official position. He would not, he announced on the morning of December 6, order the national flag flying over the war department building in Washington to be lowered to half-mast as a mark of respect. The government, he said, had not been told officially that Davis was dead. "We know no such man," he explained, "It is better to forget such things, to let them pass away from our minds."<sup>29</sup> Proctor gauged the mood of the North correctly. Even Democrats, who usually supported sectional reconciliation and condemned what they regarded as cynical Republican efforts to keep Civil War hatreds alive, approved the decision. Most northerners, certainly those of the wartime generation, recoiled from the idea of proffering official respect to a noncitizen who had spearheaded a bloody rebellion against the United States. Proctor, commented one Democratic editor in New Hampshire, had adopted "the proper course under the circumstances." Lowering the flag would only have sparked "intense resentment," thereby retarding "the happy day when the animosities of the war shall have gone out of the breasts of the people."<sup>30</sup>

Detailed assessments of Jefferson Davis's contribution to the country's turbulent recent history followed quickly. Democratic editors, conscious of public opinion in the predominantly Democratic South and, like their readers, sympathetic to Davis's conservative views on central government power and racial equality, supplied the most positive commentaries. The *Boston Globe* called Davis "a gentleman" and wondered why "sectional hatreds that ought to be buried" should be heaped upon him.<sup>31</sup> The deceased, contended Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World*, had been an especial target for the North's war-born hatreds. Yet he was "a man of commanding ability, spotless integrity, controlling conscience" who spearheaded the fight against the Union "in the sincere conviction of its necessity as a means of preserving the liberties which the Union represents." Confederates, claimed the *World*, had fought "with a heroism the memory of which is everywhere described as one that does honor to the American character and name."<sup>32</sup> While other northern Democratic papers hewed less closely to the ex-Confederate line, most acknowledged Davis's commitment to principle (which many of their readers may have contrasted favorably with the cynical politics of the Gilded Age). James Gordon Bennett's *New York Herald* and the *Boston Globe* featured interviews with the president's wartime private secretary, Burton Harrison, now a prominent Manhattan attorney. Harrison described his former employer as a "reticent, stately" man "of lofty character" and "rare singleness of purpose."<sup>33</sup> The *Herald's* judgment on Davis, however, was harsher than that of the *World* and the *Globe*. It compared him unfavorably to Lincoln and criticized him for his attachment to "the barren dogmas of Calhoun." Nevertheless, the paper concluded that in the storied history of the Confederacy, "no one will hold a more conspicuous place than the stern, implacable, resolute leader, whose cold, thin lips have closed forever. ..."<sup>34</sup>

The country's financial and mercantile papers were just as committed to the restoration of sectional amity as the northern Democratic press. The *New York Commercial Advertiser* articulated a common view among northeastern businessmen that Civil War enmities were now virtually forgotten and that the country must focus its gaze resolutely on its prosperous future. It described Davis as a man of "spotless integrity and honest devotion to what he believed to be right," but insisted that "[t]o history and the course of contemporary events" he "has already been dead many years." While

noting southern whites' "sentimental regard" for their former president, the *Advertiser* dismissed their nostalgic affection as "simply a tribute to the lost cause."<sup>35</sup>

Republican views on Jefferson Davis were generally much harsher. The kindest verdicts came from conservative organs and papers on the reform wing of the party shading into Mugwumpery. Contending that no one could have done a better job of leading the "doomed" Confederacy, the *New York Evening Post* described him as "one of the ablest men" of his day. The independent-minded *New York Times* was more critical but it conceded that he would "hold a considerable place in the history of the United States."<sup>36</sup> The metropolitan weekly magazines also rendered relatively balanced judgments. The liberal *Nation* lamented what it regarded as Davis's vanguard role in secession as well as his constant "brooding over the past" in old age. However, it also complimented his wartime administration as "vigorous" and concluded grudgingly that "he was himself no discreditable example of American manhood in both extremes of fortune."<sup>37</sup> *Harper's Weekly* urged younger northerners to judge the deceased "objectively." It found fault not only with what it saw as Davis's flawed administration but also a "certain class of Northern politicians" who used the kind of Lost Cause "utterances" that Davis made in old age "to fan the dying flames of prejudice."<sup>38</sup> Implicit here was the conviction of pro-business conservatives and high-minded reformers, shared with most Democrats above and below the Mason-Dixon line, that Republican spoilsmen manipulated wartime hatreds to promote their careers at the cost of hindering reconciliation with southern whites and obstructing the nation's path to prosperity and greatness.

Most regular Republican newspapers in the party's northeastern and midwestern heartlands made it clear that their views on Jefferson Davis had changed little since the Civil War. Some of the party's leading metropolitan dailies supplied particularly damning judgments. The *Philadelphia North American* described Davis as "an ambitious trader in human depravity" whose treachery was comparable to that of Benedict Arnold and Aaron Burr.<sup>39</sup> Whitelaw Reid's *New York Tribune* called Davis "a broken old man" whose main purpose had been to remind southerners of a "gallant fight that was not worth winning, of a lost cause that did not deserve to succeed."<sup>40</sup> The Chicago *Inter Ocean*, the newspaper of choice for many Union veterans in the Midwest, described him as "a dangerous man, because he was at heart an enemy to the Union and all it means to the people."<sup>41</sup> Although the editor of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* joined some of his co-partisans in acknowledging that the Confederate leader had certain "private virtues," he made clear his conviction that Davis had gambled "his fortunes and his fame upon a desperate and criminal venture, and lost."<sup>42</sup>

The vehemence of so many Republican verdicts on Jefferson Davis testified not only to the party's fears of the reenergized Democracy but also to the persistence of powerful memories of wartime suffering in the North. Although Democrats were right to perceive the underlying cynicism of much Republican sectionalism in the late 1880s (just as Republicans were correct to sense the partisan intent of their opponents' enthusiasm for reconciliation), this does not mean that many of the voters who responded positively to sectional rhetoric did not nurse real grievances. As David Blight, Benjamin Cloyd, and other historians have shown, POWs on both sides in the Civil War harbored bitter memories of their treatment at the hands of the enemy long after Appomattox.<sup>43</sup> These memories played an important role in obstructing sectional reconciliation and in the case of many individuals never dissipated. Jefferson Davis was a particular focus for POW animus in the North because he had triggered a bilateral decision not to swap prisoners during the Civil War by refusing to treat U.S.



Colored Troops as free men. While it is no surprise that the POW controversy remained a hot issue among many Union veterans at a time when the Republicans were ramping up efforts to enforce the Fifteenth Amendment, it would be wrong to underestimate the role that personal suffering played in sustaining it. Certainly, Davis had never been able to throw off charges that he had been instrumental in the mistreatment of Union POWs. Shortly before his death, he prepared a characteristically robust defense of his prison policies, which was published posthumously in *Belford's Magazine*.<sup>44</sup> But traumatized veterans of Andersonville and other Confederate prisons dismissed attempts by “rebels” to defend their treatment of POWs or to point out that conditions in northern prisons were just as bad, if not worse.

Republican denunciations of Davis's alleged wickedness thus drew considerable force from the festering recollections of Union veterans—many of whom were impoverished, disabled, and in increasingly poor health—and their female kin.<sup>45</sup> For the *Omaha Republican*, Davis was “the central figure in a most unholy cause” whose “name is a synonym for all that is despicable in American history.” No tears for him would be “shed by those who marched through four years of bloody war, neither by those who were left mourning for lost ones, murdered by the so-called Confederacy.”<sup>46</sup> Equally dark memories were conjured by the editor of a GOP paper in Maine:

Not yet ... can the historian who writes in touch with the feelings of the whole people, inscribe sentiments of sorrow in the death of one who must ever be known as a traitor. ... Nor, while memories of those Southern prison pens and the ingrained belief in his connection with the horrors they represent exist, can his character be correctly analyzed.<sup>47</sup>

One of the most negative verdicts appeared in the organ of the country's largest and most active veterans' association, the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), which operated as an unofficial arm of the Republican Party in several states.<sup>48</sup> The *National Tribune* denounced Davis's “unutterable wickedness” in bringing about the Civil War and excoriated him for continuing the fight long after it had been lost. “He caused the sacrifice of a million lives,” asserted the veterans' paper, “in order to keep 4,000,000 negro[e]s in slavery.”<sup>49</sup> The *Grand Army Record* was similarly ill disposed toward the deceased. “At last Jeff Davis is dead,” it rejoiced, “We are finding no fault with the Lord on that account.”<sup>50</sup>

Not all ex-Federals reacted to Jefferson Davis's passing in this way. One of the most balanced judgments was rendered by the writer and reporter, Ambrose Bierce, whose searing accounts of his soldiering experiences chimed uneasily with the growing tendency to romanticize the Civil War—or at least to divest it of its horrors.<sup>51</sup> Instead of dancing on the Confederate leader's grave, Bierce contributed a short essay to the *San Francisco Examiner* on December 8 in which he lambasted “loyalty's hot-gospellers” for seizing the opportunity to trumpet the North's putative moral superiority over the treacherous South. There was, he thought, something decidedly impressive about Davis's stubborn attachment to principle: “[N]o generous antagonist to the lost, and justly lost, cause could have wished to mitigate ... the stony immobility of that sole human monument, which death alone could overthrow.”<sup>52</sup>

Bierce's generous appraisal, however, was atypical. It was certainly not shared by another white Union veteran, Albion Winegar Tourgée, whose regular “Bystander” column in the Chicago *Inter Ocean* was essential reading for many of the region's ex-servicemen. Tourgée, a formidable champion of equal rights for African

Americans who had experienced white-supremacist violence at first hand while a carpetbag judge in North Carolina, articulated the feeling of most former bluecoats by describing Davis as a “faulty” leader who had only gained renown among his people by defending their cause after he had helped to lose it through his own lack of “audacity and vigor.”<sup>53</sup>

Black editors in the North provided some of the most negative responses to Davis’s demise. “The JUDAS of American history is dead,” rejoiced the Detroit *Plain dealer*.<sup>54</sup> The *Cleveland Gazette* derided him as “a relic of the so-called Confederacy.”<sup>55</sup> He was “a coward,” commented the *Leavenworth Advocate*, who lived to see the Union secure and “the race which he endeavored to keep in the chains of bondage ... freed and standing as his equal before the law as an American citizen, enjoying even more rights than did Davis himself.”<sup>56</sup> T. Thomas Fortune, the editor of the *New York Age*, was less sanguine than this Republican partisan about the status of blacks in contemporary American society (fig. 3). But he confessed that he had “no tears to shed upon the new-made grave of JEFFERSON DAVIS.” The latter’s widely quoted last words, “pray, excuse me,” he wrote, were a fitting epitaph for “the man who more than any other incarnated the rampant spirit of treason which attempted to cut the throat of the Nation.”<sup>57</sup>

Although northerners’ assessments of Jefferson Davis’s political career provided evidence of lingering anti-southern feeling, most targeted their hostility primarily on the former president rather than southerners in general. There was, at first, a prevailing sense grounded in the widely accepted Slave Power thesis that he was an exceptional historical figure, “an isolated character” whose death would pave the way for final reconciliation between the sections.<sup>58</sup> Speaking in Washington shortly after the news of Davis’s death was announced, Postmaster General John Wanamaker, a Philadelphia department store owner, commented that the president’s passing “shuts from view the last great leader of the terrible war. If it could end all divisions and strifes and bury in a deep grave differences of sections a new day of peace and prosperity would dawn upon the land.”<sup>59</sup> Most northern Republicans concurred. Davis’s death was no misfortune to the United States, declared one North Dakota editor, “for it removes a figure which has been martyred by unreconstructionists and served to keep alive a disloyal regret—a sentiment the existence of which has prevented that friendly and perfect reunion so much desired and so necessary to future development and national greatness.”<sup>60</sup> The *New York Tribune* asserted confidently on December 7 that the deceased could “[i]n no aspect ... be considered entitled to the regard of the Southern people” and two days later reassured readers that the South would “not look for its ideal in his grave.”<sup>61</sup> In the days before the funeral, many regular Republicans convinced themselves that the forward-looking, pro-business New South would now triumph over its embittered and nostalgic Lost Cause proponents. Failing to recognize the extent to which the New South was being built on a constructed memory of the Confederate War, they were about to get a rude shock.<sup>62</sup>

#### IV

They had been warned. Within hours of Davis’s death, reporters from the metropolitan press sought out southern politicians in Washington for their reactions. Many declined to comment out of concern that they would be misinterpreted.<sup>63</sup> But those willing to speak publicly announced that they embraced both the late president and what they saw as the quintessential American principles for which he had fought all his life. Congressman Roger Q. Mills of Texas, a Confederate veteran, praised the deceased



Fig. 3 T. Thomas Fortune, Wikipedia image, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timothy\\_Thomas\\_Fortune#/media/File:Timothy\\_Thomas\\_Fortune.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timothy_Thomas_Fortune#/media/File:Timothy_Thomas_Fortune.jpg).

“as one of the greatest, best and purest men in the world. We all loved him. He was our representative man. ...”<sup>64</sup> In the hours and days following the news from New Orleans, resolutions were passed by state legislatures, chambers of commerce, and Confederate veterans’ associations across the South. All of them affirmed white southerners’ love and admiration for Jefferson Davis and the Lost Cause. In the words of prominent merchants in New Orleans, the chieftain was a “hero” and “statesman” whose “name and patriotism shall never perish so long as the spirit of liberty shall remain the foundation upon which our government shall rest.”<sup>65</sup> Accustomed to regarding the Confederate president as a uniquely treasonous plantocrat, northern Republicans watched developments with mounting concern.

Word of Jefferson Davis’s passing stirred powerful feelings of loss among many southern whites who flocked to New Orleans, long a hub of Confederate memorialization, to attend the funeral.<sup>66</sup> Long lines of people gathered outside City Hall to view the remains. Once inside, they filed respectfully past the partially open coffin in which the corpse lay clad in a suit of Confederate gray. Press reports on the numbers inside the death chamber varied, but the crowds were so large that the authorities agreed to open the chamber to the public on the morning of December 11, the day of the funeral.<sup>67</sup> Virtually all the mourners were southern residents. Confederate veterans—some embittered, “some armless, some legless, some nearly blind, and some hardly able to totter”—were especially visible.<sup>68</sup> Large numbers of white women, however, also appeared in the lines. Many were mothers and sisters of dead Confederates; in some cases, they were probably members of long-established burial associations that had helped to create the city’s vast Confederate mausoleums.<sup>69</sup>

The funeral arrangements were finalized by the all-male organizing committee headed by Davis’s wartime aide-de-camp, William Preston Johnston. Its key decision

was to make the funeral a military ceremony. This suggestion came from Captain Jacob Gray, commander of the GAR's department of Louisiana and Mississippi.<sup>70</sup> His colleagues on the committee likely welcomed the idea because it enabled southerners to deflect external criticism by burying Davis as an American soldier as well as a Confederate statesman. Determined to recognize Davis's contribution to the abortive southern bid for independence without obstructing the modern South's reintegration into national life, the New Orleans committee prepared a dignified pageant that would allow Confederates to mourn their chieftain under the watching gaze of the wider American public.

As these plans unfolded, Union veterans belonging to the GAR fretted that Davis's death might provide their former enemies with a platform to advertise their continuing allegiance to a discredited cause. Their anxieties crystallized in what one newspaper called "a big row" over the decision of some southern bluecoats to support Gray's plans to involve some southern-based GAR members in the funeral procession.<sup>71</sup> Many northern veterans were appalled. The issue, wrote one of them, was loyalty to the United States: "If these people in New Orleans stultify themselves as individuals and in citizens' clothes at the funeral of the arch traitor, it is a matter for their own consciences; but if they go either as Posts of the G.A.R. or singly in G.A.R. uniform, it becomes a matter for G.A.R. discipline. ..." The ex-Federal added that he and "thousands" of others would leave the organization if it failed to act decisively on this matter.<sup>72</sup> The view was a representative one within the Grand Army. After Jacob Gray and at least two dozen of his comrades marched in the funeral procession without official sanction, the GAR's national encampment court-martialed Gray and, in an unusual move, stripped him of command.<sup>73</sup>

The president's funeral took place at noon on December 11. His casket was closed for the last time and removed to an improvised catafalque outside City Hall where a crowd of around twenty thousand people had gathered in Lafayette Square. A silk Confederate flag was thrown over the coffin along with the deceased's Mexican War sword. In his address, Bishop John Galleher of the Episcopalian Church, a former Confederate chaplain, contributed to the emergence of the Lost Cause as a civil religion striated with Christian symbolism of suffering and redemption by depicting Davis as a martyr for his people. "[T]he stately tree of our southern wood ... 'lies uprooted,'" he said, adding pointedly that the late president, had "suffered many and grievous wrongs" and "[s]uffered most for the sake of others. ..." <sup>74</sup> After the service the spectators watched in silence as a detachment of soldiers transferred the casket onto a decorated artillery caisson that bore a black-clad catafalque topped with furled American flags. A long funeral procession, watched by huge crowds, then made its way slowly through the packed streets of New Orleans to Metairie Cemetery (fig. 4). Here another large crowd watched as the casket, now shorn of the Confederate flag, was emplaced temporarily in the vast burial vault for soldiers of the legendary Army of Northern Virginia.

Crucially for an understanding of northern responses to Davis's death, white southerners participated in parallel memorial services across the region at the same time as the funeral in New Orleans. Organized at the behest of Georgia governor John B. Gordon, a former Confederate general and New South booster, they typically incorporated a civic procession to the local music house where citizens of all ages gathered to hear eulogies on Jefferson Davis and the Confederacy. Images of Davis and other southern leaders were prominent on stage as were replica caskets and tangible symbols of the southern war effort such as swords and faded regimental banners. Turnouts were impressive. In Charleston, South Carolina, around thirty thousand people watched

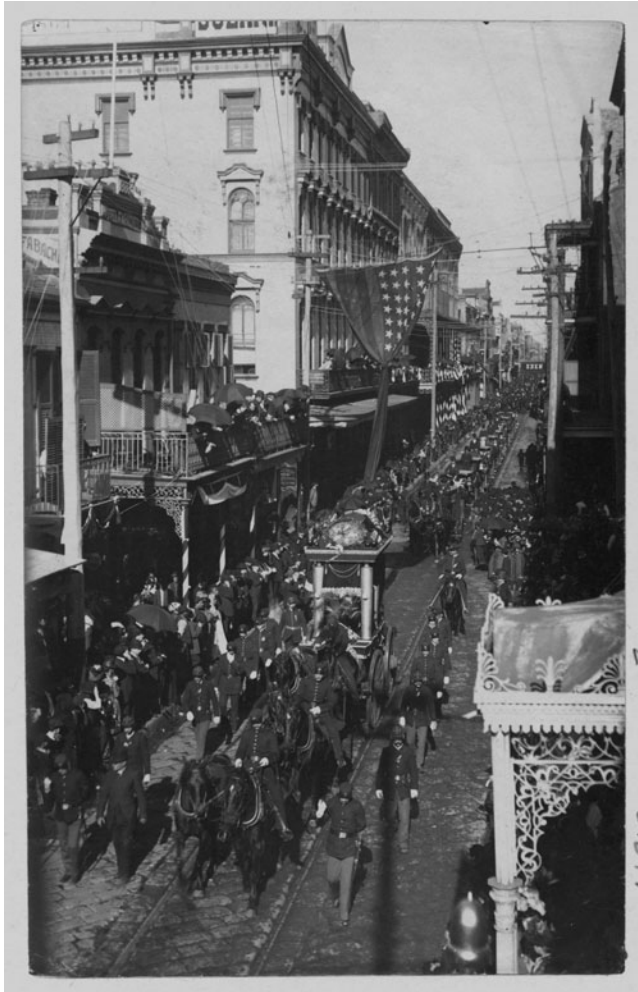


Fig. 4 Jefferson Davis's Funeral Procession in New Orleans, Dec. 11, 1889, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/ppmsca.23871/>.

Confederate orphans, veterans, and cadets from the city's Military Academy process in separate groups to the Grand Opera House, which had been copiously decorated by local women. There they joined Confederate veterans and mothers to hear a bevy of old "rebels" address the mourners. The stage itself was crowded with images and objects redolent of the Confederacy, including a portrait of Jefferson Davis, the flag of the *C.S.S Shenandoah* (one of the South's most feared raiders), and the banners of various infantry regiments including that of Rhett's battery inscribed with the names of Confederate victories. Reflecting on these impressive demonstrations of affection for the lost southern nation as well as its president, a local newspaper asserted that they were evidence that Charleston "does not forget—never can forget—her sons whose lives were offered a willing sacrifice for the principle of self-government ... [and] the man who, in his own

person, embodied this principle, and who expatriated himself in defence of the doctrine of State rights.”<sup>75</sup>

David Blight has argued that Jefferson Davis’s funeral was noteworthy for the way that its rituals helped to restore white southerners’ pride in themselves.<sup>76</sup> One of the most common themes in the many southern testimonials to Davis was indeed the conviction that local whites must surrender their self-respect if they failed to acknowledge their devotion to both him and the Confederate cause. They understood that many northerners wanted to depict Davis as an exceptional figure whose treasonous conduct in 1861 did not reflect accurately the thinking of most modern southerners. On the day of the funeral, newspaper editors, politicians, and memorial speakers across Dixie rejected this line of argument. Southerners, they insisted, were united in their loyalty not only to him but also to the immortal principles of self-government defended by the Confederacy.

## V

Northerners’ responses to these striking events were determined largely by partisan affiliation. Most Democratic papers responded with equanimity. The *Philadelphia Record*, for example, insisted that southern mourning for the president was “sincere,” free from “bitterness,” and “a vindication of the courageous honesty of purpose which impelled a whole people to try the terrible arbitrament of war.”<sup>77</sup> Many Republicans, however, reacted strongly and in most cases negatively to press reports of the funeral in New Orleans and the attendant obsequies in other towns and cities below the Mason-Dixon line. The sheer size of the crowds at these events was disconcerting enough, but even more shocking was the general praise for Davis and the Confederacy.

The dawning realization that Jefferson Davis’s death might actually spur the Lost Cause rather than deflate it was evident in much northern press coverage of the funeral, but nowhere more so than in the dispatches of Colonel Fred D. Mussey. Mussey, a Vermonter who had served under General Benjamin Butler in the Union army, compiled detailed dispatches on the funeral in his capacity as a special correspondent of Murat Halstead’s influential Republican organ, the *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*.<sup>78</sup> These appeared on the front page of the paper and provide historians with unique insights into proceedings.

The banner headlines attached to his reports revealed that Mussey’s editor expected the funeral to demonstrate that white southerners were now loyal to the Union. “In Somber Hue the Sunny Southland Puts on the Habiliments of Woe,” declared the *Gazette* empathetically on December 9.<sup>79</sup> The following day’s account was topped by reconciliatory headlines including “THE DEAD SOUTHRON—lies Peacefully in His Coffin, Surrounded by Flowers and Flags—The Confederate Banner Being Intertwined with the Stars and Stripes—When Davis is Buried the Cause He Represented Is Gone—Evidences That the Death of the Chieftain Will Tend to Closer Fraternity of North and South.”<sup>80</sup> At times Mussey was able to fit his reports into this purposeful linear narrative. But for the most part he seemed to be torn deeply about the state of public opinion in the sunny South.

In his first major dispatch dated December 8, Mussey reported that huge crowds were viewing the remains of the late president. The whole South, he wrote, was in mourning for “the worshiped chieftain of the dead Confederacy.” Although most local papers were “as a whole, quite conservative in expression,” he observed

forebodingly that “some of them go to the last extreme in praise of Davis and the cause he led. They say that the Northerners were the real rebels, that the South were overcome by mere averdupois, and that the cause of the Confederacy will yet triumph.”<sup>81</sup> In the next day’s dispatch, he noted again the throngs of people—an estimated forty thousand—crowding into the death chamber. He observed too the open display of two Confederate flags on both sides of the room and another one draped across the casket.<sup>82</sup> Ever watchful for signs of disloyalty, most Union veterans in the North remained wary of public displays of “rebel” symbols at this time. In 1887, GAR pressure had forced President Grover Cleveland to abandon plans to return captured Confederate battle flags in the hands of the U.S. government to the southern states.<sup>83</sup> Anxiously, Mussey speculated that most “demonstrations” in honor of Davis were made out of love for the cause he represented, rather than the man himself.<sup>84</sup>

On December 10, the day before the funeral, Mussey discovered more disturbing signs. Twenty thousand schoolchildren, he commented, had passed by the bier, brought there by adults to gaze upon “the greatest man America ever produced.” Such teaching, he pondered, “can not lead to good results. ... The fathers who encountered the battalions of the North knew better, but the boys may go wrong again on the idea that one Southerner can lick ten Yankees.” He was also perturbed by the appearance of a Confederate flag in Jackson Square, a silk banner tacked up by a group of white women. Perhaps remembering that General Butler had hanged a Confederate sympathizer for tearing down the Stars and Stripes in Union-occupied New Orleans, he sought reassurance from “the head of the Grand Army”—almost certainly Jacob Gray, the local GAR commander and funeral organizing committee member. The officer told Mussey what most northerners wanted to hear: “It is all right. Let those gentlemen display their old flag. It may do them some good, and it will do us no harm. The death of Davis will stop all this matter except, perhaps[,] in the case of some crank-heads here and in the North. So far as we are concerned the death of Jeff. Davis ends the war, and, privately, I wish he had died a good while ago.”<sup>85</sup>

The *Gazette* wrapped Mussey’s report of the funeral itself in more comforting headlines: “AMID CANNON’S ROAR—The Chief of the Confederacy is Laid in His Tomb.—The Body is Borne Wrapped in the Stars and Bars.—But the Stars and Stripes Float in the Breeze Overhead.” Perhaps influenced by his conversation with the GAR officer, the opening lines of Mussey’s account of the day’s events bolstered this narrative: “To-day Jefferson Davis and the Lost Cause were laid away to their final rest amid a combination of circumstances, incidents and surroundings hitherto unknown in this country.” He used the mix of flags in New Orleans to reassure concerned readers that “the tremendous demonstrations made by the Southern people in the obsequies of Mr Davis” should not worry them unduly. The Stars and Stripes, he asserted, could be seen everywhere “bound about the middle with black crepe.” Although Confederate flags were in evidence, he made it clear that they were generally furled. The exception was the appearance in the funeral procession of a blue flag bearing a single star, the so-called “bonnie blue flag,” which had been the unofficial first flag of the Confederacy. “This flag was hissed repeatedly,” maintained Mussey, “or rather the idea of its being carried unfurled at a funeral and as the procession turned into Canal Street from Royal it was gathered up and bound to the staff like the other flags.”<sup>86</sup>

The emotion displayed by people on the streets left the Yankee observer in no doubt that the mourning was genuine. “I can not conceive it possible,” he wrote, “that any public man ever went to his grave followed by such personal as well as public evidence of grief.” He noted that during the burial ceremony at Metairie, two or three “ladies”

near him “were crying as though they had lost their own father instead of the father of the Confederacy.” After the service, a conversation with a high-ranking Confederate officer seemed to confirm the idea that it was not just Davis but a cause that was being interred. “This is the burial day of the Confederacy,” the officer told him: “we make the last demonstration of any division by the binding of the [national] flag in the center that represents the war. To-morrow the black band disappears, the flag of the Union floats free, and the men of Maine and Massachusetts will not be more devoted to the beautiful flag of the Union than those of the Confederate States.”<sup>87</sup>

It was time now, decided Mussey, to look to the future. He considered (wrongly) that General Gordon, an imposing figure at the head of the parade, was a man “who represented the past and the war,” while other participants represented “the new South, its business developments which have gone on until New Orleans stands sixth in line in the list of cities in the amount of business.”<sup>88</sup> “To-day ...,” he concluded, “our fellow-citizens carried by the hundred the fair flag of our Nation, and it floated from every window and balcony along the line of the march. There seems to be little else left of the war now except the negro vote and the negro problem.”<sup>89</sup>

Had Fred Mussey’s dispatches stopped at this point, it would be an easy task to stitch them into a linear narrative of sectional reconciliation. However, he sent one last report from New Orleans written on the evening after the funeral. This one was headed “Not Buried Yet.” In it he revisited his initial anxieties about contemporary southern fealty to the nation and alleged that local people were as “bitter and disloyal” as they had been during the Civil War. “The idea that the Confederacy is buried may obtain for public consumption,” he alleged, “It is far from the heart and ideas of many eminent Southerners.” Although Mussey had felt conflicted about the significance of Davis’s funeral from the moment he arrived in New Orleans, his final verdict was determined by his survey of southern press coverage of the regionwide obsequies and by expressions of Lost Cause defiance made by southern politicians at these events. He drew readers’ attention, for example, to remarks uttered by James Taylor Ellyson, the mayor of Richmond, Virginia. Ellyson, a Confederate veteran, had commended the prominent role of young people in the mourning process. Southern children, wrote Mussey, “are being taught in every possible way to reverence the cause, the leaders and the principles of the Confederacy, and to believe that those principles must some day be vindicated, and the ruler of those leaders emulated.”<sup>90</sup> The intergenerational transmission of historical memories by southern whites, evident for all to see in the days after Jefferson Davis’s passing, indicated that the Lost Cause would outlive its original progenitors. For Republicans, especially middle-aged men and women of the wartime generation wedded to the Union cause, this was a reason for considerable concern.

Many northern Republicans, including those who hoped Davis’s death would allow the country to draw a line under wartime divisions, were shocked by the white South’s determination to mourn their president as an American hero. Party organs motivated by genuine outrage, as well as political cynicism, quickly denounced southern praise for Davis as “gush” and sounded sectional alarms.<sup>91</sup> One Republican editor warned readers that Davis’s death had “acted like a sudden breeze on a set of coals, sending a shower of treasonable sparks into the air.” “[E]ternal vigilance,” he stated, “is the price of responsibility.”<sup>92</sup> The *New York Mail and Express* observed that while Jefferson Davis had gone to his maker, “the rebellion which he led still lives in a large part of the country.”<sup>93</sup> The Philadelphia *Evening Bulletin* concurred. Not a single voice, complained the editor, had been raised against Davis’s “crimes.” Southerners thereby showed “that there is still in their hearts an abiding faith in the cause for which they fought. ...”<sup>94</sup> Inevitably,



several northern editors invited their readers to reflect critically on the fashionable concept of the New South in the wake of recent events. It seemed, suggested one newspaper, “to be strong chiefly in fiction.”<sup>95</sup>

White southerners closely monitored external responses to the death of their chieftain, seeking confirmation of their particular views on Jefferson Davis and his cause.<sup>96</sup> Some newspapers, particularly those eager to promote reconciliation, found it in the generous or at least balanced obituaries of metropolitan newspapers like the *New York World* and the *New York Times*.<sup>97</sup> It was not long, however, before southern Democratic editors were denouncing “radical” attacks on both the reputation of Jefferson Davis and their own conduct as the work of political animals.<sup>98</sup> The *Charleston News and Courier* was especially combative. Republican assaults, it averred, were intended “through the machinery of the Government, to fix the stigma of treason and rebellion on the Southern people.” All that southerners “demand,” it continued, “is recognition of their patriotic purpose in the act of Secession, that the Confederate war was a war for independence and not a conspiracy, and that having done their best endeavor in what they believed to be right and having failed, they are worthy to stand side by side as American citizens with those of other sections of the Union who fought for what they believed to be right and succeeded.” The South, said the *Courier*, was unmoved by northern vitriol because it owed nothing to the Republican Party. Southerners were not traitors: “we bide our time, fully confident that in the end the truth must prevail, and that the name of Jefferson Davis will forever illumine the scroll of fame as the patriotic leader of a patriotic people.”<sup>99</sup>

## VI

Jefferson Davis’s death and white southerners’ collective response to it did much to dispel misplaced northern illusions that reconciliation could be achieved on a quasi-religious basis of southern repentance for the alleged sins of secession and rebellion. Although Davis’s passing removed a lightning rod for northern sectionalism, many Republicans continued to view white southerners’ protestations of loyalty to the republic with deep suspicion even while they yearned for a reconciliation that would not be tantamount to surrender. Their anxieties were to the fore once again in May 1890 when vast crowds of southern whites descended on Richmond to attend the dedication of a gigantic equestrian statue of Robert E. Lee (fig. 5). The *Cincinnati Commercial’s* reporter Fred Mussey was again on hand to witness events. He watched files of Confederate veterans march past cheering spectators, noting worriedly that “the music of bands and bugle and drum corps, the tramp of infantry, the rumble of the artillery and the ceaseless and ear piercing rebel yell” were no longer “defiantly answered on the battlefield by the sturdy Yankee cheers and the deadly roar of Yankee artillery and musketry.” Invoking themes that he had first broached in his reports of Jefferson Davis’s funeral, he observed particularly the prevalence of unfurled Confederate flags and “the thoroughness with which the children of the South are being educated to belief in the ‘cause,’ and the idea that they must sustain and if necessary fight for the ‘cause’ for which their fathers fought.”<sup>100</sup> Although the Republican press was not united in its condemnation of the events in Richmond (for Lee’s acceptance of U.S. citizenship after the war rendered him a less controversial figure than Jefferson Davis), the raw power of the Lost Cause celebration concerned many northern editors. The Chicago *Inter Ocean*, for example, joined Mussey in registering its dismay



Fig. 5 Robert E. Lee Statue, Richmond, VA, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2016796908/>.

that southern whites were determined to honor “the theory of secession and regret the loss of power to accomplish it.”<sup>101</sup>

The three-and-a-half-year period between Jefferson Davis’s death and his final interment in Richmond, however, marked a turning point in the fraught process of sectional reconciliation. Republican efforts to revive the party’s black voting base in the South, motivated by a combination of war-born ideals and cynical political strategy, kept sectional tensions alive during 1890. Northern congressmen, some of them Union veterans, conjured collective memories of the Union cause to justify their support for a relatively moderate federal elections bill, while their Democratic opponents marshaled equally powerful recollections of Reconstruction to oppose the “force” legislation that was finally defeated in the Senate in early 1891.<sup>102</sup> Pro-silver western Republicans played a key role in scuppering the bill. One of them, Senator William Stewart of Nevada, commented that its defeat had “terminated the unnatural strife between the North and the South.”<sup>103</sup> His observation was not entirely accurate. Albion Tourgée’s subsequent campaign to create a new equal rights organization, the National

Citizens' Rights Association, garnered considerable support from white northerners, including many Union veterans disillusioned with what they saw as the Republican Party's abandonment of loyal blacks.<sup>104</sup> However, the GOP leadership's realization, hastened by heavy defeats in the midterm elections of 1890, that further efforts to protect the constitutional rights of African Americans would prove counterproductive in a political climate increasingly conducive to North-South amity undoubtedly took much of the heat out of what remained of the sectional conflict. The election of Grover Cleveland for a second term in November 1892 confirmed the dwindling appeal of Civil War-related issues, the fragility of the Republican base, and the urgent need to broaden the party's appeal to a rapidly changing and expanding electorate.

If any single event could have stirred the embers of sectionalism, it would surely have been the final interment of the arch-traitor himself in Richmond's Hollywood Cemetery.<sup>105</sup> The former Confederate capital had faced stiff competition from a number of southern cities for the privilege of providing the president's last resting place, but in the end Varina Davis decided that her husband should be buried in the city where he had given most to his people. Davis's coffin was transported slowly by rail from New Orleans to Richmond in late May 1893, enabling the former president to lie in state in Montgomery, Atlanta, and Raleigh before his corpse was reinterred amid more Lost Cause pomp in Virginia. Just as they had done in 1889 and 1890, white southerners turned out in huge numbers to signal their affection for the Lost Cause.

Northern commentary on these events shadowed that of December 1889, but it was more limited and, on the whole, more muted—evidence of a growing, though by no means complete, acceptance that white southerners' open celebration of the Lost Cause was not a barrier to sectional reconciliation, much less a serious danger to the republic. A few Republican newspapers continued to breath sectional hostility. The *Philadelphia Press*, for example, denounced the "shameless spectacle" of southerners "flaunting their naked disloyalty to the Union," adding gratuitously that "[t]he swamps of the Mississippi would have afforded a much more fitting resting place for one of the most odious characters in the history of the American people."<sup>106</sup> One of the most outspoken condemnations of the Richmond pageantry was delivered by former Ohio governor Joseph B. Foraker, an anti-Harrison Republican and Union veteran who was also a strong supporter of black rights (fig. 6). Foraker asked a large Memorial Day crowd in Brooklyn that "[i]f Jeff Davis is all that this ridiculous demonstration implies and is entitled to live in history as a great hero, to what place in history ought we to assign Abraham Lincoln?" The barbed question drew applause from spectators, as did the speaker's warning that the Richmond ceremonies were intended to convey the impression "that the war was a sort of family quarrel, and that so far as real principles were concerned, one side was not more than half right and the other side not more than half wrong."<sup>107</sup>

Such concerns over white southerners' refusal to renounce their rebellious past were increasingly confined to a segment of the North's shrinking veteran community. Most major newspapers devoted relatively little coverage to Jefferson Davis's reburial. If they did notice it, they often described it as evidence of northern magnanimity or conceded white southerners' right to commemorate their heroes. The response of the *New York Tribune* was not untypical of the mainstream Republican press, which was now much less heavily invested in the use of sectionalism for political purposes. Despite reporting a massive parade of Confederate veterans through the streets of Richmond, the paper proudly observed that Democrats, normally so keen to denounce Republican sectionalism, were disappointed at the paucity of it on this occasion.<sup>108</sup> In a report that would

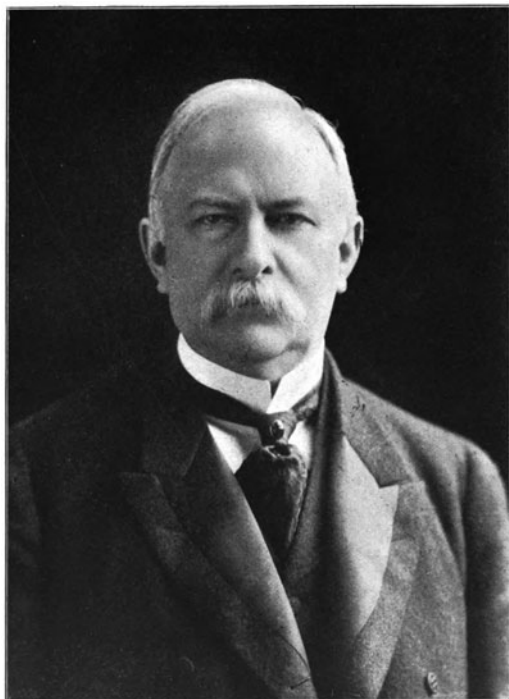


Fig. 6 Joseph Foraker as governor of Ohio, Wikipedia image, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph\\_B.\\_Foraker](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_B._Foraker).

have been music to the ears of any Lost Cause critic of money-grubbing Yankees, the *Tribune* even contrasted what it regarded as southerners' understandable desire to commemorate their wartime heroes with the unconscionable decision to run a trolley line through the Gettysburg battlefield.<sup>109</sup> The *Boston Advertiser* viewed events with similar equanimity. Demonstrations of support for Davis and the Confederacy, observed the paper, were hardly in "good taste" but there was no need for northerners to be "excited" about them. Urging empathy for fellow Americans, the *Advertiser* added that it was perfectly possible for "our misguided ... brethren" to cherish memories of the late war "without thereby indulging in sentiments that are incompatible with genuine patriotism."<sup>110</sup>

Northern responses to Jefferson Davis's death provide historians with a valuable snapshot of sectional reconciliation—one that confirms the view of Caroline Janney, John Neff, and other scholars that it was a protracted process in which many northerners hesitated to participate. White southerners' public embrace of the Lost Cause as well as Davis revealed their desire for northerners to accept them as principled and courageous Americans who had fought for a cause of equal moral value to that of the Union. While most of their northern Democratic allies were willing to accept them on this basis, Republican politicians, northern black leaders, and—crucially because they constituted one of the GOP's major constituencies—very significant numbers of white Union veterans were determined to stand their ground.

However, this essay also demonstrates that historians including David Blight, Nina Silber, and K. Stephen Prince are right to observe northerners' mounting acceptance of sectional reconciliation on terms broadly acceptable to southern whites. Some

Republican newspapers did raise sectional alarms when Davis was interred permanently in Richmond in May 1893.<sup>111</sup> But by this time the tide of North-South amity was running strongly. In the second half of the 1890s, Republican leaders, convinced that voting rights enforcement was both impossible to achieve and most likely a vote loser, embraced a reconciliatory discourse, best evidenced when President William McKinley sought, and to an extent secured, southern backing for the war against Spain and his subsequent policy of empire.<sup>112</sup> By 1898 the die was cast. Although most Union veterans continued to reject the moral equivalence of the Union and Confederate causes until the day they died, the majority of them joined their fellow northerners in accepting southerners' claims to be loyal, brave, and patriotic fellow Americans at the precise moment when those same southerners were disfranchising, segregating, and murdering African Americans with impunity. Jefferson Davis was thus finally laid to rest when his dream of a white-supremacist republic was beginning to bear its ugly fruit.

## Notes

1 *Morning Star* (Wilmington, NC), Dec. 10, 1889.

2 *New York Daily Tribune*, Dec. 9, 1889.

3 *Troy (New York) Weekly Times*, Dec. 25, 1889.

4 Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865–1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001). Silber updated her views in “Reunion and Reconciliation, Reviewed and Reconsidered,” *Journal of American History* 103 (June 2016): 59–83. In this essay, she continued to represent the process of North-South amity as a predominantly cultural one by urging scholars to attend to “the imagined reconstitution of the nation” in the late nineteenth century (80), while simultaneously emphasizing that reunion/reconciliation was “chaotic, attenuated, and contested” (67).

5 K. Stephen Prince, *Stories of the South: Race and the Reconstruction of Southern Identity, 1865–1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 246.

6 William A. Blair, *Cities of the Dead: Contesting the Memory of the Civil War in the South, 1865–1914* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); John R. Neff, *Honoring the Civil War Dead: Commemoration and the Problem of Reconciliation* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005); Caroline E. Janney, *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); M. Keith Harris, *Across the Bloody Chasm: The Culture of Commemoration Among Civil War Veterans* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014). For a recent assessment of modern scholarship on sectional reconciliation, see Robert J. Cook, “The Quarrel Forgotten: Toward a Clearer Understanding of Sectional Reconciliation,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 6 (Sept. 2016): 413–36.

7 Scholarship on the death of Jefferson Davis is limited to a single book chapter and a few pages scattered in biographies and histories of sectional reconciliation and the Lost Cause. Collins, *The Death and Resurrection of Jefferson Davis* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 49–85, is a useful but predominantly descriptive account of the president's passing and some of the responses to it. Although the author acknowledged some hostile northern reactions, he contended that these were “relatively few in number” and treated the event as evidence that sectional reconciliation was well underway. *Ibid.*, 57. This thesis was broadly consistent with Blight's contention in *Race and Reunion* that the forces driving better feelings between northerners and southerners had become unstoppable by the late 1880s. Blight devoted only a few lines to Davis's death, interpreting it as “signal” evidence of southern whites' growing determination “to proclaim the glory of their failed revolution and to refurbish their self-respect.” *Ibid.*, 266–67. Paul H. Buck, *The Road to Reunion 1865–1900* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co, 1937), 254, claimed that “An epoch ended with his [Davis's] death” because “[h]e alone seemed to represent a past that could not be assimilated into the present.” Buck, however, noted the continuing power of sectionalism in American politics until the early 1890s. For Caroline Janney, the most important aspect of Davis's death was the “torrent

of vitriol” that it attracted from Federal veterans’ groups like the Grand Army of the Republic. Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*, 182–83. Unlike Donald Collins, Neff portrayed southern mourning for Davis as predominantly sectional in nature and providing “a foundation for a particularly aggressive resurgence in Southern rhetoric and commemorative activities.” Neff, *Honoring the Civil War Dead*, 174. Of Davis’s biographers, Hudson Strode, *Jefferson Davis, Tragic Hero: The Last Twenty-Five Years, 1865–1889* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964), 507–26, provided the fullest description of the president’s funeral. He based his erroneous contention that “[t]he majority of the leading Northern papers ... were not only fair, but admiring in their comments [on the deceased]” on evidence from two Democratic and one independent newspaper in New York. William J. Cooper, *Jefferson Davis, American* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), the standard modern biography, provided no coverage of the rituals and responses that followed his subject’s demise.

8 I chose these newspapers and journals using a combination of informed scholarship and random selection based on the availability of Gilded Age newspapers in the Library of Congress and on the Readex Early American Newspapers, 1800–1901 digital website. I consulted small-town and major urban papers, the circulation of which varied greatly from a few thousand to hundreds of thousands in the case of mass-circulation papers like the *New York World*. Typically, their content was determined by their partisan affiliation. The majority of those whose partisan identity could be identified were Republican but around a third were Democrat or Independent. Four were African American newspapers.

9 Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 260. On the postbellum memory work of elite ex-Confederate women, see Blair, *Cities of the Dead*, 61–62, 79–87; and Caroline E. Janney, *Burying the Dead But Not the Past: Ladies’ Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

10 On the UDC, see especially Karen L. Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003).

11 Gaines Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865 to 1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 104–44.

12 On the Lost Cause as a religiously-infused civil religion, see Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865–1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980).

13 Prince, *Stories of the South*, 9.

14 On Davis’s later years see Strode, *Tragic Hero*; and Cooper, *Jefferson Davis*, 611–702.

15 For a detailed account of the Young Pretender’s dispiriting career in continental Europe after the Jacobite defeat at Culloden, see Frank McLynn, *Bonnie Prince Charlie: Charles Edward Stuart* (1988; Pimlico ed.: London, 2003), 308–550.

16 *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, Aug. 19, 1873.

17 Rebecca Edwards notes that political cartoonist Thomas Nast first drew an elephant, “an animal with a proverbially long memory,” to depict the Republican Party in 1876. He did so in order “to represent Republicans’ fixation on Union victory.” Edwards, *New Spirits: Americans in the Gilded Age 1865–1905* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 20.

18 Quoted in Michael F. Holt, *By One Vote: The Disputed Presidential Election of 1876* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 68. Holt’s analysis of the 1876 election highlights the Republicans’ purposeful use of Civil War memories in the campaign. Blaine’s vengeful rhetoric was doubtless intended to remind northern voters that Davis should have joined Henry Wirz, the camp superintendent hanged in November 1865 for the mistreatment of Union POWs at Andersonville, on the scaffold.

19 Jefferson Davis, *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government* (2 vols., 1881; repr. New York: T. Yoseloff, 1958), 2:764.

20 On the construction of this once robust narrative see Robert J. Cook, *Civil War Memories: Contesting the Past in the United States Since 1865* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), 69–72; and Barbara A. Gannon, *Americans Remember Their Civil War* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2017), 19–36.

21 Rossiter Johnson, “Factitious History,” *North American Review* 133 (Sept. 1881): 302–14.

22 “A DEAD HERO AND A LIVE JACKASS” (cartoon), *Puck*, June 22, 1881, 267.

23 Jefferson Davis, speech of March 10, 1884, in *The Papers of Jefferson Davis*, ed. Lynda Lasswell Crist (14 vols.; Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971–2015), 14:220.

24 For an account of Davis’s successful visits to Alabama and Georgia, see Collins, *Death and Resurrection*, 25–48.

25 On the political context of Wounded Knee, see Heather Cox Richardson, *Wounded Knee: Party Politics and the Road to an American Massacre* (New York: Basic Books, 2010). Nelson A. Miles, the U.S. military

commander in South Dakota at the time of the massacre, had been commandant at Fort Monroe when Jefferson Davis was incarcerated there after the Civil War.

26 Bruce E. Baker, *What Reconstruction Meant: Historical Memory in the American South* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 23.

27 On the close linkage between Republicans and veterans in the Gilded Age, see Richard Jensen, *The Winning of the Midwest: Social and Political Conflict, 1888–1896* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 22–26. Republican Party appeals to veterans were particularly evident in the swing state of Indiana in the 1888 election.

28 *Aberdeen (South Dakota) Daily News*, Dec. 6, 1889; *Minneapolis Tribune*, Dec. 6, 1889; *Chicago Herald*, Dec. 6, 1889; *Topeka State Journal*, Dec. 6, 1889.

29 *Sun* (New York), Dec. 7, 1889.

30 *New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette* (Concord), Dec. 12, 1889.

31 *Boston Daily Globe*, Dec. 7, 1889.

32 *World* (New York), Dec. 7, 1889.

33 *New York Herald*, Dec. 7, 1889. See also *Boston Daily Globe*, Dec. 7, 1889.

34 *World* (New York), Dec. 7, 1889.

35 *Commercial Advertiser* (New York), Dec. 6, 1889. The *Philadelphia Public Ledger* provided extensive front-page coverage of Davis's death and the many responses to it, but initially left its readers to make up their own minds about the meaning of events. *Public Ledger*, Dec. 7, 1889.

36 *Evening Post* (New York), Dec. 6, 1889; *New York Times*, Dec. 7, 1889.

37 *Nation*, Dec. 12, 1889.

38 *Harper's Weekly*, Dec. 14, 1889.

39 *Philadelphia North American*, Dec. 7, 1889.

40 *New York Tribune*, Dec. 7, 1889.

41 *Daily Inter-Ocean* (Chicago), Dec. 7, 1889.

42 *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Dec. 7, 1889.

43 Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 183–85; Benjamin G. Cloyd, *Haunted By Atrocity: Civil War Prisons in American Memory* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 31–82; Harris, *Across the Bloody Chasm*, 20–26.

44 Strode, *Jefferson Davis*, 501.

45 On Union veterans' often difficult postwar lives, see especially Donald R. Shaffer, *After the Glory: The Struggle of Black Civil War Veterans* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004); James Marten, *The Lives of Union and Confederate Veterans in Gilded Age America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); and Brian Matthew Jordan, *Marching Home: Union Veterans and Their Unending Civil War* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2015).

46 *Omaha Republican*, Dec. 8, 1889.

47 *Daily Kennebec Journal* (Augusta, ME), Dec. 7, 1889.

48 Stuart McConnell, *Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic, 1865–1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992) is the standard modern account of the GAR; but see also Barbara A. Gannon, *The Won Cause: Black and White Comradeship in the Grand Army of the Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

49 *National Tribune*, Dec. 12, 1889.

50 Quoted in Harris, *Across the Bloody Chasm*, 54.

51 Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 244–51.

52 Ambrose Bierce, "On Jefferson Davis's Death" in *Phantoms of a Blood-Stained Period: The Complete Civil War Writings of Ambrose Bierce*, eds. Russell Duncan and David J. Klooster (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 330, 331.

53 *Daily Inter-Ocean* (Chicago), Dec. 14, 1889. On Tourgée's continuing battle to promote equal rights for African Americans, see Mark Elliott, *Color-Blind Justice: Albion Tourgée and the Quest for Racial Justice from the Civil War to Plessy v Ferguson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); and Carolyn L. Karcher, *A Refugee from His Race: Albion W. Tourgée and His Fight Against White Supremacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

54 *Detroit Plain dealer*, Dec. 13, 1889.

55 *Cleveland Gazette*, Dec. 14, 1889.

56 *Leavenworth Advocate*, Dec. 14, 1889.

- 57 *New York Age*, Dec. 14, 1889. Davis addressed his last words to his wife, Varina, as she tried to administer medicine. Collins, *Death and Resurrection*, 52. Although Fortune chose to interpret them for public effect as a belated sign of repentance, it seems more likely that Davis was simply declaring his wish to die. The president had never previously apologized for his political conduct, and it would have been out of character for him to engage in a death-bed conversion that would have cast doubt on his own whole career. As Karl Guthke has observed, the last words of great men have often assumed importance as proof of a good life lived consistently. Guthke, *Last Words: Variations on a Theme in Cultural History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 50–51.
- 58 *Daily Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco), Dec. 6, 1889.
- 59 Quoted in *Aberdeen (South Dakota) Daily News*, Dec. 7, 1889.
- 60 *Bismarck Daily Tribune*, Dec. 8, 1889.
- 61 *New York Daily Tribune*, Dec. 7, 1889, Dec. 8, 1889.
- 62 On this theme, see especially Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970).
- 63 *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Dec. 7, 1889.
- 64 *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Dec. 7, 1889.
- 65 Quoted in *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Dec. 10, 1889.
- 66 Surprisingly the standard history of New Orleans at this time, Joy J. Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age: Politics and Urban Progress 1880–1896* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press for the Louisiana Historical Association, 1969), makes no mention of Davis’s funeral nor, aside from a brief discussion of Pierre G. T. Beauregard’s postwar career, does it have much to say about the city’s importance as a center of Lost Cause activity.
- 67 The New Orleans *Picayune’s* estimated total attendance was 140,000: 18,000 on the first day of public viewing; 40,000 on the second; 20,000 on the third; and nearly 70,000 on the fourth; *Daily Picayune*, Dec. 11, 1889. Although these figures were probably inflated, there is no question that tens of thousands of people viewed Davis’s remains. In his 1964 biography, Hudson Strode observed that “[n]ewspaper estimates of the number that passed the bier in three days varied widely; one exaggerated report put the figure at 150,000, but none was under 50,000.” Strode, *Jefferson Davis*, 520.
- 68 *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans), Dec. 8, 1889.
- 69 *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans), Dec. 8, 1889.
- 70 Collins, *Death and Resurrection*, 62.
- 71 *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Dec. 10, 1889. The row inside the Grand Army elicited President Harrison’s only public comment on the burgeoning controversy over Davis’s death. It came while he was en route from Washington to Chicago to attend a concert to mark the opening of the Chicago Auditorium. Asked by a reporter in Pittsburgh about “the propriety” of Federal veterans marching in the funeral parade, he responded guardedly that “the G.A.R. must regulate their own conduct.” It is reasonable to assume that his private view on how to respond to Davis’s passing was consistent with the decision of his Union comrade, Redfield Proctor, not to lower the flag on the war department to half-mast. *Louisville Commercial*, Dec. 11, 1889.
- 72 *Philadelphia North American*, Dec. 11, 1889.
- 73 Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*, 183.
- 74 *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans), Dec. 12, 1889.
- 75 *News and Courier* (Charleston, SC), Dec. 12, 1889.
- 76 Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 266–67.
- 77 *Philadelphia Record*, Dec. 11, 1889.
- 78 For a brief obituary of Mussey, see *New York Times*, June 29, 1897.
- 79 *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, Dec. 9, 1889.
- 80 *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, Dec. 10, 1889.
- 81 *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, Dec. 9, 1889.
- 82 One of these Confederate flags can be seen clearly in a photograph of Davis’s coffin inside City Hall. See New Orleans Public Library, “Jefferson Davis Lies in State,” <http://cdm16880.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/p16880coll18/id/10> (accessed Aug. 25, 2017).
- 83 Cook, *Civil War Memories*, 86.
- 84 *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, Dec. 10, 1889.
- 85 *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, Dec. 11, 1889.



- 86 *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, Dec. 12, 1889.
- 87 *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, Dec. 12, 1889.
- 88 Gordon's career as a New South businessman in the 1880s is detailed in Ralph Lowell Eckert, *John Brown Gordon: Soldier, Southerner, American* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 239–67.
- 89 *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, Dec. 12, 1889.
- 90 *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, Dec. 13, 1889.
- 91 *Evening Bulletin* (Philadelphia), Dec. 10, 1889.
- 92 *Rochester (New York) Democrat and Chronicle*, Dec. 23, 1889. The paper's name belied its Republican affiliation.
- 93 *Mail and Express* (New York) quoted in *Daily Register* (Mobile), Dec. 11, 1889.
- 94 *Evening Bulletin* (Philadelphia), Dec. 12, 1889.
- 95 *Morning Oregonian* (Portland), Dec. 20, 1889.
- 96 See, for example, *Daily Register* (Mobile), Dec. 11, 1889, Dec. 12, 1889, *News and Courier* (Charleston), second ed., Dec. 8, 1889.
- 97 *Constitution* (Atlanta), Dec. 8, 1889, *Louisville Commercial*, Dec. 9, 1889.
- 98 *New Mississippian* (Jackson), Dec. 11, 1889.
- 99 *News and Courier* (Charleston), Dec. 10, 1889.
- 100 *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, May 30, 1890.
- 101 *Daily Inter-Ocean* (Chicago), May 31, 1890.
- 102 J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880–1910* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), 20–23.
- 103 Quoted in Charles W. Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic: The Republican Party and the Southern Question, 1869–1900* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 259.
- 104 Karcher, *A Refugee from His Race*, 149–95. Karcher notes that 80 percent of the NCRA's estimated 250,000 members were white northerners, significant numbers of them Union veterans and students. The organization proved short lived, partly because of opposition from some black leaders.
- 105 The best account of Davis's reinterment is Collins, *Death and Resurrection*, 87–129.
- 106 *Philadelphia Press* quoted in *Daily Inter-Ocean* (Chicago), June 2, 1893.
- 107 *New York Herald*, May 31, 1893.
- 108 *New York Tribune*, June 1, 1893.
- 109 *New York Tribune*, June 2, 1889. The trolley was the brainchild of William H. Tipton, a Gettysburg politician and photographer, who saw it as a way of encouraging more tourists to visit the battlefield. Opposition from veterans' groups and other interested parties resulted in a U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1896 affirming the federal government's right to protect the Union shrine for the purposes of patriotic education, but the trolley continued to operate on a slightly different route until the advent of the automobile. Jim Weeks, *Gettysburg: Memory, Market, and an American Shrine* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 71–72, 88–89.
- 110 *Boston Daily Advertiser*, June 1, 1893.
- 111 Collins, *Death and Resurrection*, 123–24.
- 112 Patrick J. Kelly, "The Election of 1896 and the Restructuring of Civil War Memory" in *The Memory of the Civil War in American Culture*, eds. Alice Fahs and Joan Waugh (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 180–212; Cook, *Civil War Memories*, 110–12.