

“PHYSICIANS OF THE PUBLIC WEAL”: JEFFERSON DAVIS, HIS CABINET,
AND CONFEDERATE IDENTITY, NATIONALISM, AND MORALE

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DEDICATION

Soli Deo Gloria—Colossians 3:17

ABSTRACT

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The Confederate States of America was dependent on the success of its military. Civilian leaders stood behind the military, creating and dictating policy at all levels of Confederate society. President Jefferson Davis assembled a Cabinet designed to unite separate States behind a single national government. Composed of state politicians of varying influence, the Cabinet of Jefferson Davis failed to engage in defining a national Confederate identity. Additionally, these men focused on the administrative work of the new government, leaving the creation of national identity and loyalty to President Davis who was consistently undermined by military failures.

Examining the papers, diaries, speeches, and letters of Jefferson Davis and members of his Cabinet (and other observers of life in the Confederate capital) revealed that the Cabinet engaged in no public statements of national purpose. Additionally, Cabinet officers and key government leaders confided to private diaries and journals their belief as early as 1862 that the Confederate national experiment was doomed.

Nationalism in the Confederacy was strong, relying on a pre-existing American nationalism, redirected to the new Confederate government. The Confederate nation was tied to the fight for self-government epitomized in the mind of Davis in the American Revolution. Firmly engaged in a struggle to *preserve* the past gains of the Revolution, Davis could never articulate a forward-looking national identity that inspired loyalty. As vast portions of the Confederacy fell to Union occupation, his words rang hollow. Efforts

beginning in 1864 to redefine Confederate national identity based on independence removed the homogenizing effect of slavery and race.

In Richmond, Virginia, the Confederate capital, Varina Davis, the wives of Cabinet officers, and other elite women engaged in the extra-official politics of social functions. In the early years of American independence, similar social functions hosted by First Ladies helped to give the young nation a sense of legitimacy, especially on the world stage. In the Confederacy, a lukewarm First Lady and a sickly President limited social functions. When these functions did occur, they exacerbated class tensions.

KEY WORDS: Jefferson Davis, Cabinet, Confederate States of America, Nationalism.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Of the many myths surrounding Lincoln, that he was a self-made man of the frontier seems to be the most pervasive and long-lasting. William W. Freehling has written of Lincoln: “Fellow frontiersmen, loving his company, hated to see him sink...prov[ing] that self-helpers’ skills must include aptitude for luring assistance.” Lincoln’s story demonstrates that “no one rises altogether unaided.”¹ The work of historians, especially graduate students working on theses during a pandemic, teaches a similar lesson.

First, glory goes only to God—*Soli Deo Gloria*.

Next, many librarians and archivists assisted me in ways that they might never know or understand. Some of them, I regret, are unknown to me. Rickman Library on the campus of Southern Wesleyan University is small, but I have never known a more kind and helpful group of librarians. Joni Addis, Technical Services Librarian with Rickman Library, has been helping me gather books from across the state of South Carolina and the country since I first began my undergraduate experience in Fall 2014. Without her expertise and professional connections, many key sources would have been out of my reach. I’m thankful for Joni’s help to satisfy my seemingly insatiable thirst for more books. (I tell myself and library staff that there are worse addictions).

Renna Redd, Interlibrary Loan Librarian at Clemson University, was essential in helping me get my hands on Dunbar Rowland’s *Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist*. It required some creativity given safety measures due to COVID that limited library access, but I’m thankful for the flexibility she showed on more than one occasion to get me

¹ William W. Freehling, *Becoming Lincoln* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2018), first quote is on p. 82, the second is p. 135.

resources I needed in a safe and timely manner. Jason Tomberlin and Matthew Turi, Librarians at Wilson Library (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill), met with me over Zoom and were immeasurably helpful. They, too, showed kind flexibility to help me get digital access to essential manuscript collections. Mr. Turi especially directed me to valuable resources that were vital to the argument I make in this thesis.

In the Summer of 2017, I traveled to Rice University to examine the Jefferson Davis papers in Woodson Research Center of Fondren Library. At the time, I was working on my undergraduate thesis. It was my first time exposed to primary source materials and the intricate world of archivists. I was incredibly thankful for their care and kindness to me then. Meeting Lynda Crist, editor of the *Papers of Jefferson Davis* (LSU Press) was a highlight of the trip. Her feedback, thoughts, and insight were invaluable. Though they did not help directly on this thesis, I am grateful for their help on the first which this one builds upon.

My thesis advisor and committee members have been exceptional. Dr. Brian Jordan spoke to me early in my graduate school search. As a remote (non-traditional) student, he made me feel at ease and welcomed. His attention to me made me feel I was a valuable member of the Graduate School even though I was a time-zone and several states away. I am especially appreciative that he entrusted me with several opportunities to submit book reviews for *The Civil War Monitor*. His advice and professional connections were and are much appreciated. Dr. Thomas Cox was the first professor I had in my graduate program. Again, I was made to feel valued, and my nerves put to rest as he challenged me to think more expansively about the American founding and the Early Republic period. I took a women's history course with Dr. Nancy Baker. In all

honesty, I was not expecting to enjoy the course, but Dr. Baker made the subject interesting and was always supportive of my work in the class. She set up a phone call to help me better understand Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*; she tried admirably, but I might need more work yet! Her influence challenged me to reconceptualize Confederate politics and the Cabinet by incorporating the experiences and voices of elite women.

Last, but assuredly not least, many thanks for my family. My in-laws, Ted and Lori, allowed me the space to read and write even as they were moving and beginning the process of building a house. My parents, as ever, were supportive. My mom returned to college herself as I embarked on graduate studies, and I am proud of her accomplishments. My brother, Josiah, finished high school as this thesis was being wrapped up. His intelligence surpasses mine, and I am especially thankful for our conversations about the nature and purpose of knowledge. My sister, Abbey, finished her RN degree and accepted her dream job as I was finishing this work. Her support came most unconventionally in the form of well-intentioned jokes about history and my fondness for dead people.

My beautiful wife, Emily, does not like history. She much prefers the logic and orderliness of math. The events of 2020 turned our discussions more and more towards politics, and especially Confederate memorialization. Through these, I choose to believe, she recognized more the importance of the past (though the inevitable human irrationality still drives her crazy). I find myself living more in the abstract world of ideas while she daily goes out to *live* with the harsh realities and heartbreak she finds in her fourth-grade students. I will forever admire and respect her for that. She sacrificed the most during my

time in graduate school and especially during my work on this thesis. Her sacrifices are not easily forgotten and so greatly appreciated.

Caleb W. Southern

Central, SC

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PREFACE

This thesis began with a curiosity and an undergraduate “answer” to that curiosity that I wanted to explore in more depth. My freshman year of high school, I carried around Doris Kearns Goodwin’s lengthy study of Abraham Lincoln and his Cabinet: *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (Simon & Schuster, 2005). I was introduced, for the first time, to men such as Secretary of State William H. Seward; Treasury Secretary Salmon P. Chase; Attorney General Edward Bates; Postmaster General Montgomery Blair; and Secretaries of War Simon Cameron and Edwin Stanton. These men were much more well-established than Lincoln. Their political careers had been full and controversial, explaining partly how Lincoln won the Republican nomination. Goodwin claims that Lincoln’s political genius is revealed in his gathering of these “superior” men around him in his Cabinet to advise and direct the Union war effort.

The curiosity was simple: who made up the Cabinet of Lincoln’s southern “foil.” Jefferson Davis? The situation in the Confederacy seems to be the opposite faced by Lincoln. Davis was the seasoned politician; his Cabinet officers were the local, state, and regional novices. Some had made it to the United States senate in the antebellum period, but the majority had been active in local or state politics with little national following or attention. These men were at the pinnacle of Confederate civilian leadership. Yet, they are little remembered nationally or regionally, in the American South. Part of the answer is obvious: they were leaders of the losing side, and their lives are not immortalized in our national myth(s). Their words have the hollow ring of a foreign language, trapped in the context of a slave-holding elite regime of which they were members.

I began the hunt for sources. I found only two. Burton Hendrick wrote a book about the Davis Cabinet in 1939. Five years later, the only study of the Confederate Cabinet published by a university press was released: Rembert Patrick's *Jefferson Davis and His Cabinet* (LSU Press, 1944; reprinted 1961). The field was relatively empty, and I was ready to begin satisfying my own curiosity. Patrick's study of the Cabinet was sufficient for the averagely curious, but my curiosity was not so easily assuaged. I couldn't shake the feeling that there was more to be said. For instance, Patrick makes almost no sustained study of politics within the Confederacy and the Cabinet. Lincoln's genius was evidenced through the way he balanced men of various and opposing political leanings and inclinations. According to the literature that then existed on the Confederate Cabinet, Davis did not have a similar situation. His Cabinet operated almost hilariously smoothly (except for one incidence with Secretary of War George W. Randolph). I didn't buy this, and I dove deeper, first in a paper for an undergraduate southern history class, then as an undergraduate thesis.

As I was finishing my thesis, I discovered a new book: *Confederate Cabinet Departments and Secretaries* by Dennis Peterson (McFarland, 2016). I thought that another scholar had discovered a similar curiosity and had beaten me to "finish line." Instead, Peterson's book was a helpful gathering of information. He made no new interpretive claims. I continued to feel "vindicated" that I had discovered an untapped Civil War historical mine—no small feat! As I entered graduate school, I put Davis and his Cabinet aside to focus on my degree-required courses. When the time came to prepare a thesis, I had a ready-made topic. However, at this next level, I wanted to take my analysis a level deeper.

Toward the end of one undergraduate semester, as I was getting more free time, I picked up a book that had been on my shelf for some time. Brian R. Dirck's *Lincoln & Davis: Imagining America, 1809-1865* (University Press of Kansas, 2001) is a thoughtful examination of both Lincoln's and Davis's nationalisms. Dirck made a claim that I had never thought about or taken seriously: "The result is not a zero-sum game between a Lincolnian and Davisonian perspective on national identity; rather, the *two together and necessary* parts of that rich and complex American nationalism that has so often defied simple categorization."¹ It was so obvious to me that because Lincoln was the patron god of American national civil religion that Davis must be nation's arch fiend. Instead, Dirck was painting a nuanced picture in which Davis was not all terrible—or at least he had some lessons that should be learned and not thrown out with the bath water, so to speak.

As I began to work on my thesis, a global pandemic shut the world down. In our isolation, Americans did much reflection. Perhaps even more than the pandemic, Americans began to "reckon" with their nation's history of slavery and racism—and the unfortunate ways these institutions may still be affecting us in the present. The Confederacy and the Jim Crow-era monuments raised to that failed nation came under renewed scholar and public scrutiny. In this milieu, I wanted to understand how the Confederates identified themselves. I wanted to know how Confederates viewed their nation. To embark on this journey, I used Davis and his Cabinet officers to gage the various ways that Confederate leaders defined their nation.

¹ Brian R. Dirck, *Lincoln & Davis: Imagining America, 1809-1865* (University Press of Kansas, 2001), 246. *Emphasis added.*

What struck me as I examined diaries, speeches, letters, and official papers was the mundane work of the Cabinet. Whereas we read a dramatic, glorious meaning *back* into the Civil War, Confederate civilian leaders were more focused on their day-to-day *paperwork*. The work was almost anticlimactic for a young southern historian trying to understand that ways past southerners had built the present South. I found almost no public comments by the Cabinet officers. Their private diaries and letters revealed little else of dramatic note. Instead, early on, they wrote of their fears that their new nation was doomed. Before morale failed across the Union-occupied portions of the Confederacy, I wonder if it didn't first fail in the government officers in Richmond.

Jefferson Davis stands out as a bright light in opposition to the doom and gloom of his cabinet. Davis was vigorous in defining his new nation. But, as many scholars have noted, these definitions (1) relied on the past and (2) defined the Confederacy *against* something, not *for* something. Lincoln spoke dramatically of the Union's exceptionalism and the "vast future" that Union had in global affairs. The message of Davis, again, was almost anticlimactic: The Confederacy wanted only to secede in peace and continue living in the independence established by the American Revolutionaries. Scholars have come forward recently to describe the harrowing future that Confederates planned to create, but neither Jefferson Davis nor, especially, his Cabinet officers described this future in vivid, moving detail as did Lincoln.²

² Michael T. Bernath, *Confederate Minds: The Struggle for Intellectual Independence in the Civil War South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Ann L. Tucker, *Newest Born of Nations: European Nationalist Movements and the Making of the Confederacy* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2020); Adrian Brettell, *Colossal Ambitions: Confederate Planning for a Post-Civil War World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2020); Andrew F. Lang, *A Contest of Civilizations: Exposing the Crisis of American Exceptionalism in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021).

New and diverse historians are adding their voices to the chorus of historical literature. Writing about the Civil War South, I knew that there were many “Others” against which white Confederates identified themselves.³ I knew that I wanted to include the voices of these Others in my study. In a graduate-level Civil War course, I was exposed to the intriguing fact that women undermined the Confederacy as much as did military defeats, slave rebellions, and military desertions by white men.⁴ While much has been written about women in the Confederacy, almost nothing is known about the wives of the Confederate Cabinet secretaries. I wanted to include their voices in my study. The COVID-19 pandemic and travel limitations prevented me from accessing the sources necessary to understand what these men’s wives thought about the war or their husband’s work. Instead, what I offer here is more of a suggestion for future study, as I have sought to compare the nationalizing effect of women-led social functions in the early republic to the divisive nature of similar events in the Confederacy.

Writing history, as I imagine writing in general to be, is incredibly humbling. As one accumulates information, books, data, quotes, and scraps of papers of various shapes

³ For the concept of “Other,” see especially, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *This Violent Empire: The Birth of an American National Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); for Confederate “Others,” see Stephanie M. McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); for Yankees as a Confederate “Other,” see George C. Rable, *Damn Yankees!: Demonization and Defiance in the Confederate South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015).

⁴ This literature is relatively new and rapidly growing: George C. Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Anne Sarah Rubin, *A Shattered Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy, 1861-1868* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); McCurry, *Women’s War: Fighting and Surviving the American Civil War* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2019); Thavolia Glymph, *The Women’s Fight: The Civil War’s Battles for Home, Freedom, and Nation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020).

and sizes, it becomes quickly clear that everything cannot be included. Much has been left out of this study. I offer here a corrective to the literature as it now exists. Civilian leadership—“high politics”—is neglected at a cost. Whether the masses of Confederates persisted in their efforts towards independence and self-government depended greatly on circumstances outside of their control, not the least of these is the rhetoric, inspiration, and vision set forth by their leaders. In the 2017 film *Darkest Hour* about Prime Minister Winston Churchill’s famous “never surrender” speech, a member of the British Parliament leans over to War Cabinet member Lord Halifax and asks, “What just happened?” Halifax, a proponent of negotiated peace with Nazi Germany sighs and says, “He just mobilized the English language--and sent it into battle.”⁵ The rhetorical power of leaders is astounding. The popular will of Confederates was not well directed by its leaders—primarily Davis—and external circumstance—military defeats—deprived the popular will of its much-needed “oxygen.”

My study concludes with suggestions for future research. I hope to take these up later, possibly as a doctoral dissertation. Much more needs to be said and investigated. Particularly, the nature of Confederate politics is not fully understood. George C. Rable’s indispensable study, *The Confederate Republic*, remains the best treatment of the politics of the Confederate South. Stephanie McCurry has expanded our conception of politics to include Others (women and Blacks) and, more recently, Jeffrey Zengrowski has brought an international lens to Confederate politics in a highly original study.⁶ The interactions

⁵ *Darkest Hour*, directed by Joe Wright, screenplay by Anthony McCarten, featuring Gary Oldman (Focus Features, 2017). Screenplay accessed at <https://www.scripslug.com/assets/uploads/scripts/darkest-hour-2017.pdf> on 28 March 2021. Quote is on p. 97.

⁶ George C. Rable, *The Confederate Republic: A Revolution Against Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Jeffrey Zengrowski,

of old, antebellum political commitments among Confederate leaders needs more sustained treatment. Many members of Jefferson Davis's Cabinet, in the antebellum period, had been politically aligned with the Whig Party and joined the Democracy only later, closer to the time of secession. How did their previous Whig loyalties and ideologies advance or hinder Confederate military and political fortunes? These interconnections, more than the simple dichotomy of states'-rightists versus centralizationists, need to be more fully investigated.

Previous studies and biographies of Davis and his Cabinet members have celebrated them for their efforts as Confederates. I do not believe the Confederate Cabinet was an out-right failure as many historians have too simply concluded. Defeat does not necessarily equate with poor skill or ability. In attempting to understand the Confederate Cabinet on its own terms, some of what I have written may seem to praise the Confederacy or her efforts toward nation-building. In an incredibly nuanced study of the Civil War, William Freehling writes, "True, Federals fought for majority rule and the minority's acceptance of election results. But Confederates fought for the consent of the governed and the natural right to switch consent to another government."⁷ I do not pine for the Confederacy or for the South's oft-promised future "rise." Instead, I sought to present Confederate leaders as I found them in their speeches and personal writings. If I seem compassionate or too lenient in judgment toward them it is simply that I have come to realize that the past is often much more complicated than we typically imagine. It

Jefferson Davis, Napoleonic France, and the Nature of Confederate Ideology, 1815-1870 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2020).

⁷ William W. Freehling, *The South vs. the South: How Anti-Confederate Southerners Shaped the Course of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 205.

rarely fits into our pre-conceived, modern political boxes. The enemies we encounter in the past are too human for us to truly hate for long.⁸ Had the Confederacy won the Civil War, the entire “New World” would be terribly, darkly different. While I do not mourn their failure, I hope that my effort to narrate the story of Jefferson Davis, Robert Toombs, Stephen Mallory, John Reagan, Judah Benjamin, Thomas Bragg, Josiah Gorgas, J. B. Jones, Mary Chesnut, Varina Davis, Robert Kean, among others, reveals their humanity in their misguided efforts to create a new Southern Nation. To find oneself in the contextual shoes of her subject is one of the essential aims of a historian.

⁸ For an explicitly Christian, but nonetheless thought-provoking reflection on the role of “love” in the historian’s vocation, see, Beth Barton Schweiger, “Seeing Things: Knowledge and Love in History,” in *Confessing History: Explorations in Christian Faith and the Historian’s Vocation*, edited by John Fea, Eric Miller, and Jay Green, 60-80 (University of Notre Dame Press, 2010).

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

In November 1889, had Jefferson Davis been sitting on the front porch of Beauvoir, his retirement home in Biloxi, Mississippi, he would have enjoyed the crisp, cool fall weather. A slight breeze may have wafted off the ocean, directly in front of the front porch. It was so close that he might have thought he could reach out and touch it. Steady ocean waves moved in, then out; in, then out. The rhythm was soothing for writing. He sketched an autobiographical sketch of his life, briefly running through all that he had accomplished in his life before November 1889.¹ He gives hardly any space to his tenure as President of the Confederacy. Instead, he implies, his life is inextricably bound up with what he deems the rise then fall of his beloved South. After describing how he came to hear about his appointment as president of the Confederate States of America and his inauguration, the only post-inauguration incident that Davis reports in detail has to do with the creation of the cabinet. He remembers: "In the selection of a cabinet I was relieved from a difficulty which surrounds that duty by the President of the United States; for there were no 'sections' and no 'party' distinctions. All aspirations, ambitions, and interest had been merged in a great desire for Confederate independence."² This is not the only place within the autobiographical sketch that Davis mentions the president's cabinet. After detailing some of his accomplishments as President Franklin Pierce's Secretary of War, Davis writes, "The administration of Mr.

¹ The physical description of Beauvoir in Biloxi, Mississippi is based on my travels there in May 2016. The Davis retirement home is also the site of the Jefferson Davis Presidential Library and Museum.

² Autobiographical sketch, November 1889, in Haskell M. Monroe, Jr. & James T. McIntosh, eds., *The Papers of Jefferson Davis*, Vol. 1 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 1:lxii. Hereafter, abbreviated as *PJD*.

Pierce presents the single instance of an executive whose cabinet witnessed no change of persons during the whole term.”³ For such a short reminiscence, two specific references to the executive cabinet are surprising, especially given the myriad other accomplishments, circumstances, and people that Davis could have commented on. Like most Americans then and now, Jefferson Davis worried about the unity of his country. In the mind of Jefferson Davis, the Democratic Party, the South, and the Confederacy had been true representatives of American national purpose. The stability of the Pierce Cabinet and the supposed lack of political intrigue surrounding his own Confederate Cabinet were golden ages of American political harmony.

The United States Constitution does not create the Cabinet of the Executive Branch. In the British Empire from which the thirteen colonies rebelled, the king’s cabinet “took ownership of the government’s policies, effectively absolving the king of all responsibility for wrongdoing.”⁴ In designing their own government, the Founders wanted an executive who would be responsible for his actions. Therefore, they did not create the cabinet as an institution but allowed the President to consult with the department heads of the various government departments (to be created by Congress). Like so much else in the American political system, the Cabinet (as an institution) owes its existence to the precedent set by George Washington.⁵ Diplomatic crises and questions of Constitutional legality provided opportunities for Washington to consult his

³ *PJD*, 1:lx.

⁴ Lindsay M. Chervinsky, *The Cabinet: George Washington and the Creation of an American Institution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2020), 97.

⁵ Throughout, I have capitalized *cabinet* to refer to a specific governing institution.

cabinet secretaries. As a result, the institution of the Cabinet “developed organically in response to these governing challenges.”⁶

The men that Washington chose to fill his first Cabinet were “experienced politicians and diplomats” and he trusted their advice and intended to listen to them individually and collectively.⁷ By the nineteenth century, because of the geographic and demographic growth of the United States, Cabinet secretaries were appointed “to represent a particular faction of interest, and appointment also became a means of reward for political support.”⁸ Between 1829 and 1861, Cabinet secretaries’ primary functions revolved around policy and political management and *not* administration.⁹ In the early American Republic, perhaps more so than today, the Executive Cabinet played an important role in policy creation and politics.

Despite its importance to the Early American Republic and the nation in general, the President’s Cabinet has received almost no scholarly attention, especially from historians. The best history of the institution is R. Gordon Hoxie’s 1984 *Presidential Studies Quarterly* article: “The Cabinet in the American Presidency, 1789-1984.” Four years later, Janet M. Martin in the same journal published “Frameworks for Cabinet Studies” in which she described and examined six frameworks for scholars to

⁶ Chervinsky, 5. Chervinsky’s study of the Washington Cabinet is the first, book-length treatment of the subject that attempts to explain and describe the history of the Cabinet *as an institution*. David S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler’s *Washington’s Circle: The Creation of the President* (Random House, 2015) also focus on Washington’s Cabinet, but they instead treat the individuals within the Cabinet and the ways these men influenced Washington’s leadership.

⁷ Chervinsky, 5.

⁸ R. Gordon Hoxie, “The Cabinet in the American Presidency, 1789-1984,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (1984): 215. Hoxie’s article remains the only scholarly history of the institutional Cabinet.

⁹ Hoxie, 217.

organize their studies of the Cabinet.¹⁰ Despite her efforts, few scholars have taken her frameworks to heart in producing their own examinations. The only book-length study of the Cabinet, as an institution is Jeffrey E. Cohen's *The Politics of the U.S. Cabinet*.¹¹ As his work suggests, Cohen is primarily concerned with the political aspects of the cabinet, particularly representation.¹² There is almost no history of the Cabinet as an institution except whatever is necessary for Cohen's sociological examination.

Scholarly works on individual presidents have sometimes used the Cabinet as a framework for studying their subject. Doris Kearns Goodwin can likely be credited as bringing the Cabinet to the forefront of public and scholarly attention with her *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (Simon & Schuster, 2005). By blending the biographies of Lincoln's Cabinet secretaries together into one narrative, Goodwin shows how Lincoln, who was politically underestimated by contemporaries, showed himself politically superior to some of the senior statesmen in his Cabinet. David S. and

¹⁰ Janet M. Martin, "Frameworks for Cabinet Studies," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (1988). Martin's frameworks are: (1) the Inner/Outer Cabinet—the State, Defense (War/Navy), Treasury, and Justice departments make up the inner cabinet. These secretaries are responsible for their departmental functions and typically take on a more advisory role to the president. (2) Balance—especially at the beginning of a presidential administration, the Cabinet is organized to have a balanced representation of the nation's politics, geographic regions, commercial interests, etc. (3) Issue Networks—Cabinet secretaries move among different networks and advocate for specific policies connected with those networks. (4) Partisan Factor—Presidents of differing political parties select different types of secretaries. (5) "Naïve" View—Presidents, especially at the beginning of their terms, have a naïve view that their Cabinet will act as a collegiate advisory body. (6) Initial vs. Midterm Cabinets—Presidents typically select their initial Cabinet secretaries from outside of the political infrastructure; by their midterm, Presidents are more confident in their role and responsibilities and, therefore, do not feel constrained to pick particular Cabinet secretaries (795-802).

¹¹ Jeffrey Cohen, *The Politics of the U.S. Cabinet: Representation in the Executive Branch, 1789-1984* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988).

¹² Cohen argues: "We have misunderstood the cabinet in part because we have relied upon a theory of institutions that emphasizes institutional capability. What is required, however, is a theory of democratic institutions, a theory that emphasizes the balance between the dual nature of representative government, that is, its need and capacity to act and also its ability to represent. The cabinet is important because of its representative qualities" (4).

Jeanne T. Heidler's *Washington's Circle: The Creation of the President* (Random House, 2015) marketed their study as a similar treatment to George Washington.¹³ Most recently, Lindsay M. Chervinsky's *The Cabinet: George Washington and the Creation of an American Institution* (Belknap Press, 2020) examines the creation of George Washington's Cabinet and how his precedent created what we now recognize as a vital governmental institution.

If the United States Cabinet is understudied, the Confederate Cabinet is more so. Almost all Confederate government institutions are ignored in favor of more abstract narratives of Confederate nationalism and more popular histories of specific Civil War battles. Beginning in the 1940s, students of Southern history focused their attention on the men who comprised the Confederate Cabinet. Robert Douthat Meade led the way with *Judah P. Benjamin: Confederate Statesman* (1941), a study that is still recognized as foundational for any histories of Confederate politics. Following soon after Meade's biography of Benjamin, Rembert Patrick published *Jefferson Davis and His Cabinet* in 1944 (it was republished in 1961).¹⁴ Patrick's work remains the only scholarly work of the Confederate Cabinet as a whole.¹⁵ His history of Davis and his key advisors unleashed a flurry of biographies. Confederate Navy Secretary, Stephen Russell Mallory

¹³ See the description on the inside flap of the hardcover edition.

¹⁴ Rembert W. Patrick, *Jefferson Davis and His Cabinet* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1961).

¹⁵ Burton J. Hendrick's treated the Confederate Cabinet in *Statesmen of the Lost Cause: Jefferson Davis and His Cabinet* (Literary Guild of America, 1939). His title is misleading, as Hendrick's work addresses *all* Confederate civilian leadership and does not keep his focus narrowed on the Cabinet. Most recently, Dennis L. Peterson independently published *Confederate Cabinet Departments and Secretaries* (McFarland, 2016). By his own admission: This "is not intended to be an exhaustive, definitive academic textbook on the Confederate cabinet. It is merely a survey, an attempt to provide in one place basic information about the Confederate government that rarely is covered elsewhere" (3).

was treated in Joseph T. Durkin's *Stephen R. Mallory: Confederate Navy Chief* (1954).¹⁶ A biography of Robert Toombs by William Y. Thompson was published in 1966 by Louisiana State University Press.¹⁷ Most recently (1988), Thomas E. Schott published a biography of Confederate Vice President Alexander Stephens.¹⁸ Most Confederate Cabinet officers still do not have a scholarly biography.¹⁹ Beginning in the 1960s social history took the field by storm as new more diverse voices began to contribute to American history. Mirroring the general public distrust in governmental organizations, historians turned their attention to other subjects. Historians were satisfied with Rembert Patrick's study, even as it became more and more outdated.

Jefferson Davis has received more sustained interest. William C. Davis's *Jefferson Davis: The Man and His Hour* remains a popular biography.²⁰ More scholarly, but still accessible is William J. Cooper, Jr., *Jefferson Davis, American*.²¹ Herman Hattaway and Richard E. Beringer treated Davis's presidency in *Jefferson Davis, Confederate President*.²² More recently, R. Jarrod Atchison wrote about Davis's

¹⁶ Joseph T. Durkin, *Stephen R. Mallory: Confederate Navy Chief* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1954). Recently, Durkin's biography was reprinted by University of Alabama Press as *Confederate Navy Chief: Stephen R. Mallory* (2005).

¹⁷ William Y. Thompson, *Robert Toombs of Georgia* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966).

¹⁸ Thomas E. Schott, *Alexander H. Stephens of Georgia: A Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988, reprinted in 1996).

¹⁹ Christopher G. Memminger (South Carolina), Treasury Secretary, and James A. Seddon (Virginia), Secretary of War remain two long-serving ministers in need of scholarly treatment.

²⁰ William C. Davis, *Jefferson Davis: The Man and His Hour* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).

²¹ William J. Cooper, Jr., *Jefferson Davis, American* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2002). See also, Cooper's follow up to his biography: *Jefferson Davis and the Civil War Era* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008).

²² Herman Hattaway and Richard E. Beringer, *Jefferson Davis, Confederate President* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002).

rhetorical leadership in *A War of Words: The Rhetorical Leadership of Jefferson Davis*.²³ (University of Alabama Press, 2017). Michael E. Woods has examined Jefferson Davis's politics and vision for American purpose in *Arguing Until Doomsday: Stephen Douglas, Jefferson Davis, and the Struggle for American Democracy*.²⁴ What the brief overview shows is that biographies of American leaders and political histories, especially as connected with the debate over national purpose, remain popular. Institutions, however, continue to be shunted to the sidelines. This study seeks to contribute, correct, and build upon the incredible foundation laid for it by scholarly treatments of Confederate politics and leaders.

The Confederate experience was intimately connected with the success or failure of the military.²⁵ Confederate diaries are filled with fears and expectation surrounding military maneuvers and news from the front—or lack thereof. Popular will depended on the success of the military. By examining the Confederate Cabinet, scholars can begin to bring unity to a field of study so frequently fragmented. Histories of the Confederate homefront and military are too frequently separated. Contemporaries experienced the war as one, integrated whole. For the Confederacy, home and war fronts blended and became one. Confederate Attorney General Thomas Bragg of North Carolina fretted in April 1862, “We are loosing ground slowly in every quarter, and without

²³ R. Jarrod Atchison, *A War of Words: The Rhetorical Leadership of Jefferson Davis* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2017).

²⁴ Michael E. Woods, *Arguing Until Doomsday: Stephen Douglas, Jefferson Davis, and the Struggle for American Democracy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020).

²⁵ See especially Gary Gallagher, *The Confederate War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

several successful blows, and that soon, we are likely to have the worst of it.”²⁶

Everywhere, Bragg noted, the enemy “seek[s] to conquer by numbers.” Confederate civilian leaders could not make decisions without taking into consideration the military realities. The Cabinet represents an ideal, contained group of individuals for scholars to study to understand more the interconnectedness of civilian and military policy in the Confederacy.

Social historians of recent decades have reminded us that even in periods when their political rights were hindered, women played vital roles in the formation and functions of government. Catherine Allgor’s field-defining *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* shows that women and public, social events played important political roles in the formation of the capital city and United States government.²⁷ “In politics,” she writes, “private spaces have often served public purposes.”²⁸ In relation to the Civil War, perhaps no historian has been more influential than Stephanie McCurry in bringing the plight and contributions of women to the forefront of scholarly attention. “Women are never just witnesses to war,” she writes in *Women’s War: Fighting and Surviving the American Civil War*. “When war breaks out, they are swept into the same raining current of history as the men in their families and communities. Wars force everyone to fight.”²⁹ Her history of Confederate

²⁶ Thomas Bragg, *Diary of Thomas Bragg*, Vol. I: January 3, 1861-May 15, 1862, in the Thomas Bragg Papers, #3304-z, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 19 April 1862 entry, I:214.

²⁷ Catherine Allgor, *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 1.

²⁸ Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 138.

²⁹ Stephanie McCurry, *Women’s War: Fighting and Surviving the American Civil War* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2019), 2.

politics, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South*, remains the best history to integrate women and Blacks into the Confederate political story. “In the heart of their own national territory the mass of white Southern women emerged as formidable adversaries of their government in the long struggle over the military policies of the” Confederacy.³⁰

The history of the Confederate Cabinet and national government is also incomplete without the voices of women. Though no women held Cabinet positions, their influence was felt, nonetheless. Social functions defined and divided the Richmond populace, and Cabinet secretaries wrestled with their public and family responsibilities. Navy Secretary Mallory wrote that his wife’s “letters bring me joy or sorrow always.”³¹ Thomas Bragg wrote that it “is hard to abandon my family, though they would be among friends.”³² Too often left out of political histories, this study of the Confederate Cabinet seeks to re-integrate women and “social politics” into its narrative. This will better reflect the ways Confederate leaders lived and made decisions.

The seemingly endless study of Confederate nationalism has taken Civil War scholarship by storm.³³ Early studies debated whether the Confederacy had a weak or

³⁰ Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 4.

³¹ Stephen Mallory, *Diary and Reminiscences of Stephen R. Mallory*, in the Stephen R. Mallory Diary and Reminiscences, #2229, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, entry 21 June 1861, I:5.

³² Bragg, *Diary*, 4 May 1862 entry, I:266.

³³ Debates around Confederate nationalism are defined by many recent and thought-provoking works. Emory Thomas emphasized the importance of nationalism to the Confederate story in his *The Confederate Nation: 1861-1865* (Harper & Row, 1979). Since then, historians have been debating his claims and adding nuance to our understanding of Confederate nationalism. Paul D. Escott, *After Secession: Jefferson Davis and the Failure of Confederate Nationalism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); John McCardell’s *The Idea of a Southern Nation: Southern Nationalists and Southern Nationalism, 1830-1860* (Norton, 1979); Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate*

strong nationalism. Most recently, historians have turned away from this binary and largely unhistorical debate to, instead, examine the *contents* of Confederate nationalism, its local expressions, and how that nationalism changed in different geographic locations. My contribution seeks to situate the Confederate Cabinet within these debates on Confederate nationalism. Particularly, it will examine how Confederate political leaders fostered (or failed to foster) nationalistic purpose and how they imagined the CSA's national identity and future.

My research shows that besides Davis, no other Confederate political leaders made concerted, public efforts to define the Confederacy and give it national purpose. Cabinet secretaries and the Confederate Congress were satisfied with the day-to-day

Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988); George C. Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge University Press, 1993); Rable, *The Confederate Republic: A Revolution Against Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Gary W. Gallagher, *The Confederate War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Brian R. Dirck, *Lincoln & Davis: Imagining America, 1809-1865* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001); Harry S. Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War* (Viking, 2006); Anne Sarah Rubin, *A Shattered Republic: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy, 1861-1868* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); John Majewski, *Modernizing a Slave Economy: The Economic Vision of the Confederate Nation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Michael T. Bernath, *Confederate Minds: The Struggle for Intellectual Independence in the Civil War South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Paul Quigley, *Shifting Ground: Nationalism and the American South, 1848-1865* (New York: Oxford, 2012); Andre M. Fleche, *The Revolution of 1861: The American Civil War in the Age of Nationalist Conflict* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Ian Binnington, *Confederate Visions: Nationalism, Symbolism, and the Imagined South in the Civil War* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013); Michael Brem Bonner, *Confederate Political Economy: Creating and Managing a Southern Corporatist Nation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2016); Aaron Sheehan-Dean, *The Calculus of Violence: How Americans Fought the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018); Ann L. Tucker, *Newest Born of Nations: European Nationalist Movements and the Making of the Confederacy* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2020); Adrian Brett, *Colossal Ambitions: Confederate Planning for a Post-Civil War World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2020); Sheehan-Dean, *Reckoning with Rebellion: War and Sovereignty in the Nineteenth Century* (Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 2020). For a good, accessible overview of the historiography of Nationalism in the Civil War see Michael T. Bernath's contribution to the *Journal of the Civil War Era* forum on the Future of Civil War Studies found at <https://www.journalofthecivilwarera.org/forum-the-future-of-civil-war-era-studies/the-future-of-civil-war-era-studies-nationalism/>. Accessed 18 January 2021.

political functions of the nation. Political rhetoric alone does not make a successful revolution, but it certainly helps. The evidence, to me, shows that the Confederacy crumbled primarily due to superior Union military might. Still, a lack of clear vision or political purpose from the new nation's leaders did not give recently overrun portions of the country reason enough to resist their Union occupiers. Whatever its contents at the popular level, Confederate leadership failed to *direct* Confederate nationalism by giving the nation a clearly defined future identity.

The Confederate Cabinet has been neglected since Rembert Patrick's foundational and excellent study. My research seeks to bring renewed attention the Cabinet as an important institution in the operation of the Confederacy. In the process, I seek to situate it better within three recent historiographical trends: (1) the importance of the military to Confederate civilian and political life; (2) the vital role of women in government and politics, especially in the Confederacy where men were more and more called to military service; and (3) the all-encompassing influence of Confederate nationalism and its differing expressions in different locales and levels of leadership. To do this, I depart from typical studies of the Confederate Cabinet. Most studies, naturally, examine each department and its' secretaries individually and separately. There are certain merits to this approach, particularly the way that it allows a historian to trace the change over time of a particular department and the policies it oversees.

For this study, I have chosen a more straightforward, chronological narrative. I especially emphasize the biographies of the individual Cabinet Secretaries believing that their lives serve as microcosms to larger historical trends and developments. Chapter Two examines the early lives and antebellum careers of some Confederate Cabinet

officers. By tracing their lives from childhood to the creation of a new Southern nation, I can show how men from varying and different backgrounds came to identify with a single section and how that section then came to be imagined as a nation. The biographies of these men shows that myriad influences—family, finances, politics, ideology, personal convictions—drove them to support a new nation and join the Confederate Cabinet. This chapter relies primarily on respected secondary sources but is unique in providing a “group biography” approach to the Confederate Cabinet.

The third chapter describes Jefferson Davis’s selection as president and his selection of Cabinet secretaries. It begins by integrating the Confederate presidency and cabinet within the larger history of the same institutions within the United States. This context provides a necessary foundation for understanding the limits and potential of the Cabinet as a group. The historical reality of the creation of the CSA Cabinet is much more interesting than Davis’s remembrances of a united and politically-free selection process. Instead, the process was highly political and fraught with important decisions regarding national representation. In this regard, even the creation of the Confederate Cabinet served to strengthen Confederate nationalism and unity. Throughout the war, Davis would seek to maintain Confederate unity through his Cabinet appointments.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six trace the development of the Cabinet through the life of the Confederacy. Relying on primary sources, including the diaries of two Cabinet Secretaries and other government leaders and observers, I argue that despair within the Cabinet arose as early as 1862. This despair, combined with a lack of public rhetorical engagement, and failed military campaigns sapped Confederate morale.³⁴ The fourth

³⁴ Too often, I think, historians equate *morale* with *nationalism*. Recent literature shows that the Confederacy had a vibrant nationalism that was actually strengthened by defeat. Morale refers to an

chapter focuses particularly on the early rhetoric of Jefferson Davis. Unlike his Vice-President, Alexander Stephens, Davis rarely explicitly spoke of slavery as a defining national characteristic for the Confederacy. Instead, he sought to situate the Confederate nation on a firm foundation as a righteous cause fighting for self-government and liberty. The following chapter (five) traces changes within the Cabinet during 1862 as despair settled in following military setbacks. Finally, 1863 and 1864 are treated in Chapter Six. I show that Jefferson Davis's national identity increasingly became unmoored from traditional markers of national sovereignty/identity. Excellent scholarship exists on the slave impressment debate in the Confederacy.³⁵ This segment of my work seeks to build upon this by highlighting the policy debates happening at the top of the Confederate command. Most studies of the slave impressment debate center around the public discourse happening in soldier letters and the Confederate press. While valuable, my study emphasizes the oft-neglected debates between Davis, his War Secretary, Seddon, and state governors. The picture that emerges is one of increased desperation even as

emotional or mental condition, whether within an individual or group. Nationalism involves morale, but is a social-cultural construction that seeks to give a people shared history and collective identity. Nationalism is more consistent organization of beliefs compared to morale or patriotism. The created belief *system* that was Confederate nationalism remained intact after the war. Morale, in contrast, ebbed and flowed with events. For debates about nationalism, especially surrounding definitions, see: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983) and Lloyd Kramer, *Nationalism in Europe and America: Politics, Cultures, and Identities since 1775* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

³⁵ Key works on Southern slave impressment during the Civil War include: Robert F. Durden, *The Gray and the Black: The Confederate Debate on Emancipation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972, reprinted, 2000); Bruce Levine, *Confederate Emancipation: Southern Plans to Free and Arm Slaves during the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Jaime Amanda Martinez, *Confederate Slave Impressment in the Upper South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2013); Philip D. Dillard, *Jefferson Davis's Final Campaign: Confederate Nationalism and the Fight to Arm Slaves* (Mercer University Press, 2017).

Confederates struggled with the possibility of increasing military enlistment while maintaining a significant Other to national consciousness.

Chapter Seven describes the social scene within which the Confederate Cabinet operated. Further, it seeks to uncover, through personal diaries, the “intimate” lives of these secretaries and the ways the private sphere influenced the public. In other words: the personal letters and diary entries of these men show that the sphere most often relegated to women—their wives—profoundly impacted the way they worked in public. Additionally, the social scene in Richmond, or lack thereof at times, helped to establish the governmental apparatus. Historians of Early America have shown how the social functions of Washington gave the government form and function outside of the technicalities of the legislative hall. In the Confederate capital, a similar process was underway, though greatly hindered by the war effort and the potential backlash from class conflict.

The final, eighth chapter, describes the Cabinet’s flight from Richmond and ends with their recommendations for Confederate surrender. Even as Jefferson Davis called Confederates to continued resistance through guerrilla warfare, his highest advisors and policymakers were advocating for surrender. What is remarkable is the length of time after the fall of Richmond that Davis and his Cabinet continued to meet to give their “nation” some semblance of governing order. The chapter ends with some concluding remarks and some suggestions for future research and study.

The organic creation of George Washington’s Cabinet, Lindsay Chervinsky writes, “embodies the emergence of the United States.”³⁶ The formation of Jefferson

³⁶ Chervinsky, *The Cabinet*, 12.

Davis's Cabinet embodies the principle of states' rights and homogenous unity that Davis and most Confederates thought existed in their new nation. Each state was represented in the Cabinet as a symbol of national unity. This operating procedure for the Cabinet was essentially maintained throughout the war and was consistent with Cabinet representational practices of the era. That Davis sought to maintain this representational model so long into his administration, though, shows that he was unable to gain widespread (or at least consistent) popular support. Initial Cabinet positions given as political favors gave way to still more politically motivated Cabinet appointments with little regard to specific job performance. The military situation prevented Davis from making ideal and perfect Cabinet selections. Cabinet officers left for the military and many men of public service age and good health were in the military. His selection pool was limited, and military necessities and resource consumption prevented Cabinet officers from devoting all their focus to the workings of their department or to pressing national issues because the war effort was essentially *the* national issue. Without success in that arena, the Cabinet of the Confederacy would no longer exist. Confederate leaders and Cabinet officers expressed frequent frustration with lack of trustworthy and accurate military information and fretted about the survival of their nation. The Northern war machine was a constant and overwhelming presence.

Social functions in the Confederate capital of Richmond were few. Many Cabinet officers and their wives were sick or *claimed* sickness as an excuse to cancel social functions. As a result, the Confederacy did not build a respectable society that could gain recognition on the European stage. When social functions did occur, Cabinet wives mingled with the wives of other leading Confederate politicians in what Allgor

terms “parlor politics.” Confederate Cabinet secretaries were known to enjoy each other’s company at Richmond social functions. Their presence there was interpreted along class lines. Just as Mary Lincoln was criticized for her extravagance during war time, Confederate Cabinet officers were reviled for their supposed overconsumption of food when many soldiers were deserting the military because of a lack of food and other necessary resources. Richmond social life, therefore, hindered the workings of the government and only sought to exacerbate class divisions in the Confederacy. Confederate Cabinet members were deeply attached to their families and worried about their safety and their ability to provide and protect their families.

In the Confederacy, no one served as national spokesman more than Jefferson Davis. His Cabinet was largely silent when it came to national speeches and statements. Instead, they focused on policy, politics, and advising the president personally. This is consistent with Cabinet tradition. Most Cabinet Secretaries are not known for their roles in national self-consciousness (if they’re known at all). Instead, these largely administrative positions are seen as symbolic and representative. The Confederate States of America, however, had a need for a well-formulated national identity. Most of that identity was formed by the press and the Christian religious commitments of Confederates. Only Davis made extensive public statements in which he sought to formulate and guide Confederate national identity. The lack of ideological leadership from Confederate Cabinet officers and congressional leaders hindered the formulation of Confederate national purpose. What ideological leadership was present continuously mired the Confederacy in the past as it sought to build a common history for

Confederates to rally around. While the Union was reaching for new heights, the Confederacy was seeking to maintain ground.

Historical reality is much more nuanced and complicated than the simplistic, nostalgic remembrances of Jefferson Davis. That he remembered his Cabinet experiences as symbols of unity reflects his hope in a perfectly unified America—followed by a completely unified Confederacy. In the United States, that unity was never attained. Unity in the Confederacy was also non-attainable. The experiences of Confederate Cabinet officers reflect this lack of unity and provide a way a way to better understand how the war effort, political rhetoric, and social life, influenced and shaped the inner workings of Confederate civilian government and leadership.

CHAPTER II

Antebellum American Nationalism and Southern Sectionalism

During the first decade of the nineteenth century, a new generation of American Founders were born across the Southern region of the United States. The American Nation itself was in its infancy. These new Southerners would grow up with the American Nation, and their lives would be propelled forward by efforts to give that Nation meaning and purpose.

On 3 June 1808, Jane Davis gave birth to a son, named “Jefferson” after their esteemed President, Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson’s father, Samuel Emory Davis was in his early fifties. He was a teenager during the American Revolution, and he served the Patriot Cause in Georgia and South Carolina before starting his own militia company and commanding it in defense of Savannah, Georgia when he was twenty-three.¹ By the time of Jefferson’s birth on the American frontier, Samuel only had his family to show for his almost thirty years of work and toil. “It was time to find a home and stay there. Perhaps he could find it in Mississippi.”² And so, in 1810, Samuel Davis moved his family to Louisiana, then to Woodville, Wilkinson County, in the southwestern corner of Mississippi.³ There, Davis recalled later in life, “my memories begin.”⁴

¹ William C. Davis, *Jefferson Davis: The Man and His Hour* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 4. Jefferson’s middle name is unknown; only the letter *F* survives (William J. Cooper, Jr., *Jefferson Davis: American*, 9).

² Davis, *Jefferson Davis*, 6.

³ Michael E. Woods, *Arguing Until Doomsday: Stephen Douglas, Jefferson Davis, and the Struggle for American Democracy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 15.

⁴ Jefferson Davis, Autobiographical sketch, November 1889, in Haskell M. Monroe, Jr. & James T. McIntosh, eds., *The Papers of Jefferson Davis*, Vol. 1 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 1:lxviii. Hereafter, abbreviated as *PJD*.

In 1810, outside Washington, Georgia, Catharine Huling gave birth to a son. She was the third wife to Major Robert Toombs who, like Samuel Davis, was a Revolutionary War soldier. Originally from Virginia, he had moved south with the rest of his siblings shortly after the war's end.⁵ On 2 July 1810, in a "small farm house in a grove of venerable oaks," Robert Augustus Toombs was born.⁶ Major Toombs had risen to the status of planter, and, as of 1814, he owned forty five human slaves and 2,200 acres of land in three Georgia counties.⁷ At the age of five, Robert Augustus endured the death of his father. If it negatively affected him, he did not remember it. The Toombs family was well-cared for at the time of Major Toombs's untimely death. A total of \$35,000 in holdings was to be divided amongst his sons and wife, Catharine. The human property of Major Toombs was valued at \$17,000.⁸

As these young boys grew into young men, the United States was coming of age as a nation. "The United States was born amidst a world at war. From 1792 to 1815...Europe was torn apart by a ferocious struggle for dominance between revolutionary and later Napoleonic France and her many European enemies, especially Great Britain. It became the longest sustained global war in modern history."⁹ America would find that She could not stay out of the war. In 1812, the United States declared war

⁵ William Y. Thompson, *Robert Toombs of Georgia* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), 4.

⁶ Thompson, 3. Quoting *Augusta Chronicle*, 16 December 1885.

⁷ Thompson, 5.

⁸ Thompson, 6.

⁹ Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 620.

on Great Britain, supposedly because British impressment of American naval officers violated American rights. President-elect James Madison (of Virginia) “believed war was inevitable because impressment and neutral rights had come to symbolize what he and other Republicans wanted most from Britain—unequivocal recognition of the nation’s sovereignty and independence.”¹⁰ The declaration of war was supported by the southern region of the United States, whose power was bolstered by the three-fifths clause of the Constitution. New England and mid-Atlantic states opposed the declaration, “yet they found themselves powerless against the slave-owning states, grown mightier through the extension of slavery into newly acquired territories.”¹¹

William J. Cooper has noted that Southerners perceived their nation as being “dangerously close to losing independence and sliding back into slavery with Great Britain again as the political slave master. These southerners believed the fruits of the Revolution were at stake.”¹² Early Americans would not have been shocked that the South took the lead in exerting American nationhood onto the world stage. “The southern states,” writes John Boles, “were disproportionately responsible for choosing the itinerary and for suggesting the constitutional destination, in fact, for creating the new nation.”¹³ These southerners were surrounded by slavery in their daily lives, so they were extra

¹⁰ Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 662.

¹¹ Jill Lepore, *These Truths: A History of the United States* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2018), 172-173.

¹² William J. Cooper, Jr., *Liberty and Slavery: Southern Politics to 1860* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 123.

¹³ John B. Boles, *The South Through Time: A History of an American Region*, Vol. 1, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Pearson, 2004), 133.

sensitive to threats to their liberty.¹⁴ Human slavery in the South not only reminded White Southerners of the danger of tyranny and oppression, but it fostered a violence different from the rest of the newfound American nation. “Violent punishment of enslaved people happened everywhere and in every context in the antebellum South. The public nature of these acts...made violence pervasive in Southern life.”¹⁵ Thus, British impressment all too strongly reminded Southerners especially of the dangers of slavery and threatened their nation’s pride.¹⁶ “In large part, the War of 1812 was the nationalistic South’s war.”¹⁷

If the War of 1812 was largely the result of a nationalistic South, nationalism seems to be its only true effect on the fledgling American nation. Jasper Trautsch has put forward a three-phase model of national movements. Phase One sees a small group of intellectuals “studying the history, culture, language, and folk traditions of a people” become nationalized and attract attention. Phase Two is marked by the wider acceptance of the elitist vision to other social groups. In the final phase, nationalism becomes a mass phenomenon that encompasses all social classes.¹⁸ In the War of 1812, Trautsch sees the United States moving from a second phase nationalism to the third phase. The treaty that ended the war in 1815 left many of the original issues—especially impressment—

¹⁴ Boles, 132.

¹⁵ Aaron Sheehan-Dean, *The Calculus of Violence: How Americans Fought the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 22.

¹⁶ Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 669.

¹⁷ Boles, 175.

¹⁸ Jasper M. Trautsch, “‘Mr. Madison’s War’ or the Dynamic of Early American Nationalism?” *Early American Studies* 10, no. 3 (2012): 632.

unresolved.¹⁹ However, a last-minute victory by General Andrew Jackson at New Orleans left many Americans with the taste of final victory in their mouths. They began to think of the 1812 War as their second war for independence. A new sense of “national character” was the most visible result of the war. Albert Gallatin, United States Secretary of Treasury, said that the people “are more American; they feel and act more as a nation.”²⁰ This new sense of national character, however, was not monolithic. During the war, New England Federalists had held a convention to contemplate exiting the Union through secession. Their legacy was a new political discourse in American politics: a discourse that emphasized states and regions over federal supremacy. “New England Federalists laid the groundwork for nationalist visions that prioritized regional identities and issues and paved the way for a political philosophy of states’ rights.”²¹

Three of Jefferson Davis’s brothers “bore arms in the War of 1812.” His fourth brother did not fight in the war because an influx of volunteers before the Battle of New Orleans necessitated intervention to prevent further volunteering. This was necessary “so as to retain a sufficient number at home for police purposes.” His prevention in enlisting, Davis notes, was “characteristic of the times.”²² This anecdote is revealing regarding nationalism and the national American character of the period. “Police purposes” almost certainly refers to the common Southern belief that whites were needed to defend hearth and home against slave insurrection. If too many masters were away, Blacks would have

¹⁹ Boles, 177.

²⁰ Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 699.

²¹ Benjamin E. Park, *American Nationalisms: Imagining Union in the Age of Revolutions, 1783-1833* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 154.

²² *PJD*, I:lxix.

less oversight and more opportunity to rebel against their oppressive enslavement. That this occurrence was “characteristic” of the period reveals that Southerners were ardent defenders of their nation; in addition to defending their nation, though, Southerners held in balance their need and desire to protect their specific region. That volunteers were turned away reveals the nature of antebellum citizenship. Nationalism could be strong without a centralization that ceded power to the government to make demands on citizens’ lives.

Jefferson Davis remembered his father as a “silent, undemonstrative man.”²³ Though some biographers have suggested that Samuel Davis’s supposed emotional distance negatively affected young Jefferson, he does not seem to have the same attitude. Instead, he describes Samuel as a “man of action. He talked little, and never in general company, but what he said had great weight with the community in which he lived.”²⁴ Due to the lack of colleges and universities in Mississippi, Davis went to Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky at the age of sixteen.²⁵ Due to a “deficiency” in math, he was placed in the freshman class which was largely made up of men younger than him. “I was quite disappointed,” he remembered, “and I felt my pride offended by being put with smaller boys.”²⁶ Davis advanced well academically at Transylvania, and he only left during his senior year because his father died. “In my Father,” Davis wrote to his

²³ *PJD*, I:lxiii.

²⁴ *PJD*, I:lxii.

²⁵ William J. Cooper, Jr., *Jefferson Davis, American* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 23. Hereafter abbreviated *JDA*.

²⁶ *PJD*, I:lxvi.

sister-in-law Susannah Gartley Davis, I lost a parent ever dear to me.”²⁷ From then on, Jefferson’s oldest brother, Joseph, “occupied to me much the relation of a parent.”²⁸ No one else in Davis’s life would prove more important to his development, personally or politically, than Joseph. It was Joseph who educated Jefferson regarding the standard political ideals of Southern gentlemen of his time and place. As a result of Joseph’s tutelage and training, Davis came to regard the American nation as “a thing of abstraction, of high ideals far removed from the hurly-burly of everyday politics.”²⁹ From Joseph, Davis learned that he had been appointed as a cadet to West Point. Joseph was worried about his brother being a college graduate so young, and it seems that he orchestrated Jefferson’s appointment without his knowledge or expressed desire. Davis was not fond of the prospect of moving from a senior to a freshman at another college, but he agreed to spend one year at West Point.³⁰ However, “at the end of the year, for various reasons, I preferred to remain.”³¹

West Point would prove a vital training ground for Davis’s conception of the American nation. Once there, he encountered a “more stately, more isolated, and more rigidly formalized” community that was exclusive on a variety of terms—gender, socioeconomic status, race, and politics.³² The culture of West Point reenforced the culture the

²⁷ *PJD*, I:11.

²⁸ *PJD*, I:lxviii.

²⁹ Brian R. Dirck, *Lincoln & Davis: Imagining America, 1809-1865* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 22.

³⁰ *PJD*, I:lxviii.

³¹ *PJD*, I:lxix.

³² Dirck, 41, 44.

South sought to uphold, one of honor that emphasized emotions such as shame to maintain order.³³ In a letter home to Joseph, he wrote that he thought the “Yankee part of the corps...pitiful.”³⁴ Already, Southerners were beginning to envision themselves as distinct in comparison with their northern brethren. Despite several incidences involving alcohol that would land Davis in trouble with West Point authorities, he managed to hang on for the duration of his studies and graduated in 1828 twenty-third in a class of thirty-three.³⁵ One biographer has noted that “West Point was a test of, and training ground for, character. It changed men or helped them to find themselves.”³⁶

On 31 July 1824, Robert Toombs was admitted to the University of Georgia (UGA). At the University, Toombs evidenced that rebellious, unruly streak of most teenagers: “here was a fourteen-year-old, plantation-bred upstart who looked askance at all rules.”³⁷ During his freshman year at the institution, UGA records do not indicate any demerits; however, soon after the start of his sophomore year, September 1825, Toombs began to cause trouble across campus. On a smaller-scale the violence and individualism fostered by slavery was showing through. Exposed to family slaves, Toombs would be fiercely independent, not allowing anyone to trample on his “freedom,” whatever that freedom may be. The everyday reality of violence toward Black humans meant that Toombs would also not have a problem using physical force if necessary. Just like

³³ Dirck, 60.

³⁴ *PJD*, I:18. *Emphasis in original.*

³⁵ Davis, *Jefferson Davis*, 37.

³⁶ Davis, *Jefferson Davis*, 38.

³⁷ Thompson, 7.

Southerners were willing to defend their national honor, so they were willing to defend their personal honor. “[C]ontempt for authority,” Toombs’ most recent biographer has written, “would remain a lifelong characteristic.”³⁸ This contempt for authority was not limited to Toombs.

Across the country, young men going off to college took an aggressive democratic spirit that clashed, often violently, with the hierarchical authority of the colleges. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, colleges, faced with students who felt more license after the Revolution, were trying to find new ways to control their rebellious student bodies.³⁹ Despite the national nature of the problem, many Americans of the early nineteenth century thought that Southern college students were more undisciplined and defiant than their northern counterparts.⁴⁰ These students reinforced a student-defined culture in which students were pressured to seek approval from other students and not faculty. One Virginian noted that there “is something wonderfully inflammable in the nature of young men, which is fostered and promoted by the manner of living together. A feeling of resentment or indignation communicates itself like electricity.”⁴¹ In addition to the inherent rebelliousness of adolescence, Southern youth were fiercely independent, determined to protect their honor and liberty, which slavery reminded them was always at risk of being eradicated. Roger Geiger has noted that

³⁸ Thompson, 9.

³⁹ Roger L. Geiger, *The History of American Higher Education: Learning and Culture from the Founding to World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 128.

⁴⁰ Alan Taylor, *Thomas Jefferson’s Education* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2019), 97.

⁴¹ Taylor, *Thomas Jefferson’s Education*, 98.

beginning in the eighteenth century, “efforts to achieve [Southern] student submission to college laws were frustrated, and a consistent degree of control was unattainable.”⁴²

The troubles colleges had disciplining southern students arose out of a social community that valued hierarchy or order. The Bible provided southerners with a ready-made hierarchy to make sense of the world. God was the heavenly father who controlled all earthly events and the fate of humankind. Society was organized with different layers and levels of authority that flowed from God. The four primary components of southern hierarchy were class, race, gender, and age. “Yeomen were expected to defer to their economic and social betters, wives to husbands, children to elders, slaves to masters (in truth, all whites).”⁴³ As southern students went off to college, they took this hierarchical understanding of the world with them. “Every personal interaction required a quick, sometimes unconscious, sometimes painfully conscious, application of a kind of calculus of hierarchy.”⁴⁴

In addition to their understanding of society’s proper ordering, southern students brought an intense individualism to college. “Everywhere and invariably his fundamental attitude is purely personal—and purely self-asserting.”⁴⁵ The rural nature of the South and the lack of government intrusion meant that “at every turn a man was thrown back wholly upon his own resources.”⁴⁶ The individualism of southerners was only further

⁴² Geiger, 237.

⁴³ Boles, 208.

⁴⁴ Boles, 208.

⁴⁵ W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Vintage, 1991), 31. Originally published in 1941.

⁴⁶ Cash, 32.

enforced by the hierarchy within which their society was organized. Slaves and family members were all subject to his will as if it was “imperial law.”⁴⁷

These social forces were not tamed or altered by religion. During the great religious outbreak of the nineteenth century commonly referred to as the “Second Great Awakening,” hierarchy and individualism would only be reinforced and given new life. Religion, especially Christianity, had been vital to the formation of the American nation. During the early decades of the American republic, Christianity continued to breathe life into the nation. These men were in college during a period of religious revival that would see the formation of dueling definitions of liberty. One definition would take the form of abolitionism and envision a multi-racial liberty; another would use the language of liberty but would reserve the benefits of liberty only for whites.

American religion had a democratizing effect on the nation. “Americans of this generation experienced widespread direct democracy through the creation, administration, and financing of churches and other voluntary societies.”⁴⁸ In fact, religion tended to be more democratic than political or civic institutions since minorities within the nation—Blacks, women, and poor immigrants especially—participated in religion before they were allowed to participate in politics.⁴⁹ Through the help of leaders such as Lyman Beecher Stowe and Albert Finney, Americans experienced a revitalization in religious activity that has come to be called the Second Great Awakening.

⁴⁷ Cash, 32.

⁴⁸ Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 166. See also, Nathan O. Hatch’s field-defining study, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

⁴⁹ Howe, 166.

The most important result of the Second Great Awakening was the way that it entrusted ordinary people with religious, moral, and political responsibilities. The most idealistic messages coming from the religious revival claimed that human worth was not tied to race, class, or gender.⁵⁰ Revivalists “taught self-respect and demanded that individuals function as moral agents.”⁵¹ Out of this religious fervor, the abolitionist movement arose. Emphasis on individual free-will and perfectibility led many to embrace an understanding of society in general in the same terms. Free-will theology “meant that if immediate conversion is available by an act of the human will, then, through God’s miraculous grace, all things are possible: human nature is open to total renovation in the twinkling of an eye and so, then, is the nature of society.”⁵² The democratization and revitalization of religion helped to produce a new, inclusive idea of liberty, one that demanded the freedom of Southern slaves.

In the South, Christianity, would not go so far as to call for the abolition of slavery. To do so would have been to risk southern distinctiveness and white supremacy. Instead, it would give rise to a sense of paternalism and a new, more powerful, pro-slavery rhetoric. The natural rights philosophy of the American Revolution did bring about a small, yet significant, transformation in Southern attitudes toward slaves. They began to see them more as people and less as mere animals. “The simultaneous growth in the evangelical movement, with its emphasis on all people having souls and being precious in the sight of God, also had a tendency to change how whites perceived the

⁵⁰ Howe, 187.

⁵¹ Howe, 188.

⁵² William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 114.

blacks in their midst.”⁵³ Blacks, if they were people with value before God, were seen as childlike. They were stalled in their development and were, therefore, naturally dependent on a superior race. “If one convinced oneself that slaves were a race of permanent children, then one could rationalize depriving them of adult freedom.”⁵⁴ The racial inferiority of Blacks fit neatly within the socially constructed hierarchy within which southerners operated. Just as children should obey their elders, Blacks were to submit to whites—racial children submitting to their superior racial elders. Early in the nineteenth century, southern Evangelicals had opposed slavery; however, as wealthy slave owners began to join these denominations, opposition to slavery, over time, grew to be outright support and justification.⁵⁵

As the War of 1812 was ending John Henninger Reagan was born to Timothy Richard and Elizabeth Reagan on 18 October 1818. He was their first son.⁵⁶ John’s family did not come from wealth, and his father was unable to afford his schooling.⁵⁷ “When I was about sixteen year of age,” John Reagan remembered, “I undertook the task of securing an education, and began it by hiring myself to Major John Walker for one year at farm work.”⁵⁸ After a couple of years of working several odd jobs to save up money for schooling, Reagan continued to run into financial difficulties. His friends

⁵³ Boles, *The South Through Time*, 216.

⁵⁴ Boles, 217.

⁵⁵ Boles, 227.

⁵⁶ Ben H. Procter, *Not Without Honor: The Life of John H. Reagan* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962), 7.

⁵⁷ John H. Reagan, *Memoirs with Special Reference to Secession and the Civil War*, Walter Flavius McCaleb, ed. (New York, NY: The Neale Publishing Company, 1906), 23.

⁵⁸ Reagan, *Memoirs*, 24.

suggested that he leave Tennessee and head West where he could potentially find better opportunities for jobs to save money for school.⁵⁹

The Panic of 1837 was causing many people to follow the advice of Reagan's friends.⁶⁰ At eighteen years of age, Reagan continued to work several jobs as he traveled westward.⁶¹ He arrived in Texas, and his biographer notes, "almost immediately he became involved in an Indian war."⁶² Reagan joined a group of men who fought in the Cherokee War. The frontiersmen won a decisive battle against the Native Americans when their chief was killed during the battle. Reagan traveled back with the wounded but abandoned them due to thirst. He found a river where he satisfied his thirst and recovered with a local family. He continued traveling across the Texas frontier, completing odd jobs and found himself in crushing debt.⁶³ To pay off his debts, he took up surveying in Nacogdoches. By January 1842, he had acquired land along the Trinity River.⁶⁴ His political career began that same year when he was elected justice of the peace and militia captain for his precinct near Nacogdoches.

Around this time, Colonel John Durst received a letter from Reagan and was so impressed by his grammar and knowledge that he hired him as a tutor for his children. From 1843-1844, Reagan taught the Durst children before he quit to marry the widow

⁵⁹ Procter, *Not Without Honor*, 12-13.

⁶⁰ Procter, *Not Without Honor*, 15.

⁶¹ Procter, *Not Without Honor*, 16.

⁶² Procter, *Not Without Honor*, 18.

⁶³ Procter, *Not Without Honor*, 27-38.

⁶⁴ Procter, *Not Without Honor*, 44.

Martha Music on 19 April 1844. Within a year, Martha died, and John continued to care and raise her four children. He moved deeper into the Texas prairies and settled at the edge of the wilderness.⁶⁵ Although he was sixty miles from a law office, Reagan somehow acquired Blackstone's Commentaries, Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, and Bouvier's Law Dictionary. He taught himself law and earned a temporary license in 1846.⁶⁶ With the outbreak of the Mexican-American War, Reagan was unable to fight because he came down with pneumonia.⁶⁷ Reagan's adventures along the Texas frontier symbolize the restlessness and swift movements of many other Americans who flooded West after the American Revolution during the early days of the American Republic. Reagan's biographer writes, "Prospects of adventure and success had lured him to Texas and after arrival, his objectives had been clear-cut—to survive and then to pursue his fortune. To realize these ambitions, however, he knew that he must help bring civilization to the frontier, and toward this end he daily strove."⁶⁸

As Americans and resources flooded West, politics moved with them. As a result, a new nationalism was created that was more unruly but also more enduring than that created during the Revolutionary period.⁶⁹ Western advancement was understood as progress, "defined as the introduction of domesticity to the wilderness" or bringing

⁶⁵ Procter, *Not Without Honor*, 44-47.

⁶⁶ Procter, *Not Without Honor*, 48.

⁶⁷ Procter, *Not Without Honor*, 54.

⁶⁸ Procter, *Not Without Honor*, 41.

⁶⁹ Sam Haselby, *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 2.

civilization to the frontier.⁷⁰ Those Americans moving West took a raw and untamed character with them. Mixed with evangelical Christianity and racial understandings of the American nation, a more volatile and democratic nationalism took root and flourished.⁷¹ Those on the frontier of the American nation gave rise to the Age of Jackson which was “more democratic, more assertive, and more self-assured than the republic crafted by the revolutionary generation.”⁷² Those settlers in Texas, like Reagan, did not see themselves so much as citizens of the United States ruled by the Constitution but as “variants of the American revolutionary tradition.”⁷³ These younger Americans coalesced into a more “arrogant, defiant, materialistic, increasingly racist” and “imperial” Young America voting bloc.⁷⁴ The expansion of militaristic Young Americans westward eventually brought about conflict with Mexico as the two sovereign nations disputed common land. Victory for the United States would be pyrrhic, unleashing deadly new domestic debates and conflicts over American identity and purpose.

Jefferson Davis was elected in 1845 to the United States House of Representatives from Mississippi. In late June the following year, he resigned his position to join the United States military in the fight with Mexico, upon which the Polk Administration had recently declared war. The army never left Davis. He remembered fondly his time at

⁷⁰ Amy S. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 3.

⁷¹ Lester D. Langley, *The Long American Revolution and Its Legacy* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2019), 57.

⁷² Langley, 106.

⁷³ Langley, 139.

⁷⁴ Langley, 137.

West Point and the early appointments he had on the frontier fighting Native Americans before he settled in Natchez Mississippi. The military “placed a high premium on honor, duty, and personal fidelity to a code of conduct and a set of regulations. It gave him a sense of community that placed a heavy emphasis on emotions, ranging from anger to pride to a sense of personal indignity and shame.”⁷⁵

On 21 July 1846, Davis addressed the people of Mississippi to explain his resignation from Congress. “Having received a military education and served a number of years in the line of the army, I felt that my services were due to the country, and believed my experience might be available in promoting the comfort, the safety and efficiency of the Mississippi Regiment in the campaign on which they were about to enter.”⁷⁶ According to Davis, the government had attempted to amicably settle the southern boundary dispute with Mexico. When American forces were attacked, the United States declared war on Mexico. Davis made sure to clarify that the declaration of war was made in the way prescribed by the Constitution and only after Mexico had recognized a state of war.⁷⁷

The War with Mexico, “went embarrassingly well,” John Boles has observed.⁷⁸ By 1847, Mexico was essentially under United States occupation. The Mexican-American War was a pro-slavery, imperialistic conflict, and the primary aim was to

⁷⁵ Dirck, 60.

⁷⁶ Dunbar Rowland, ed., *Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist: His Letters, Papers and Speeches* (Jackson: Mississippi Dept. of Archives & History, 1923), 1:52. Hereafter abbreviated *JDC*.

⁷⁷ Rowland, *JDC*, 1:57.

⁷⁸ Boles, *The South Through Time*, 282.

acquire Mexican territory.⁷⁹ Ralph Waldo Emerson had prophetically written that “the United States will conquer Mexico, but it will be as the man swallows the arsenic, which brings him down in turn. Mexico will poison us.”⁸⁰ And indeed it did. Manifest Destiny continued to be alive and well after the Mexican-American War, but Americans now faced a new challenge: Should Southern slavery be allowed West? The answer to this question was not at all clear. The “Mexican-American War,” writes one historian, “exposed the dual face of revolutionary America, one democratic and hopeful, one imperial and tribal.”⁸¹

Sam Haselby, in describing the rise of American religious nationalism in the early American Republic, has noted that in “essence, nation-building aims to homogenize.”⁸² In pursuing homogeneity, nationalisms always contrast themselves with “Others” who are excluded from the national identity. These “fabricated Others are designed to render insignificant the difference and contradictions that divide” national citizens.⁸³ As such, national identities, often praise “points of commonality and collective belonging” among subjects, but in fact these identities “are grounded on systematic patterns of exclusion.”⁸⁴ National identities “derive their sense of cohesion less from their celebration of sameness than from their construction of a series of threatening Others whose fabricated differences

⁷⁹ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 49; Boles, 282.

⁸⁰ Quoted in McPherson, *Battle Cry*, 51.

⁸¹ Langley, *The Long American Revolution*, 155.

⁸² Haselby, *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism*, 234.

⁸³ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *This Violent Empire: The Birth of an American National Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 21.

⁸⁴ Smith-Rosenberg, 466.

overshadow the actual differences and contradictions dividing heterogeneous nations.”⁸⁵

Elizabeth Varon has shown how, in American politics, discourse surrounding disunion created “political ‘others’—an ‘us,’ defined as true Americans who upheld the principles of the Founders, and a ‘them,’ defined as traitors who betrayed those principles.”⁸⁶

In the early years of American nationhood, several Others were constructed, including foreigners, Blacks, slaves, and Catholics. Throughout the nineteenth century, these groups were the victims of “moral panics” of various, fluctuating degrees. A moral panic “occurs when a society or a powerful subgroup within that society perceives a pattern of radiating social disorder and chooses an individual or group to embody the dangers that disorder threatens.”⁸⁷ In the American South, Blacks, because of the system of racial slavery in the region, were an institutionalized Other, the recipient of myriad moral panics of Southern whites.

Against the institutionalized social status of Black slaves, southerners and Americans defined their nationhood and citizenship. In the American South, white southerners could not conceive of their political identity without slavery. John Boles has compared racism in the antebellum South to gravity—“a force always present” but “most actors were unaware of its pull.”⁸⁸ The presence of slavery in the South provided a type of glue that helped to unite all whites—rich and poor—together as part of a master race. Poor whites were made an extension of the dominant class as a result of slavery. “Come

⁸⁵ Smith-Rosenberg, 466.

⁸⁶ Elizabeth R. Varon, *Disunion!: The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789-1859* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 14.

⁸⁷ Smith-Rosenberg, *This Violent Empire*, 104.

⁸⁸ Boles, 207.

what might, he would always be a white man. And before that vast and capacious distinction, all others were foreshortened, dwarfed, and all but obliterated.”⁸⁹ Southern whites were united by other factors besides racism: a “commonality of economic interests, ties of kinship, an abiding sense of localism, and a politics of deference are just some of the features of antebellum southern society that created a strong degree of white solidarity.”⁹⁰ Further, the desire and hope that poorer whites would one day become slaveholders themselves went a long way to wed whites together in solidarity.⁹¹ Still, at an unconscious, almost fundamental level, racism put all whites in a common category separate from enslaved Black people.

Politically, slavery was the “Other” to southerner’s great political “god”: liberty. “Slavery had a particular political meaning—the absence of liberty. In its political definition slavery described a society or a people who had lost their power to resist oppression, and that loss led inevitably to tyranny.”⁹² Southerners lived their daily lives surrounded by slaves. The institution was a constant reminder of the dangers of political “Otherness.” All whites knew exactly what slavery was like. “All the characteristics associated with political slavery—dependence, tyranny, oppression, defenselessness—glowed especially brightly among a people who owned slaves, for those words described their own human institution.”⁹³

⁸⁹ Cash, *The Mind of the South*, 39.

⁹⁰ Boles, *The South Through Time*, 207.

⁹¹ Clement Eaton, *The Growth of Southern Civilization, 1790-1860* (New York: Harper, 1961), 176.

⁹² Cooper, *Liberty and Slavery*, 30.

⁹³ Cooper, *Liberty and Slavery*, 30-31.

Slavery was also connected to Southern political conceptions of liberty through the economic concept of property. In the early period of American history, Thomas Jefferson was a “model republican gentleman.” His claim to the title gentleman rested on his land. These “men derived their wealth and status from a slave labor economy.”⁹⁴ A key part of that economy was the notion that slaves, human beings, were property, and the “right to hold property was an integral part of liberty.”⁹⁵ Both the race of slaves and their legal designation as property were powerful reasons why southerners used slavery as the antithesis of liberty.

One historian has claimed that “commanding the First Mississippi Rifles” during the Mexican-American War “was the wisest political investment Davis ever made.”⁹⁶ Davis gained an “enviable reputation” after the Battles of Monterrey and Buena Vista. He fought tooth and nail to maintain the “scarce resource” of fame.⁹⁷ After being discharged from service, Mississippi’s governor offered Davis his seat in the Senate back, which he gladly accepted in August 1848. In the Senate, he would clash primarily with Illinois Senator Stephen A. Douglas over the Western territories and Southerners’ rights to slave property in those territories.⁹⁸

Following college, Robert Toombs was given special permission by the Georgia State Legislature to practice law as a minor. He was admitted to practice on 18 March

⁹⁴ Smith-Rosenberg, *This Violent Empire*, 63.

⁹⁵ Cooper, *Liberty and Slavery*, 35.

⁹⁶ Woods, *Arguing Until Doomsday*, 79.

⁹⁷ Woods, 79.

⁹⁸ Woods, 80.

1830.⁹⁹ Six years later, he was elected to the Georgia House of Representatives where he would serve until 1843.¹⁰⁰ In 1844, he was ready to enter national politics. “He was hardly a man of the people with his wealth and imperious manner. But his handsome, imposing appearance, undoubted ability, and boldness of speech appealed to Georgians.”¹⁰¹ During his campaign, Toombs was accused of being soft on the slavery question, but he was successfully elected and presented to the 29th Congress on 1 December 1845.¹⁰² Serving in Congress during a war proved uneventful, and he partnered with Alexander Stephens to help found a new political party in Georgia.¹⁰³

Following the Mexican War, Toombs was elected to the Senate in November 1851. He was part of a movement called Tertium Quid.¹⁰⁴ Tertium Quids—“Third Somethings”—were Southern Whigs who “invoked what Calhoun called ‘Radical’ states’ rights to protect planter liberty and property.” The Quids had originally been a part of Thomas Jefferson’s Democratic Party coalition that opposed Federalist consolidation. Quids were highly hierarchical and, beginning in the 1820s, claimed that “universal suffrage among white men” (white supremacy) was merely “a means to the end of slavery.”¹⁰⁵ Quids were not united, but they generally opposed and feared secession as

⁹⁹ Thompson, *Robert Toombs*, 12.

¹⁰⁰ Thompson, 16-23.

¹⁰¹ Thompson, 25.

¹⁰² Thompson, 29-32.

¹⁰³ Thompson, 76-77.

¹⁰⁴ Thompson, 80-87.

¹⁰⁵ Jeffrey Zvengrowski, *Jefferson Davis, Napoleonic France, and the Nature of Confederate Ideology, 1815-1870* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2020), 4.

the instigator of a war that would destroy slavery and states' rights.¹⁰⁶ As a result of his allegiance with the Quid Whigs, Toombs was seen as a sectional politician, but less partisan than some of his colleagues.¹⁰⁷

Whereas Davis was able to gain political momentum because of his military career, John Reagan struggled politically in the years during and after the American War with Mexico. He won election to the Texas State Legislature in 1847 and arrived in Austin in December of that same year. He ran for state senate in 1849, but he was not elected.¹⁰⁸ Reagan remained a largely local and state figure after his 1849 defeat. His leading biographer has written, "Like most Americans who were not caught in the immediate jaws of sectional conflict, he lived his life from day to day interested mainly in his present needs and desires or in those of his neighbors and friends."¹⁰⁹

The Know-Nothing Party, a nativist political coalition, was highly popular in Texas, especially after the Mexican-American War because of the high volume of "Mexicans—Catholic, foreign, hated, and despised by Texans for generations—sympathized with the Negro slave." Additionally, German immigrants to the state "espoused abolitionist sentiments and argued for political and social reforms."¹¹⁰ Not a member of the Southern planter class, Reagan is evidence of the white solidarity that existed among all classes of whites in the South. For reasons not entirely known, Reagan

¹⁰⁶ Zvengrowski, 40.

¹⁰⁷ Thompson, *Robert Toombs*, 126.

¹⁰⁸ Procter, *Not Without Honor*, 62-63, 70-71.

¹⁰⁹ Procter, *Not Without Honor*, 89.

¹¹⁰ Procter, *Not Without Honor*, 90.

sided with the Democratic Party against the Know-Nothings and helped to solidify the political ideology of the area around the Democracy.”¹¹¹

On the national stage, Jefferson Davis was creating a Democratic Party for the South. A member of the Democratic Party in the US Senate, Davis sought to forge “sectional unity by honing the national Democratic Party into a proslavery weapon.”¹¹² Davis opposed Quid Southerners, like Toombs, who saw extreme States’ rights as the answer for the South amidst a dangerous Union. Instead, he followed along with Pro-Bonaparte Southerners who began to value *more* consolidation in the South in favor of white supremacy and equality over Blacks who should be properly enslaved.¹¹³

Davis decried the divisions within the Union and the Democratic Party specifically. After the election of 1848 gave the Presidency to Zachary Taylor, a Whig (and Davis’s former father-in-law), Davis, speaking before the Democratic State Convention, which was gathered to nominate Mississippi state official, decried that since “the foundation of our government the people have been divided into political parties.” It wasn’t just that the people were divided into warring parties. Instead, their differences were more fundamental: They “represent antagonistic principles; are separated by an essential difference; and however we may regret the bitterness to which the controversy sometimes rises, it is not to be expected that it will permanently cease.”¹¹⁴ He believed

¹¹¹ Procter, *Not Without Honor*, 92-93.

¹¹² Woods, *Arguing Until Doomsday*, 98.

¹¹³ For an excellent early treatment of Confederate politics and the interplay of states’ rights, consolidation, and white supremacy, see George C. Rable’s *The Confederate Republic* (UNC Press, 1994). Most recently, Jeffrey Zvengrowski examines the same themes, but with a unique, transnational lens in *Jefferson Davis, Napoleonic France, and the Nature of Confederate Ideology, 1815-1870* (LSU Press, 2020).

¹¹⁴ *JDC*, 1:237.

that “the united, decided, energetic action of the South will ensure success, whilst divisions among ourselves will entail consequences from the contemplation of which every patriot must recoil.”¹¹⁵ Already, he was beginning to conceptualize the South as a distinctive entity that required super-human, mythic, religious social homogeneity to find success. Southerners, Davis claimed, “stand now, as we have always stood, upon the defensive.”¹¹⁶

Land taken from Mexico had to be organized into territories, and at least one state was ready to be admitted, California. The United States Senate was the site of intense debates among many of America’s leading statesmen, including John C. Calhoun (South Carolina), William H. Seward (New York), Salmon P. Chase (Ohio), Jefferson Davis (Mississippi), Henry Clay (Kentucky), and Stephen A. Douglas (Illinois), “[r]epresenting the new generation.”¹¹⁷ Missing from these debates were those men who would come to play significant leadership roles within the Confederacy: Robert Toombs, George W. Randolph, John Reagan, Judah Benjamin, Stephen Mallory, or James Seddon.

During Senate debates over California’s admission as a free state and national fugitive slave laws, Jefferson Davis revealed the consolidations streak of Southerners. Because enslaved people were “the most delicate species of property,” Davis argued that the Federal Government should “provide the necessary means to secure the enjoyment of that right.”¹¹⁸ The Compromise of 1850 was passed as a series of individual bills.

¹¹⁵ *JDC*, 1:243.

¹¹⁶ *JDC*, 1:252.

¹¹⁷ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 75.

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Woods, *Arguing Until Doomsday*, 103.

Together, they organized the Utah and New Mexico Territories without restrictions to slavery, meaning slaveholders could take their human property with them West; California was admitted as a Free State; the slave trade (but not slavery) was abolished in DC; and a strengthened Fugitive Slave Law was passed to allow Southerners greater *national* means of returning Black people into slavery.¹¹⁹ Davis dropped out of the Senate to run for Governor of Mississippi, but he lost narrowly. His national life seemed over, until he was raised from his plantation by President-elect Franklin Pierce to serve as United States Secretary of War.

As Davis was leaving the Senate and advancing to the Executive Branch, men who would later serve in his Cabinet were arriving at the Senate. Stephen Russell Mallory had been chosen by the Florida Legislature as the state's newest Democratic Senator. Even as Mallory was being presented to the Senate on 13 December 1851 by Jackson Morton, David Yulee, the Whig Florida Senator whom Mallory had been chosen to replace was contesting the election. The Senate debated whether Mallory could take his seat in the Senate, with Henry Clay advocating to give the seat to the newly-arrived Floridian.¹²⁰

Mallory's family had arrived in Key West, Florida in 1820, migrating from New York and then Mobile, Alabama. Mallory's mother, Ellen, was the only white woman on the island.¹²¹ Shortly after arriving in Key West, Mallory was sent to a family friend back near Mobile where he began attending school. He left school briefly after his father died,

¹¹⁹ Boles, *The South Through Time*, 287.

¹²⁰ Joseph T. Durkin, *Stephen R. Mallory: Confederate Navy Chief* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1954), 48-49.

¹²¹ Durkin, 11. Mallory was nine years-old when his family moved to Key West.

and his older brother, John, died soon after Stephen returned to Key West.¹²² He went to Nazareth, Pennsylvania around 1826 to attend a Moravian school there, but he dropped out after three years because his mother could not pay tuition.¹²³ Back in Key West, he held various odd jobs, like Reagan in Texas. Mallory helped his mom run a lodging house and he became Inspector of Customs at Key West. During the evenings, he would study and read. For four years after becoming Customs Inspector, Mallory studied law under William Marvin who was “the recognized authority on the jurisprudence of wreck and salvage.”¹²⁴ In 1832, he was elected town marshal with the primary responsibility of enforcing curfew.¹²⁵

Mallory’s first recorded entrance into politics came in 1835. The Legislative Council of the Florida Territory revoked Key West’s charter, and Mallory wrote an anonymous article in the *Enquirer* in favor of repealing the Legislative Council’s action.¹²⁶ In 1838, Mallory married Angela Moreno, a gentle, independent, and sometimes domineering woman from a wealthy Pensacola family who had moved to Key West in 1830.¹²⁷ Since she had moved to Key West in 1830, Stephen and Angela had had an emotional and highly volatile romantic relationship with a least one previous request for marriage that Angela denied. “Toward his wife Stephen never lost the fresh, deep, yet

¹²² Durkin, 12-14.

¹²³ Durkin, 14-15.

¹²⁴ Durkin, 15-19; quote is on p. 19.

¹²⁵ Durkin, 20.

¹²⁶ Durkin, 26-27.

¹²⁷ Durkin, 16, 30.

boyish love of his courtship days.”¹²⁸ By the time of the war with Mexico, Stephen and Angela had four children, and Stephen had a successful legal practice “and was regarded by at least one of his older contemporaries as being the best lawyer of his age in the state.”¹²⁹ Stephen and Angela would live a quiet, happy life in Key West until he was catapulted onto the national stage by the Florida State Legislature, a testament to his abilities as a lawyer and his reputation.

Judah Philip Benjamin entered the United States Senate on 4 March 1853 after President Pierce had called a special session.¹³⁰ For the historian of the antebellum South, Benjamin’s story is one of fascination, not least because he “lived his American life at a time when Jews received a form of political acceptance but suffered considerable disadvantages.”¹³¹ Benjamin was born on 6 August 1811 to parents of Spanish Jewish descent. The family owned three slaves.¹³² The Benjamin family moved to Wilmington, North Carolina to stay with a maternal uncle on whom the family depended for their livelihood.¹³³ Benjamin finished school at age 14, in 1825, and went to Yale where he

¹²⁸ Durkin, 30.

¹²⁹ Durkin, 31.

¹³⁰ Robert Douthat Meade, *Judah P. Benjamin: Confederate Statesman*, (1941, reprint, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 86.

¹³¹ Catharine MacMillan, “Judah Benjamin: Marginal Outsider or Admitted Insider?” *Journal of Law and Society* 42, no. 1 (2015): 153.

¹³² Meade, *Judah Benjamin*, 3-6.

¹³³ Meade, *Judah Benjamin*, 7-11.

was part of a debating society. He abruptly withdrew from Yale his Junior year likely because of thievery.¹³⁴

Benjamin arrived in New Orleans in 1828, where Benjamin became an English tutor for a young French, Catholic girl, Natalie St. Martin. Natalie was apparently attracted to Benjamin's wealth, and they were married, though their relationship was filled with unresolved tension.¹³⁵ Judah evidently studied law at school because he was admitted to the bar in December 1832 and the following March he carried a case all the way to the Louisiana Supreme Court.¹³⁶ He entered state politics in 1842 as a Whig and was nominated and elected to the Louisiana Constitutional Convention in 1844 to re-write the 1812 constitution.¹³⁷ During the war with Mexico, Benjamin was becoming a plantation owner and experimenting with new methods for the production of sugar.¹³⁸ As the war was coming to an end, Benjamin was appointed counsel to the new California land commissioner and he traveled to the Pacific Coast. When he returned to Louisiana in 1848, he was chosen as a presidential elector on the Whig ticket. For the next several years, Benjamin focused on his law practice and plantation.¹³⁹ Before finally entering the Senate, Benjamin was nominated by President Millard Fillmore to the United States

¹³⁴ Meade, *Judah Benjamin*, 19-30. The thievery accusations arose after the Civil War, but Meade claims that altogether "the unpleasant evidence against Judah is too strong not to be considered; at Yale there was a lingering tradition that he was guilty of the offense charged" (30).

¹³⁵ Meade, *Judah Benjamin*, 31-36. Natalie lived with Benjamin for ten years before she moved to Paris, where she stayed for the duration of their "marriage." She took the kids with her, and Judah rarely saw his children (35).

¹³⁶ Meade, *Judah Benjamin*, 36.

¹³⁷ Meade, *Judah Benjamin*, 50-55.

¹³⁸ Meade, *Judah Benjamin*, 60.

¹³⁹ Meade, *Judah Benjamin*, 66.

Supreme Court in the winter of 1852-1853, the first Jew given the honor. However, Benjamin declined the position in favor of an active political career in the Senate.¹⁴⁰

Entering into the Cabinet of Franklin Pierce as Secretary of War, Jefferson Davis aimed to create a “modern, efficient, and stable army.”¹⁴¹ Indeed, military centralization and consolidation was one of Davis’s primary objectives as he sought to emulate Napoleon Bonaparte in France. Davis viewed the French Revolution and the rise of Bonapartist France as emulations of the American Revolution, “which stood, in his view, for white equality and supremacy.”¹⁴² Davis did not shy away from using the full force of the national government at his disposal, which he believed was “fully empowered to care for national well-being, especially military matters.”¹⁴³ As Secretary of War, Jefferson Davis “labored to solidify southern power over national policy.”¹⁴⁴ Davis’s appointment to Pierce’s Cabinet was met with general approval, however, it was also obvious to many observers that he had been chosen to pacify the radical, pro-slavery faction of the Democratic Party.¹⁴⁵ As Secretary of War, Davis frequently quarreled with senior military officers, but he also provided the department with innovative leadership. His

¹⁴⁰ Meade, *Judah Benjamin*, 84-85.

¹⁴¹ David Sansing, “A Happy Interlude: Jefferson Davis and the War Department, 1853-1857,” *The Journal of Mississippi History* 51, no. 4 (1989): 302.

¹⁴² Zvengrowski, *Jefferson Davis, Napoleonic France*, 80. What Davis thought about the Revolution in Haiti, also inspired by the French and American Revolutions, is not clear, but a worthy topic of future inquiry.

¹⁴³ Zvengrowski, 116.

¹⁴⁴ Woods, *Arguing Until Doomsday*, 112.

¹⁴⁵ Woods, 118; Sansing, “A Happy Interlude,” 301.

work in the US War Department “wielded federal might to promote a western slaveholding empire.”¹⁴⁶

Over in the Senate, Florida Senator Stephen Mallory was making his mark on United States Naval policy. His maiden speech was in defense of corporeal punishment in the Navy, without which, he argued, there would be no discipline or order.¹⁴⁷ During debates regarding the place of Texas within the Federal Union, Jefferson Davis had learned a lesson: “southern migration and state-sanctioned violence could make the West safe for slavery.” To accomplish this and to secure slavery’s expansion, Davis fought to improve transportation between the South and West.¹⁴⁸ Mallory similarly advocated for better transportation in Florida; he petitioned the Senate Public Lands Committee for land to build railroads.¹⁴⁹ After two years in the Senate, Mallory was appointed chairman of the Senate Naval Affairs Committee in spring 1853.¹⁵⁰ That winter, Pierce’s Navy Secretary sent over legislation intended to reform and modernize the navy; Mallory was essential to helping get the legislation through the senate.¹⁵¹ Mallory adhered to a simple ship-for-ship theory of naval combat. As a result, he looked abroad at the navies of the

¹⁴⁶ Woods, 118-119.

¹⁴⁷ Durkin, *Stephen R. Mallory*, 52.

¹⁴⁸ Woods, *Arguing Until Doomsday*, 120.

¹⁴⁹ Durkin, *Stephen R. Mallory*, 56. After the war, John H. Reagan and other Southerners would be leading advocates for rail transportation across the South and West. For an excellent overview of Southern congressmen and their work *after* the Civil War, see David A. Bateman, Ira Katznelson, & John S. Lapinski, *Southern Nation: Congress and White Supremacy After Reconstruction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

¹⁵⁰ Durkin, 61.

¹⁵¹ Durkin, 62.

United States' potential future enemies. The Navy of the United States needed to match theirs in style and size.¹⁵²

Following the Presidency of Franklin Pierce, Mallory, Benjamin, and Davis, all found themselves re-elected to the Senate. Reagan was sent to the United States House of Representatives in August 1857 as a representative of Texas's Eastern District.¹⁵³ If future Confederate military leaders gained their pre-war experience in the Mexican-American War, Confederate civilian leaders gained their political experience and reputations during the Thirty-Fifth and Thirty-Sixth United States Congresses. Jefferson Davis, Judah P. Benjamin, Stephen R. Mallory, and Robert Toombs were all in the Senate; John H. Reagan was in the House of Representatives. Missing were future, vital Confederate civilian leaders, Christopher Memminger (of South Carolina) and James A. Seddon (of Virginia) both of whom were involved in state and local politics.

The Kansas and Nebraska Territories would occupy the debate during the Thirty-Fifth and -Sixth Congresses. The issue would give rise to the South's greatest threat: a purely regional (Northern) anti-slavery party that opposed the spread of slavery into the West. One historian has succinctly summed-up the issue for Southerners: "Kansas stood between the South and destruction by anti-slavery encirclement."¹⁵⁴ Having gained fame and political prestige through his efforts in passing the Compromise of 1850, Stephen Douglas, who envisioned a sea-to-sea empire, would play a major role in the Kansas-Nebraska question.¹⁵⁵ Douglas, seeking to avoid the slavery issue that had plagued

¹⁵² Durkin, 98.

¹⁵³ Procter, *Not Without Honor*, 98.

¹⁵⁴ Woods, *Arguing Until Doomsday*, 157.

¹⁵⁵ Boles, *The South Through Time*, 288.

debates over California's entrance into the Union and the organization of the Utah and New Mexico Territories, advocated for a policy called "popular sovereignty." His logic was quite simple: let the people of the territory decide whether they wanted slavery or not. After so many years of fighting for a strong national government to advocate for slavery, Douglas threatened to undermine the national infrastructure that he had built as Secretary of War. The unintended consequence of Popular Sovereignty was an influx of settlers into the territories. Though most of these settlers probably cared more for land, symbolically, they aroused "people everywhere who were fervently interested in slavery's prospects."¹⁵⁶ The result of the influx of Northern and Southern settlers into Kansas was two Constitutions. The Topeka Constitution would make Kansas a free-state whereas the Lecompton Constitution would make the territory a slave state. The paradox of popular sovereignty was that *both* Constitutions had the sovereign popular backing of one majority of the population. Neither Constitution could gain a majority in the United States Congress, and Kansas settlers increasingly took to violence to settle the slavery issue.¹⁵⁷

Kansas unleashed two forces that broke apart the American Union. First, Southerners lost control of the national Democratic Party as they increasingly came to be seen as the radical element within the Party. There was a roughly two-to-one free-soil majority in the Kansas territory.¹⁵⁸ The Lecompton Constitution, recently rewritten by Kansas residents, protected settlers' property, specifically masters' property in slaves.

¹⁵⁶ Boles, 290-291.

¹⁵⁷ McPherson, *Battle Cry*, 145-153.

¹⁵⁸ McPherson, *Battle Cry*, 162.

The Constitution could not be altered for seven years, and slave property could not be touched even after those seven years.¹⁵⁹ Davis and pro-slavery Democrats pushed for adoption of the Lecompton Constitution. Recently-elected President, James Buchanan, a Pennsylvanian Democrat who owed his victory to slaveholding Southerners, also supported the Lecompton Constitution and made support for the same a litmus test for Democratic loyalty. Stephen Douglas, however, refused to support the Lecompton governing document since it did not truly represent the total population of the territory. Previously, Douglas had seen abolitionists as threatening the Democracy's unity, "but now the danger came from proslavery proponents of minority rule."¹⁶⁰ The battle over the Lecompton Constitution demolished all faith that Jefferson Davis had in Douglas Democrats. His efforts to maintain a national, pro-slavery party were significantly threatened and Southerners, generally, began to feel more and more defensive.¹⁶¹

The second force emerging from the Kansas Debate that eventually shattered the Union was the Republican Party. The Republican Party was an amalgamation of opponents to the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The Republican Party was purely sectional—it only had support in the North. At its foundation, it was opposed to the spread of slavery. Republicans would not touch slavery as it existed in the Southern states, but they sought slavery's slow demise by surrounding it with free-soil States. Further exacerbating sectional tensions, John Brown led a raid into Virginia to free slaves, arm them with weapons seized from the United States arsenal at Harper's Ferry, and instigate a massive

¹⁵⁹ McPherson, *Battle Cry*, 164.

¹⁶⁰ Woods, *Arguing Until Doomsday*, 158.

¹⁶¹ Woods, 166.

slave-revolt across the South. “For most Southerners, John Brown represented the logical outcome of abolitionism and the principles of the Republican party.”¹⁶² For Democrats, there were no degrees of anti-slavery supporters; all were abolitionists, and all were threats to the nation. In the mind of Southerners, Republicans were “murderous foes of the South, willing to condemn every white man, woman, and child to a horrendous death if it took that to destroy slavery.”¹⁶³

In the Presidential election of 1860, Illinois Republican Party founder, Abraham Lincoln, won a remarkable majority of Northern votes. Because there were three other candidates, no one else received a plurality of votes. Southerners were outraged that Lincoln had been Constitutionally elected by a purely sectional (Northern) plurality.¹⁶⁴ The election of 1860 represented a revolution in which the interests of the South were now permanently overwhelmed by a hostile North that would forever dominate the region. Southerners quickly enacted a “counter-revolution” designed to protect the Union from the cancerous growth of abolitionism. South Carolina seceded from the Union in December 1860, followed by the rest of the Deep South: Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia and Louisiana all seceded in January 1861, followed shortly by Texas on 1 February 1861.

After the secession of the Southern States, Senators were recalled from their posts in the Senate. Many of them gave farewell speeches in which they all consistently

¹⁶² Boles, *The South Through Time*, 299.

¹⁶³ Boles, 299.

¹⁶⁴ McPherson, *Battle Cry*, 232.

emphasized their desire for peaceful secession.¹⁶⁵ Robert Toombs was the first senator to give a farewell address on 7 January 1861. Toombs listed five demands. First, was the extension of slavery as an institution into the American West and that, secondly, slaves be recognized as property. His third, fourth, and fifth demands all centered around claims that slave property should be returned to Southerners no matter where in the Union they had fled to and that those inciting insurrection be properly punished.¹⁶⁶ On 21 January, there were five farewells given in the Senate chamber, including Jefferson Davis and Stephen Mallory.¹⁶⁷ Mallory was the second senator to speak. He had supported secession as a last resort and regretted “that causes existed which impelled the South to separate from the Union.”¹⁶⁸ Secession, according to Mallory, was an expression of the American ideals of freedom and justice. Early on, the Southern cause was connected with the Revolutionary founding of the United States.

Jefferson Davis spoke last on 21 January 1861. Davis began his address by defending the legality of secession. “Secession belongs to a different class of remedies. It is to be justified upon the basis that the States are sovereign.”¹⁶⁹ By leaving the Union, Southern states were merely exercising their sovereign rights to protect, preserve, and defend the political rights of the people within those states. Davis claimed that it “has been a belief that we are to be deprived in the Union of the rights which our fathers

¹⁶⁵ Glenn E. Reddick, “When the Southern Senators Said Farewell,” *The Southern Speech Journal* 15, no. 3 (1950): 170.

¹⁶⁶ Reddick, 174-175.

¹⁶⁷ Reddick, 177.

¹⁶⁸ Reddick, 180.

¹⁶⁹ *JDC*, 5:42.

bequeathed to us.”¹⁷⁰ Mississippi was forced to take the drastic action of secession to defend the Revolutionary rights of self-government that had been given to them by the American Revolutionaries. Davis closed his speech claiming that he had no “hostility” toward his Northern allies and colleagues in the Senate. Instead, Southern secession was merely a peaceful measure to protect those things held most dear by Southerners: slavery and white supremacy, free from the radical, egalitarian threat of abolitionism.¹⁷¹

As Davis, Mallory, Benjamin, and Toombs were giving their farewell addresses to the United States Senate, John Reagan had departed the House of Representatives on 15 January 1861. Arriving in New Orleans, he discovered he had been elected to the Texas secession convention. He headed directly to Austin, arriving there on 30 January 1861, just in time to vote with the secessionists to pass the ordinance of secession on the first of February. He was then selected as one of seven representatives to go to Montgomery to represent Texas at the convention of Southern states gathering there. The convention was a “triumph of efficiency,” in the words of James M. McPherson.¹⁷² In just six days, the convention wrote a provisional Constitution (by copying the United States text nearly verbatim); made themselves a provisional legislature; made themselves an electoral college; and selected a president and vice president. The pre-emptive, Southern counter-revolution to preserve slavery and white supremacy had found expression as a modern nation-state.

¹⁷⁰ *JDC*, 5:43.

¹⁷¹ *JDC*, 5:44.

¹⁷² McPherson, *Battle Cry*, 257.

CHAPTER III

President Jefferson Davis and the Creation of Confederate Identity

The convention that created the Confederate government also acted as an electoral college to choose the new nation's first president. There was limited debate regarding who should hold the nation's highest office.¹ Jefferson Davis frequently came up in deliberations, though he did nothing to actively influence his selection as president.² Mary Chesnut wrote that everybody in the Montgomery convention "wanted Mr. Davis to be general in chief or president."³ The most serious contenders for the presidency were the delegates from Georgia, Robert Toombs, Alexander Stephens, and Howell Cobb, because of their prominence and impressive political record. Historians Herman Hattaway and Richard Beringer have gone so far as to assert that the Montgomery convention *preferred* Toombs over Davis.⁴ Robert Toombs actively sought the position, but he met some opposition within his own delegation, especially due to his support for the Constitutional Union Party during the 1860 election.⁵ With a divided delegation, neither of the three men could gain a majority of votes.⁶

Most Southerners understood that Jefferson Davis would play a vital, nationalizing role within the young republic. William J. Cooper, Jr., Davis's most recent

¹ Cooper, *JDA*, 326.

² William C. Davis, *Jefferson Davis*, 301.

³ Mary Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, edited by C. Vann Woodward (New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1981), 19 February 1861 entry, 6.

⁴ Herman Hattaway and Richard E. Beringer, *Jefferson Davis, Confederate President* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 19.

⁵ Hattaway and Beringer, *Confederate President*, 19.

⁶ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 258-259; Cooper, *JDA*, 327.

biographer, has noted that he had “military, political, and administrative experience that set him apart from other southern notables in 1861.”⁷ The lack of political maneuvering in the Montgomery convention favored Davis. He had a long and largely unblemished political reputation and career. He served admirably in the Mexican-American War, speaking to his personal bravery and honor, and to his military skill, something that would be needed should the new nation be forced into war. His service as Secretary of War under President Pierce gave him administrative experience (especially connected to the military). Further, his terms in the Senate gave him the necessary political skills and connections to lead a new nation.

Davis desired a general-in-chief position similar to the position George Washington held during the American Revolution.⁸ Davis thought that his previous military experience equipped him well for the work of military organization and strategy that a general-in-chief would be required to perform. Writing to Alexander M. Clayton on 30 January 1861, Davis noted that the office of “President of the provisional government is one of great responsibility and difficulty.” He claimed to have “no confidence in my capacity to meet its requirements. I think I could perform the functions of general if the Executive did not cripple me in my operations by acts of commission or omission.”⁹ Davis’s claims to not desire the presidency are likely true. He had spent an entire career both militarily and politically connected to the United States Army. Like many southern

⁷ William J. Cooper, Jr., *Jefferson Davis and the Civil War Era* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 79.

⁸ Davis, *Jefferson Davis*, 301.

⁹ Letter to Alexander M. Clayton, 30 January 1861, in Lynda Lasswell Crist & Mary Seaton Dix, eds., *Papers of Jefferson Davis*, Vol. 7 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 28. Hereafter abbreviated *PJD*.

men, military service was an honored career which could result in the glory necessary to uphold white men's coveted honor. Simultaneously, that Davis shied away from the presidency fit perfectly within the "republican tradition of publicly renouncing any motivation to become president."¹⁰ In his letter to Clayton, Davis claimed that, in truth, he did not want *either* position, but "in this hour of my country's severest trial will accept any place to which my fellow citizens may assign me."¹¹

Despite Davis's claims to indifference to public service and some early preference for Georgia Confederate delegates, many suspected that Davis was being heavily considered for the Presidency. It was Davis's understanding that "adequate precautions had been taken to prevent" his selection.¹² After the war, Davis remembered that he was "surprised" and "disappointed" when he heard about the news of his selection at his Mississippi plantation.¹³ Davis had already been given the highest military office within the state of Mississippi, and he had every intention of returning to that post after his temporary stint as *provisional* president was completed.¹⁴ In a speech delivered after he arrived in Montgomery, Davis told the crowd, "If, in the progress of events, it shall become necessary that my services shall be needed in another position—if, to be plain, necessity shall require that I shall again enter into the ranks of the soldiery, I hope that

¹⁰ R. Jarrod Atchison, *A War of Words: The Rhetorical Leadership of Jefferson Davis* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2017), 31.

¹¹ Letter to Alexander M. Clayton, 30 January 1861, *PJD*, 7:28.

¹² Jefferson Davis, *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government* Vol. I (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1881), I:230.

¹³ Davis, *Rise and Fall*, I:230.

¹⁴ Davis, *Rise and Fall*, I:230.

you will welcome me there.”¹⁵ Even after the start of the war, Davis continued to remind his listeners that he never fully desired the presidency. He thought that the Presidency of the Provisional Government to which he was being called would “prove to be but temporary.” Instead, he “imagined that it might be my fortune again to lead Mississippians in the field, and to be with them where danger was to be braved and glory won.”¹⁶

Hattaway and Beringer used Davis’s claims that he did not desire the presidency to apply James David Barber’s presidential leadership types to Jefferson Davis. Barber contends that personality and character are important markers of how presidents lead. Character, according to Barber, is “defined according to (a) how active he [the President] is, and (b) whether or not he gives the impression he enjoys political life.”¹⁷ Out of four presidential leadership styles proposed by Barber, Hattaway and Beringer argue that Davis is an “active-negative” president. The active-negative leader has an active political and administrative style, but he does not enjoy it. The civic republicanism that Davis espoused, Hattaway and Beringer assert, was more than mere formality. Instead, Davis truly found little emotional reward in his work as president. “He poured a great deal of energy and commitment into his work, but we suspect that he did not enjoy it much.”¹⁸ Davis desired to serve, but not in the capacity for which he was chosen.

¹⁵ Montgomery, AL, *The Confederation*, 22 February 1861.
<http://digital.archives.alabama.gov/digital/collection/cwnp/id/1945> (accessed 15 August 2020).

¹⁶ Speech at Jackson, 26 December 1862, *PJD*, 8:565-566. That Davis expressed a desire to serve his *state* is a great irony in the midst of a speech in which he called on his fellow Confederates to make greater sacrifices for the national good in a war that was growing to terrible proportions.

¹⁷ Quoted in Hattaway & Beringer, *Confederate President*, xvii.

¹⁸ Hattaway & Beringer, *Confederate President*, xvii. The other leadership types are: (1) active-positive where the president is active in public life and enjoys it; (2) active-negative, described above; (3)

Jefferson Davis Forms His Cabinet

Not since George Washington has an American president been in a position like Jefferson Davis. Emory Thomas explains: “Davis was in a unique position...in that he had the opportunity to construct an entire executive branch of government by himself.”¹⁹ The “skeleton” of the executive branch was left over from the United States political tradition, but Davis was tasked with giving the Confederate’s executive branch muscle and skin. In the new nation, the executive was to be an important position. The hopes and aspirations of the South were concentrated in one individual. Davis and the Executive Branch, especially the Cabinet, was Confederate nationhood personified. Lindsay Chervinsky has recently argued that the creation of George Washington’s first Cabinet “embodies the emergence of the United States.”²⁰ Similarly, the Confederate Cabinet came to embody the emergence of the Confederacy.

To successfully launch their nation, Davis maintained that “it will be necessary to provide for the speedy and efficient organization of branches of the executive department, having special charge of foreign intercourse, finance, military affairs, and the postal service.”²¹ The executive branch, including the Cabinet, was essential to the emergence of the new Confederate nation. The political atmosphere of the Confederate

passive-positive, a president who is not strong-willed in public but enjoys his work; and (4) passive-negative, a weak president who does not enjoy his work. Passive-negative is the most inefficient leadership type (xvii). For a more in-depth discussion that applies Barber’s leadership to Jefferson Davis, see: “Appendix: Barber’s Model of Presidential Leadership,” in Hattaway & Beringer, *Confederate President*, 435-441.

¹⁹ Emory Thomas, *The Confederate Nation: 1861-1865* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 72.

²⁰ Lindsay M. Chervinsky, *The Cabinet: George Washington and the Creation of an American Institution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2020), 12.

²¹ Inaugural Address, 18 February 1861, in *PJD*, 7:48.

States presented Davis with a unique challenge. There was no “Confederate” politics to speak of, especially since the Confederacy was essentially a party-less nation, but there were political considerations, largely remnants from the old Union, that Davis was required to take into consideration in the formation of his cabinet. “However free the President should have been to select his cabinet on the basis of merit and public virtue,” Thomas observes, “in fact his choices reflected the demands of politics and geography.”²²

The United States Constitution did not create the Cabinet as an institution of government or the departments that would compose the Cabinet. That work was left to Congress after the Constitution was ratified. The Constitution allowed for the president to gather the written opinions of the various “department heads.” The Cabinet developed organically as an institution under George Washington who frequently gathered his department heads in meetings to address constitutional and diplomatic crises during the United States’ formative years.²³ Early on, the Cabinet addressed primarily policy and political concerns. Cabinet officers did not have large administrative responsibilities, and the Congress was more active in governance than the Cabinet. By the nineteenth century, Cabinet officers were appointed primarily as political favors to particular factions or geographic regions.²⁴

The experience of Jefferson Davis and the formation of the Confederate Cabinet were little different from his United States predecessors. The Confederacy replicated the United States Cabinet, with two exceptions. The Provisional Confederate Congress

²² Thomas, *The Confederate Nation*, 72.

²³ Chervinsky, *The Cabinet*, 5.

²⁴ Hoxie, “The Cabinet in the American Presidency, 1789-1984,” 217.

created six executive departments: state, treasury, war, justice, navy, and postal. Absent from this list was the Department of the Interior, “for which the Confederates saw no need, in no small part because to them it was symbolic of too powerful a central government.”²⁵ The Justice Department was also a new addition to the Cabinet structure. It was “the first such subdivision of government in an Anglo-Saxon country, for even in England there was no unified agency of law enforcement in the royal government.”²⁶

Further changes in the Confederate Cabinet allowed Cabinet Officers to hold “a seat upon the floor of either House, with the privilege of discussing any measures appertaining to his Department.”²⁷ This retention of Congressional seats by current Cabinet officers was allowed in the provisional Confederate government, but the provision was never exercised within the permanent government despite the fact that President Davis “desired the privilege for his secretaries, and the administration had majority support in the national legislature.”²⁸ Davis felt that having the Cabinet secretaries in Congress would help speed the passage of beneficial legislation. In the Provisional Congress, Christopher Memminger (Secretary of Treasury), Robert Toombs (Secretary of State), Robert M. T. Hunter (State after Toombs), and John Reagan (Postmaster General) all retained their Congressional seats even after they had been appointed and confirmed to the Cabinet.²⁹ A further difference between the Confederacy

²⁵ Cooper, *JDA*, 331.

²⁶ William M. Robinson, Jr., *Justice in Grey: A History of the Judicial System of the Confederate States of America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1941), 27.

²⁷ Rembert W. Patrick, *Jefferson Davis and His Cabinet* (1944, reprint, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1961), 45, quoting the Confederate Constitution, Article I, Section 6, Paragraph 2.

²⁸ Patrick, 47.

²⁹ Patrick, 45-46.

and the United States was that the Confederate Congress could “make no appropriations that the department heads, through the president, had not requested”; this provision placed great power in the executive branch, and especially the Cabinet.³⁰

Davis praised the lack of political maneuvering that characterized his Cabinet selections. “The unanimity existing among our people made this a much easier and more agreeable task than where the rivalries in the party of an executive have to be consulted and accommodated, often at the expense of the highest capacity and fitness.”³¹ Drawing on his experience in the Pierce Cabinet, and his great pride in the absence of turnover in that body, Davis selected a Cabinet dictated largely by geographic and political representation. The Provisional Congress created six departments, and there were seven Confederate states. Mississippi was represented by Davis as President. The state-representation model was chosen in an effort to unite the widest popular support behind the new government.³² Davis consulted state delegations in the Confederate Congress, but he does not seem to have consulted the individuals whom he planned to appoint to Cabinet positions. Instead, he assumed that everyone would rally to the cause of the South.³³ He used the state-representation model throughout the entire war in an effort “to knit the sovereign states into a closer unit.”³⁴

³⁰ Dennis L. Peterson, *Confederate Cabinet Departments and Secretaries* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2016), 9.

³¹ Davis, *Rise and Fall*, I:241.

³² Peterson, *Confederate Cabinet Departments and Secretaries*, 13.

³³ Eric H. Walther, *William Lowndes Yancey and the Coming of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 237, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/shsu/reader.action?docID=837902#>.

³⁴ Patrick, 49.

Davis turned first to South Carolina, the first state to secede. He desired Robert Barnwell for the position of Secretary of State, with whom he had worked well with during his time in the US Senate.³⁵ However, the South Carolina delegation, of which Barnwell was a member, desired Christopher Memminger for the Treasury portfolio. Memminger, though he had no prior experience as a politician in the United States national government, was an important state political leader who had helped lead his state out of the Union and write the Confederacy's constitution. Barnwell declined to go against his state's wishes and would not accept the Treasury post. Davis had intended to give Treasury to Robert Toombs of Georgia, but with Memminger in the position, he moved Toombs to the State portfolio. Davis thought Toombs was better qualified for the treasury position, but some had recommended Toombs for State, vouching for his ability.³⁶ The State Portfolio was considered the premier Cabinet position, and by giving this position to Toombs, Davis followed a long-held political tradition within the United States where the President gave his chief rival the State Department.³⁷ Toombs, his pride deeply wounded from not being chosen for the presidency, initially declined the Cabinet offer, but Davis persisted until Toombs relented.³⁸ The *Montgomery Daily Post*, however, reported Toombs's "unhesitating acceptance" of the State Department as one of the "encouraging signs of the times." The paper reported that, previously, Davis and Toombs had been rivals and did not personally get along. However, "in the great cause of

³⁵ Davis, *Rise and Fall*, I:241-242.

³⁶ Davis, *Rise and Fall*, I:242.

³⁷ President Lincoln gave the State Department to his chief rival for the Republican Party nomination, William Seward.

³⁸ Davis, *Jefferson Davis*, 312.

Southern Independence, in which the heart and soul of both are so deeply enlisted, a common sympathy for a common cause has eradicated whatever of personal or political prejudice might have existed, and they now give their united energies for the success of the great enterprise in which we are engaged.”³⁹

With State and Treasury filled, Davis turned toward what would become the most important post, that of Secretary of War. Leroy Pope Walker was a well-known lawyer from north Alabama, and he was the only name put forward by the Alabama delegation in Montgomery. Davis, perhaps discouraged by Walker’s lack of experience, looked to other Alabamians. Clement C. Clay was a personal friend, but he declined, primarily due to poor health and his preference for a Senate post. William Lowndes Yancey, an important Alabaman “fire-eater” was given his choice of Cabinet positions or a diplomatic post. Yancey declined to serve on the Cabinet, newspapers speculated, because he could not maintain his radical support base within a moderate administration.⁴⁰ President Davis, somewhat reluctantly, appointed Walker who enthusiastically accepted, having desired the position and campaigned openly for it, an uncharacteristic display of political confidence and ambition. Perhaps Davis was suspicious of Walker’s enthusiasm, having cast himself as the selfless victim of honorable sacrifice in the tradition of civic republicanism.⁴¹ The departments of State, Treasury, and War were filled on Thursday 21 February 1861, “and as the most important

³⁹ *Montgomery Daily Post*, Montgomery, AL, 22 February 1861, <http://digital.archives.alabama.gov/digital/collection/cwnp/id/1181/rec/12> (accessed 15 August 2020).

⁴⁰ Walther, *William Lowndes Yancey*, 237.

⁴¹ Davis, *Jefferson Davis*, 312; William C. Harris, *Leroy Pope Walker: Confederate Secretary of War* (Wilmington, NC: Broadfoot Publishing Company, 2000), 20.

departments of the new Government are now provided for, public anxiety upon this point, will be quieted.”⁴²

For the Navy Department, Jefferson Davis selected Stephen Russell Mallory of Florida. In his post-war memoirs, Davis makes his selection of Mallory seem obvious: “Mr. Mallory...had been chairman of the Committee on Naval Affairs in the United States Senate, was extensively acquainted with the officers of the navy, and for a landsman had much knowledge of nautical affairs; therefore he was selected for Secretary of Navy.”⁴³ This, combined with the recommendation of the Florida delegation was enough to land Mallory the Navy portfolio.⁴⁴ There was little precedent for the Attorney General position, since the Justice Department was a new creation within the American political tradition. Attorneys General had held Cabinet-level appointments in the United States, though their roles were almost purely advisory; they had no departments to oversee and little policy to direct. Davis chose Judah Philip Benjamin of Louisiana

⁴² *Montgomery Daily Post*, Montgomery, AL, 22 February 1861, <http://digital.archives.alabama.gov/digital/collection/cwnp/id/1181/rec/12> (accessed 15 August 2020).

⁴³ Davis, *Rise and Fall*, I:242.

⁴⁴ Rembert Patrick claims that little “thought had been given to a navy by the men who led the South into secession. These fervid nationalists considered navies necessary only to imperial and industrialized nations” (Patrick, *Jefferson Davis and His Cabinet*, 244). Recent historians have noted the ways Confederates in fact imagined their future as one of these imperialistic and industrialized nations. Adrian Brettell has argued that Confederates believed they “needed a powerful navy” to guard their postwar commercial ambitions (Adrian Brettell, *Colossal Ambitions*, 97-100). An author for *De Bow’s Review* reflected on the future prospects of the Confederacy. The “bright prospects” of rapid commercial growth necessitated that the Confederate government “turn its attention to that arm of its power so essential to the protection of this vast interest, and hence a navy co-equal with and adequate to such protection and to keep pace with its growth, is indispensably necessary.” (“What of the Confederacy—The Present and the Future?” *De Bow’s Review* Vol. 31, Dec. 1861, in *The Cause of the South: Selections from De Bow’s Review, 1846-1867*, edited by Paul F. Paskoff & Daniel J. Wilson [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982], 247). An “inland navy,” this author argued, “has now also become indispensable for the protection of our river commerce” (“What of the Confederacy,” in *The Cause of the South*, 247). Mallory’s position as Navy Secretary seems to have been more important to Confederates than historians have previously realized.

because of his “very high reputation as a lawyer,” and Davis’s “acquaintance with him in the Senate had impressed me with the lucidity of his intellect, his systematic habits and a capacity for labor.”⁴⁵

The Post Office Department proved surprisingly difficult to fill. Looking to give Mississippi an official place in the Cabinet, Davis turned to an old friend, Henry T. Ellet. His appointment was submitted to and confirmed by the Provisional Confederate Congress on 25 February 1861.⁴⁶ For unknown reasons, Ellet declined the post.⁴⁷ With Ellet’s refusal, Davis approached another friend, Wirt Adams. He also refused, and the postmaster general position remained unfilled.⁴⁸

John Reagan, a member of the Texas state delegation, arrived in Montgomery late, after the election of Davis and Stephens as President and Vice President. Reagan called on Davis, informing him that he would have nominated Davis as head of the army, rather than president. Davis confessed to Reagan that this was the position he truly desired. Perhaps moved by Reagan’s flattery, Davis tendered him the postmaster general position after Ellet and Adams declined.⁴⁹ Reagan declined the post, twice! After the second time, Reagan “was called on by several members of the Congress, among them

⁴⁵ Davis, *Rise and Fall*, I:242.

⁴⁶ To Howell Cobb, 25 February 1861, *PJD*, 7:59; see also Patrick, 273.

⁴⁷ *Charleston Daily Courier*, Charleston, SC, 7 March 1861, https://www.newspapers.com/image/?clipping_id=46041287&fcfToken=eyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiIsInR5cCI6IkpXVCJ9.eyJmcmVILXZpZXctaWQiOiYwNDUzNjkxNCwiaWF0IjoxNTk3NTI1NjUxLCJleHAiOiE1OTc2MTIwNTF9.KUKdPMB1_InCGMsnYSAXvfRIIsaqMmS5V-IXVVD7Ca4 (accessed 15 August 2020).

⁴⁸ Davis, *Jefferson Davis*, 312.

⁴⁹ John H. Reagan, *Memoirs with Special Reference to Secession and the Civil War*, edited by Walter Flavius McCaleb (New York, NY: The Neale Publishing Company, 1906), 109.

Gen. T. N. Waul of Texas, and Hon. J. L. M. Curry of Alabama.”⁵⁰ The Congressmen took Reagan to see President Davis where, together with Davis and his Cabinet, they urged him to accept the position.⁵¹ Reagan objected, claiming that he did not think reliable mail delivery could be attained. He knew that people depended on this, and he “did not desire to become a martyr.”⁵² The Congressmen, Davis, and the Cabinet all promised that they would support and assist Reagan in carrying out his work to the best of their abilities. “I very reluctantly consented to accept the position,” Reagan remembered, and “instead of feeling proud of the honor conferred on me, I felt that I was to be condemned by the public for incapacity.”⁵³ Perhaps Davis saw so much of himself in Reagan’s reluctance and self-doubt. As the war would progress, Reagan would prove to be as loyal a Confederate as Davis himself.

With Reagan’s acceptance, the Cabinet of the Confederacy was complete: Robert Augustus Toombs of Georgia as Secretary of State; Christopher Gustavus Memminger of South Carolina as Secretary of Treasury; Leroy Pope Walker of Alabama as Secretary of War; Stephen Russell Mallory of Florida as Secretary of Navy; Judah Philip Benjamin of Louisiana as Attorney General; and John Henninger Reagan of Texas as Postmaster General.

After the war, several falsehoods regarding the creation of the Cabinet arose. Jefferson Davis explicitly claimed that there were no political considerations in forming the Cabinet. True, the Confederacy did not have any official political parties that Davis

⁵⁰ Reagan, *Memoirs*, 109.

⁵¹ Reagan, *Memoirs*, 109.

⁵² Reagan, *Memoirs*, 110.

⁵³ Reagan, *Memoirs*, 110.

had to appease in his Cabinet selections. Still, there were political considerations to take into account, especially a secretary's commitment to secession and slavery. The result was that the original Cabinet was made up of old-Union Democrats who had supported secession.

Giving each state a representative on the Cabinet was also a political consideration. This operating procedure was logical since secession and the formation of the Confederacy had been Constitutionally and legally justified using states' rights theory, which "emphasized sovereign state governments not only as bulwarks against the tyranny of centralized power but also as more superior expressions of popular will."⁵⁴ Giving each, theoretically sovereign, state a representative in the Cabinet helped to build a broad base of support behind the Confederate government and nation.⁵⁵ Janet Martin has noted that when a presidential administration begins, the ideal of "balance" is an important element of the president's selection process and how the nation evaluates the Cabinet.⁵⁶ Understanding the purpose of the Cabinet as a balance of representation of states, geographic regions, and so on, gives "symbolic and political considerations...in the President's selection of cabinet members," and "a certain role is also expected of a member and of the cabinet as a collectivity."⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Frank Towers, "The Threat of Consolidation: States' Rights and American Discourses of Nation and Empire in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 9, no. 4 (2019): 614.

⁵⁵ George C. Rable, *The Confederate Republic: A Revolution Against Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 71.

⁵⁶ Martin, "Frameworks," 795.

⁵⁷ Martin, "Frameworks," 797. It should be noted that Martin is using data from modern presidencies, but her general observation can be tentatively applied to the nineteenth century executive.

Another falsehood that Davis peddled after the war was that he did not consult personal friends for Cabinet positions. The republican tradition to which Southerners ascribed required that the President and his Cabinet be virtuous individuals who could serve as examples to the people.⁵⁸ However, selecting friends for the cabinet was a major way U.S. presidents fostered corruption within their administrations. A brief overview of Davis's selection process shows that he had, in fact, consulted at least three personal friends: Clement Clay, Henry Ellett, and Wirt Adams. None of these friends accepted the offered posts. The result was that the final Cabinet was composed of men that were largely unknown to Davis, which was not unusual for nineteenth-century U.S. Cabinet appointments.⁵⁹ He knew Benjamin only a little, and his relationship with Toombs was strained and distrustful at best.

Administrative and Personality Style of Jefferson Davis

Upon first being introduced to Jefferson Davis, J. B. Jones, a Confederate War Department clerk, noticed his tall stature, and his "very slight and seemingly frail" frame. Overall, there was "nothing sinister or repulsive in his manners or appearance; and if there are no special indications of great grasp of intellectual power...neither is there any evidence of weakness, or that he could be easily moved from any settled position."⁶⁰ The Confederate people would find that Davis was hardworking and devoted to the cause of

⁵⁸ Atchison, *War of Words*, 32. NICE

⁵⁹ Hoxie, 215. After Washington, Hoxie writes, presidents "frequently had Cabinet members they did not personally know and did not completely trust."

⁶⁰ John Beauchamp (J.B.) Jones, *A Rebel War Clerk's Diary: At the Confederate States Capital*, 2 Vols., edited by James I. Robertson, Jr. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2015), 17 May 1861 entry, I:23.

Confederate nationhood. Some of the work that Davis completed was self-inflicted and unnecessary. He gave personal attention to almost every paper that came across his desk, exhibiting a controlling, perfectionistic administrative style.⁶¹ Davis admitted to a crowd gathered in Macon, Georgia, “I read all letters sent me from the people, but have not the time to reply to them.”⁶² Navy Secretary Mallory, wrote in his diary, “...whatever engaged his attention, however unimportant, was thoroughly and critically examined...[and] affairs of the moment were delayed, not only because he habitually undertook more labour than he could accomplish, but that much of his time was given to unimportant details.”⁶³ William J. Cooper writes: “The minutiae that received his regular attention utterly boggles the mind.”⁶⁴ This control was evidence of the overwhelming responsibility that Davis felt as president of the Confederacy. “Neither his ingrained administrative style nor his concept of his duty would permit any substantive delegation of authority or tasks.”⁶⁵

If delegation was one of his key faults, a sense of purpose and leadership was one of Davis’s greatest strength. Davis sought to make decisions thoughtfully and deliberately.⁶⁶ He rarely relied on his own experience, especially in regard to domestic

⁶¹ Cooper, *JDA*, 333.

⁶² Speech at Macon, 23 September 1864, *PJD*, 11:62.

⁶³ Stephen R. Mallory, *Diary and Reminiscences of Stephen R. Mallory*, transcript (Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice University), 147.

⁶⁴ Cooper, *Jefferson Davis and the Civil War Era*, 86.

⁶⁵ Cooper, *JDA*, 486. Another Davis biographer, William C. Davis, theorizes another, more personal reason for Davis’s perfectionistic administrative style: the personal responsibility he felt for his first wife’s death. “Now, too, his views of the outer world began to change. Unable or unwilling to accept imperfections in himself, he developed a preoccupation with what he perceived as imperfections elsewhere, whether in people or things” (Davis, *Jefferson Davis*, 85).

⁶⁶ Patrick, *Jefferson Davis and His Cabinet*, 32.

matters. Secretary Mallory recorded in his diary that Cabinet officers met frequently with Davis one-on-one throughout the course of a week. In addition to these individual meetings, Davis met with the entire Cabinet two to three times a week. Each of these meetings could range anywhere between two to five hours which Mallory thought was “far longer than was required for the thorough examination and solution of the principles and chief features of current public measures and business.”⁶⁷ Mallory complained that Davis was known to digress during the course of discussion and that “not unfrequently [*sic*] a Cabinet meeting would exhaust four or five hours without determining anything.”⁶⁸

Whether Cabinet meetings were productive or not, the discussion was frequently lively and honest. “At the outset Davis promised his official advisors that he would be candid with them, and from them he asked for the same frankness.”⁶⁹ The Cabinet seems to have given Davis this frankness. Secretary Reagan reported that he disagreed more with the President than any other officer in the Cabinet. Reagan remembered Davis saying that “if the Cabinet should accept without question the opinions of the President, he [Davis] did not well see what their use could be as advisors.... He observed that the free interchange of opinions was the way to arriving at correct decisions.”⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Mallory, *Diary* transcript, 149. Woodson Research Center.

⁶⁸ Mallory, *Diary* transcript, 149. Woodson Research Center.

⁶⁹ Cooper, *JDA*, 332.

⁷⁰ Reagan, *Memoirs*, 162.

Disagreements within the Cabinet were apparently rarely heated or passionate.⁷¹ Davis generally decided upon courses of action that conformed with the majority opinion of the Cabinet officers.⁷² In times of great crisis, John Jones recorded, the “President, I believe is calm, relying upon the loyalty of his cabinet.”⁷³ President Davis greatly trusted and respected the opinions of his official advisors. Many critics claimed the Cabinet was essentially a collection of clerks doing the bidding of the President. However, Davis’s allowance of discussion and his great care in making decisions only after consulting the entire Cabinet speak to the respect he had for these men as his advisors in administering this new nation.

If Davis’s administrative record is generally positive, historians have often dismissed it as not being enough to compensate Davis’s personality which was not well-suited to the challenges of leading the Confederacy through the Civil War. Patrick, the most recent scholar to study Davis and the Cabinet, writes that “the President lacked finesse in the personal phases of administration.”⁷⁴ According to Mallory, “Few men could be more chillingly, freezingly cold.”⁷⁵ The office of the Presidency was a heavy

⁷¹ Reagan, *Memoirs*, 162. Most of Davis’s Cabinet officers had experience as lawyers, and historian Peter Charles Hoffer has recently argued that because Davis was not a lawyer, he was ill-equipped to handle the disagreements and debate inherent to the work of lawyers (Peter Charles Hoffer, *Uncivil Warriors: The Lawyers’ Civil War* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2018], 64). Thirteen of Davis’s Cabinet Secretaries were lawyers (Dennis L. Peterson, *Confederate Cabinet Departments and Secretaries*, 15). Hoffer writes, “Davis’s personality, framed in years of military service and as a planter, then in the Senate debating society, would not have brought him much legal business even had he changed careers in mid-life. Lincoln’s experience in the law helped made the law firm of A. Lincoln and partner perform well. Not so with Davis and his cabinet” (64).

⁷² Patrick, *Jefferson Davis and His Cabinet*, 33.

⁷³ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 13 January 1865 entry, II: 349.

⁷⁴ Patrick, *Jefferson Davis and His Cabinet*, 35.

⁷⁵ Mallory, *Diary* transcript, 155. Woodson Research Center.

responsibility for Davis, and he “maintained the rigid dignity of his high office, giving the impression of cold austerity.”⁷⁶ The cold, aloof personality that Davis fostered was an effort to give the office of the President of the Confederate States a sense of dignity, poise, and power. In this effort, he was trying to emulate George Washington. Davis “possessed the quiet dignity if not quite the commanding presence that had made Washington a natural leader.”⁷⁷ Ludwell Johnson has noted that “dignity is not always irrelevant to effective leadership.”⁷⁸ Confederates, steeped in the civic republican tradition, valued this leadership. Their President was to be an example to them and the world. War clerk Jones believed that “Statesmen are the physicians of the public weal.”⁷⁹

Davis was sensitive to criticism, taking negative feedback as a personal attack on him. Davis was loyal to his friends to a fault. He was blinded by friendship so that he could not see their weaknesses or faults.⁸⁰ This sensitivity seems odd for someone who, before the Civil War, was considered one of the South’s leading politicians. That the Confederate experiment was “a revolution against politics” explains some of Davis’s sensitivity despite his experience in politics. With the founding of the Confederacy, Davis believed that there had also been a new birth in politics. Just as the Confederacy was to be a pure version of the American nation, its politics would be a corrective to the

⁷⁶ Patrick, 35.

⁷⁷ Rable, *The Confederate Republic*, 64.

⁷⁸ Ludwell H. Johnson, “Jefferson Davis and Abraham Lincoln as War Presidents: Nothing Succeeds Like Success,” *Civil War History* 27, no. 1 (1981): 51. Johnson is critical of Lincoln’s “folksiness.” This folksiness got in his way when he was dealing with powerful men who treated him with contempt (51).

⁷⁹ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 17 May 1861 entry, I:24.

⁸⁰ Patrick, *Jefferson Davis and His Cabinet*, 35.

divisiveness of United States politics. “Because traditional politics had not succeeded in saving the Union, it certainly could not be relied on to preserve the Confederacy.”⁸¹

As President, Davis totally devoted himself to the Confederate cause. “In his view he and the Confederate State of America were one.”⁸² In a post-war autobiography, Davis wrote, “From this time [his selection as provisional president] to the fall of the Confederate Government my life was part of the history of the Confederacy and of the war between the States.”⁸³ President Davis could not understand the opposition that slowly developed against his presidency during the war. “From everyone else involved in the Confederate enterprise, the South’s president expected, even demanded, the same full measures of selfless devotion that he was absolutely sure characterized his Confederate contribution.”⁸⁴ Especially within the Cabinet, Davis expected the same devotion that he himself gave to the Confederacy. “Never doubting his own patriotism and seldom questioning his own judgement, he could not understand why others failed to rally around the administration with a simple, unaffected devotion.”⁸⁵

While Davis had trouble making close friendships, his loyalty to the Cause commanded the respect of a few close associates. This was certainly true of John Reagan, Stephen Mallory, and Judah Benjamin, the three Cabinet officers who stayed on the Cabinet for the entire duration of the conflict. John Reagan observed, “[T]aking into view

⁸¹ Cooper, *Jefferson Davis and the Civil War Era*, 15.

⁸² Cooper, *Jefferson Davis and the Civil War Era*, 15.

⁸³ Extract, “Jefferson Davis, Ex-President of the Confederate States of America: A Memoir,” Beauvoir, MS, November 1889, *PJD*, 1:lxii.

⁸⁴ Cooper, *Jefferson Davis and the Civil War Era*, 15.

⁸⁵ Rable, *The Confederate Republic*, 70.

the combined elements of character and ability I regard him as the ablest man I have known.”⁸⁶ Reagan further believed that Davis was “the best equipped of all the brilliant statesmen of his times,” and that “few men in this or any country or age have been his equals.”⁸⁷ Mallory, despite some of his negative recollections regarding Cabinet meetings, remembered that Davis had “unyielding will and energy,” along with a great litany of other attributes including patience, industry, an analytical mind, a knowledge of public affairs, and judgment.⁸⁸

President Davis, the Washington Ideal, and the American Revolution

Understanding his role as the Confederate Washington, Davis modeled some of his presidential leadership on Washington’s example. As the “great symbol of national power and harmony,” Jefferson Davis was also “the source of Confederate authority, [and] the new republic’s only genuine political hero.”⁸⁹ Like Washington, Davis sought to put this reputation to use, and traveled his new southern nation in an effort to bring some sense of unity. As the first President of the United States, George Washington took two major tours of the new nation during his first term. “He aimed to bring the federal government to communities that rarely interacted with the new administration outside their use of the postal service.”⁹⁰ Washington “was the most notable symbol of the new nation, and he hoped his presence would foster emotional connections to the union and

⁸⁶ Reagan, *Memoirs*, 252.

⁸⁷ John H. Reagan, interview about Jefferson Davis, 6 December 1889, copy (Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice University).

⁸⁸ Mallory, *Diary* transcript, 149. Woodson Research Center.

⁸⁹ Rable, *Confederate Republic*, 110

⁹⁰ Chervinsky, *The Cabinet*, 146.

build support for the administration's policies."⁹¹ Davis similarly recognized his position as the Confederate George Washington. On three separate occasions, he "journeyed west to meet not only with armies and generals but also with civilian leaders and the general public."⁹² During these trips, his speeches and efforts at creating a sense of Confederate unity were met with positive results. J. B. Jones recorded that a portion of the Confederate press, "praises the President for his carefulness in making a tour of the armies and ports south of us [Richmond]."⁹³ In the Union, Davis's Presidential "rival," Abraham Lincoln, never did anything comparable to Davis's or Washington's national tours.⁹⁴

Part of the explanation could be in Davis's Democratic-inspired conception of presidential authority which rested partially on public opinion. The Democratic Party quickly became the party committed to presidential representation. The "Democratic Party was the party of a strong president presiding over a weak national government that respected the rights of the states."⁹⁵ Assuming the presidential office of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis, a lifelong Democrat, inherited these assumptions and expectations regarding his power and authority as president.⁹⁶ Mid-way during the war, a government

⁹¹ Chervinsky, 146.

⁹² Cooper, *Jefferson Davis and the Civil War Era*, 69.

⁹³ Jones, diary entry, 7 November 1863, *Clerk's Diary*, II:80.

⁹⁴ Cooper, *Jefferson Davis and the Civil War Era*, 69.

⁹⁵ Jeremy D. Bailey, *The Idea of Presidential Representation: An Intellectual and Political History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2019), 81.

⁹⁶ During George Washington's term as president, public opinion came to be embraced as a legitimate source of authority for the presidency. By the 1840s, President Polk could claim that the "President represents in the executive department the whole people of the United States, as each member of the legislative department represents portions of them" (Bailey, 43, 73).

official observed that “the President ought not to forget that he is not a ruler by Divine right to administer justice merely, but the servant of the people to aid in the achievement of their independence; and that their opinions and wishes, right or wrong, must be respected, or they can deprive him of honor, and select another leader.”⁹⁷ The civic republican tradition rested on a body politic united behind the common good. The president’s authority and power were drawn from this homogenous outpouring of patriotism. “If we gain our independence by the valor of our people, or assisted by European intervention,” J. B. Jones wrote, “I wonder whether President Davis will be regarded by the world as a second Washington? What will his own country say of him?”⁹⁸

If following the example of Washington took Davis away from Richmond, it becomes obvious that some authority had to be delegated in his absence. The invention of the telegraph made long-distance communication easier and faster, but it was far from instantaneous. On one of his trips from Richmond in October 1863, Davis delegated authority to his Cabinet to meet should the need arise. In this, he was following the example of Washington who allowed his secretaries to gather during one of his absences from the Capital.⁹⁹ During Davis’s 1863 absence, Judah Benjamin, then Confederate Secretary of State, called the Confederate Cabinet together. Benjamin wrote Davis on 8 October, “You had scarcely left Richmond when an exigency occurred which seemed to

⁹⁷. Jones, diary entry, 29 August 1863, *Clerk’s Diary*, II:22.

⁹⁸. Jones, diary entry, 31 October 1862, *Clerk’s Diary*, I:158.

⁹⁹ Chervinsky, *The Cabinet*, 167. During one of Washington’s absences in 1791, Vice President John Adams and the Cabinet officers gathered and approved a new loan offered by the Netherlands. “Hamilton then submitted the group’s decision to the president for his review. Almost a month later, Washington finally received Hamilton’s report and gave his approval.”

me to call for immediate action, but on which I could not assume the responsibility of acting in your name during your absence without the clearest necessity—I accordingly requested my colleagues to meet me yesterday.”¹⁰⁰ Benjamin, understanding how protective Davis was of his authority, wrote, “I am very sensible how grave is the step thus taken without your sanction but trust that you will not consider us as having overstepped the bounds imposed by necessity under the circumstances.”¹⁰¹ After describing and defending the action taken by the Cabinet, Benjamin added: “P.S. It would be gratifying to me to hear by telegraph that our action meets your approval.”¹⁰² Davis upheld the actions of his most trusted Cabinet officer, telegraphing his approval from Atlanta on 29 October.¹⁰³

In keeping with his desire for a military position and the example set by Washington, Davis left the Confederate capital for the battlefield on several occasions. On 21 July 1861, Davis left Richmond for the Manassas battlefield. Clerk Jones wrote, “I have always thought he would avail himself of his prerogative as commander-in-chief, and direct in person the most important operations in the field; and, indeed, I have always supposed he was selected to be the Chief of the Confederacy, mainly with a view to this object, as it was generally believed he possessed military genius of a high order.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Letter from Judah P. Benjamin, *PJD*, 10:15.

¹⁰¹ Letter from Judah P. Benjamin, *PJD*, 10:16.

¹⁰² Letter from Judah P. Benjamin, *PJD*, 10:16.

¹⁰³ *PJD*, 10:18n13.

¹⁰⁴ Jones, *Clerk's Diary*, 21 July 1861 entry, I:48.

Clearly, Davis himself preferred a military position, believing that his skills were better fitted for a military rather than administrative role.

There was an expectation, at least among those surrounding his work in Richmond that he would militarily fulfill the role of Washington. Jones went so far as to write, “In revolutions like the present, the chief executive occupies a most perilous and precarious position, if he be not a military chieftain, and present on every battle-field of great magnitude.”¹⁰⁵ To modern readers, this is an incredible assertion that seems to imply that Davis should travel with the military. Confederates took the title Commander-In-Chief quite literally. As the life of the Confederacy lengthened, and the war grew more intense, Davis was required to stay in Richmond more frequently to direct the war.

The expectation that he would be in the field still lingered. In June 1862, Jones wrote, “Some of the people still think their military President is on the field directing every important movement in person....He issued no orders; but awaited results like the rest of us, praying fervently for abundant success.”¹⁰⁶ Some things were outside of Davis’s control. Several months later, Jones again commented on the expectation that Davis would lead in the field: “Many people thought the President himself would take the field. I doubt not he would have done so if the Provisional Government had continued in existence until independence was achieved.”¹⁰⁷ Davis’s growing infrequent physical presence and leadership at battlefields garnered the scorn of the Confederate public. “They say he is a small specimen of a statesman, and no military chieftain at all.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 21 July 1861 entry, I:48.

¹⁰⁶ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 28 June 1862 entry, I:123.

¹⁰⁷ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 3 October 1862 entry, I:145.

¹⁰⁸ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 31 October 1862 entry, I:158.

There was a sense of disappointment that Davis did not take to the field to lead Confederate armies to victory like George Washington. Jones seemed to take comfort in the knowledge that even “Washington was maligned.”¹⁰⁹

Expectations of Davis as the Confederate Washington make sense when understood as part of the larger effort by secessionists and Confederate leaders to connect the Confederacy with the American Revolutionary tradition. Especially with the outbreak of war, analogies become an important way that participants made sense of their circumstances.¹¹⁰ Secessionists drew on the prevailing traditions of the American Revolution to justify their own destruction of the Union. By 1861, Confederates saw themselves in a revolution that was largely repeating the Revolution of 1776.¹¹¹ George Rable has described the ways Confederates understood *patriotism* “as if the struggles of the 1860s mirrored those of the 1770s. Simply make the spirit of 1776 the spirit of 1861, and the Confederate nation would emerge triumphant.”¹¹²

Across the globe, emerging nationalistic revolutions latched onto liberal ideals inspired by the American Revolution, making it difficult for the Confederacy, the first pro-slavery, anti-democratic nation in the modern western world, to lay claim to being the true heirs of the Revolution.¹¹³ “Words like ‘secession,’ ‘nation,’ and ‘independence’

¹⁰⁹ Jones, *Clerk's Diary*, 31 October 1862 entry, I:158.

¹¹⁰ Aaron Sheehan-Dean, *Reckoning With Rebellion: War and Sovereignty in the Nineteenth Century* (Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 2020), 54.

¹¹¹ Emory Thomas, “Jefferson Davis and the American Revolutionary Tradition,” *Journal of Illinois State Historical Society* 70, no. 1 (1977): 4. Thomas, *The Confederate Nation*, 3.

¹¹² George C. Rable, “Rebels and Patriots in the Confederate ‘Revolution,’” in *In the Cause of Liberty: How the Civil War Redefined American Ideals*, eds. William J. Cooper, Jr. & John M. McCardell, Jr. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 65.

¹¹³ Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South*

trapped Confederates in a web of patriotic rhetoric associated with the American Revolution and its promise of liberal democracy.”¹¹⁴ To counter a liberalizing world, Confederates, and Davis especially, clung to the rhetoric of civic republicanism. The ideal of republicanism was, after slavery, the most powerful unifying aspect of Southern society.¹¹⁵ “Republicanism, or government conducted by the people for the protection of the rights of the people, constituted the most significant national value” of elite Southerners.¹¹⁶ The ideal of Republicanism allowed Confederates to claim the mantle of the American Revolution and continue to defend slavery. Confederates gladly accepted the title *rebel* when they compared themselves to “the rebels of 1776, and only then in their guise of throwing off the yoke of tyranny. None of the regrettable rhetoric of ‘all men are created equal’ carried over to the midcentury effort at American state-building.”¹¹⁷ Not only was Republicanism more conservative than the liberalism unleashed by the American Revolution, but it was also more “orderly.” “To ensure that political institutions served the public good, republicanism demanded that elected officials be dispassionate decision-makers who would set aside personal interests for the good of the community.”¹¹⁸ The people were also called on to be virtuous and sustain their government through necessary sacrifices.

(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 1-2. Founded “in defiance of the spirit of the age,” the Confederacy “was something entirely new in the history of nations: a modern proslavery and antidemocratic state, dedicated to the proposition that all men were not created equal.”

¹¹⁴ Sheehan-Dean, *Reckoning with Rebellion*, 57.

¹¹⁵ Rable, *Confederate Republic*, 12.

¹¹⁶ Ann L. Tucker, *Newest Born of Nations: European Nationalist Movements and the Making of the Confederacy* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2020), 26.

¹¹⁷ Sheehan-Dean, *Reckoning with Rebellion*, 75.

¹¹⁸ Atchison, *War of Words*, 29.

In addition to the more conservative aspects of Confederates' understanding of Civic Republicanism, they also created a liberal rhetoric to defend their new nation. White southerners could claim that they were fighting a war of independence to protect their rights and government from an encroaching tyrant. In this conception of the Confederate nation, Confederate whites were the recipients of a purer liberalism that did not run the risk of infringing their rights as slaveholders.¹¹⁹ The ideal of civic republicanism which grew out of the American Revolution gave birth to two key themes of the Confederate nation that Jefferson Davis would continue to develop throughout the war. The more conservative theme emphasized communal unity behind the goal of an ordered society. The liberal theme cast the Confederacy as the defender of white southerners' liberty and rights to self-government.

Davis's Confederate Identity: Liberty and Communal Unity

A "large and enthusiastic crowd" welcomed Davis when he arrived in Montgomery on Saturday 16 February 1861. After repeated calls for a speech, Davis addressed the crowd that had formed outside the Exchange Hotel. He told the crowd that "now we are brethren, not in name merely, but in fact—men of one flesh, of one bone, of one interest, of one purpose, and of identity in domestic institutions."¹²⁰ *Domestic institutions* was a euphemism for slavery. Buried beneath the high rhetoric of unity, Davis revealed that Confederate unity was contingent on slavery. Davis seemed to understand the Confederacy as a type of political marriage between the people and its

¹¹⁹ Tucker, *Newest Born of Nations*, 9.

¹²⁰ *The Confederation*, Montgomery, AL, 22 February 1861, <http://digital.archives.alabama.gov/digital/collection/cwnp/id/1945> (accessed 15 August 2020).

government. The unity of the people is couched in surprisingly spiritual language. Finally, Davis is saying, the Southern people can be united behind a government and nation committed to their domestic institutions—slavery. “Davis wanted to imagine a new Southern national community whereby the past history of bickering and infighting among Southerners was forgotten in a newfound sense of national unity. He wanted a new nation of like-minded people with like-minded values.”¹²¹

The weather in Montgomery that morning had been rainy and cloudy, which Davis interpreted as an omen that the new nation would encounter some “inconveniences at the beginning—but, as the sun rose...and left us the pure sunlight of heaven, so will the progress of the Southern Confederacy carry us into the safe sea and safe harbor of constitutional liberty and political equality.”¹²² The unity of the Southern people was coupled with the language of liberty and equality. The presence of slavery did not diminish southerners’ use of this imagery; instead, it made it more vivid. For southerners, especially Davis, the Confederacy represented a continuation of the work of the American Founding Fathers. The Confederate government would be one that “protected basic southern interests and guaranteed the liberty of southerners.”¹²³ Davis’s claim that southerners, now Confederates, were united behind “domestic institutions” meant that only the Confederate States of America could “protect them from slavery by preserving

¹²¹. Brian R. Dirck, *Lincoln & Davis: Imagining America, 1809-1865* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 180-181.

¹²². *The Confederation*, Montgomery, AL, 22 February 1861, <http://digital.archives.alabama.gov/digital/collection/cwnp/id/1945> (accessed 15 August 2020).

¹²³. William J. Cooper, Jr., *Liberty and Slavery: Southern Politics to 1860* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 285.

their liberty.”¹²⁴ For Davis, *liberty* was understood in relation to the state which preserved southerners’ right to property. “Davis regarded his liberty as being only possible because his state safeguarded his property, especially in enslaved people.”¹²⁵ The Confederate nation would “preserve the sacred rights transmitted to us [by the Founders], and show that Southern valor still shines as brightly as in 1776, 1812, and in every other conflict.”¹²⁶ In one, broad sentence, Davis claimed the nationalizing legacies of the American Revolution and the War of 1812 for the Confederacy.

The American Revolution and the War of 1812 not only spoke to the valor of the Southern people, but represented an attempt by Davis to create a national myth, one that would continue to hold together the unity of the people that he so highly praised. The question of national identity “was the question of the century, as ethnic and linguistic communities built nation-states across Europe and the Americas.”¹²⁷ Southerners’ nationalism in 1861, Paul Escott has written, “was still a fragile and weak organism.”¹²⁸ Without distinctive geographic boundaries, race, language, or religion, southerners were required to project to the world and themselves what made them truly deserving of nationhood.¹²⁹ They did this by calling “on the testimony of the past to support the idea

¹²⁴ Cooper, *Liberty and Slavery*, 285.

¹²⁵ Adrian Brett, “Struggling to Realize a Vast Future: The Civil War as a Contest Over the Relative Priorities of Political Liberty and Economic Prosperity,” *The Journal of Policy History* 29, no. 2 (2017): 270.

¹²⁶ *The Confederation*, Montgomery, AL, 22 February 1861, <http://digital.archives.alabama.gov/digital/collection/cwnp/id/1945> (accessed 15 August 2020).

¹²⁷ Aaron Sheehan-Dean, *The Calculus of Violence: How Americans Fought the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 28.

¹²⁸ Paul D. Escott, *After Secession: Jefferson Davis and the Failure of Confederate Nationalism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 32.

¹²⁹ Paul D. H. Quigley, “‘That History is Truly the Life of Nations’: History and Southern

of a separate southern nation in the present.”¹³⁰ Before southerners had common experiences as Confederates to give them a sense of identity and purpose, Davis sought to exploit existing American nationalism and history by using the American Revolution as the Confederacy’s true “founding.” Instead of a brand-new national entity, Davis claimed the Confederacy was the American Revolution’s true national fulfillment.¹³¹ Part of their mission of fulfilling the values and sentiments of the American Revolution was to guarantee the liberty of all Confederate citizens. Confederate liberty included Black slavery. “For white Southerners this conjunction of white liberty and black slavery came directly from the Revolution. From at least the time of the Revolution, white Southerners defined their liberty, in part, as their right to own slaves and to decide the fate of the institution without any outside interference.”¹³²

The absence of outside interference represented, for Davis, a key component of Republicanism. For southerners, “republicanism came to mean an obsessive concern with liberty, a fear of political power, and a passion for individual, state, and even sectional independence.”¹³³ As southerners defined their nation for themselves and the world, *republicanism* was of primary importance. In his inaugural address, delivered on 18 February 1861, Jefferson Davis defended his new nation as an illustration of the

Nationalism in Antebellum South Carolina,” *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 106, no. 1 (2005): 9.

¹³⁰ Quigley, “That History,” 10.

¹³¹ Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 14.

¹³² William J. Cooper, Jr., “Jefferson Davis and the Meaning of the War,” *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 107, no. 2 (2009): 156.

¹³³ Rable, *Confederate Republic*, 15.

“American idea that governments rest upon the consent of the governed, and that it is the right of the people to alter or abolish governments whenever they become destructive of the ends for which they were established.”¹³⁴ Quoting the preamble to the United States Constitution, Davis claimed that, in the eyes of the sovereign states which formed the Confederacy, the purposes laid out there had been abandoned. The Declaration of Independence made the creation of a new government through secession an “inalienable right.” Further, God would bless the work of the Confederate nation’s founders. “He who knows the hearts of men will judge of the sincerity with which we labored to preserve the Government of our fathers in its spirit.”¹³⁵ Having failed to reform the old Union, Confederates were forced to use their inalienable, Republican right to reclaim the power that was conditionally ceded to the national government. This reclaimed power was funneled into the creation of the Confederate nation which was motivated “solely by the desire to preserve our own rights and promote our own welfare”¹³⁶

Jefferson Davis presented himself as a personal example for Confederates to follow. According to southern political thought, the president should not be merely the leader of a party, but a patriot rallying his countrymen to the cause of the nation.¹³⁷ “For the task of building a Southern nation, Jefferson Davis must have seemed almost too good to be true.... [He] exemplified Southern society’s most widely shared ideals.”¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Inaugural Address, 18 February 1861, *PJD*, 7:46.

¹³⁵ Inaugural Address, 18 February 1861, *PJD*, 7:47.

¹³⁶ Inaugural Address, 18 February 1861, *PJD*, 7:49.

¹³⁷ Rable, *Confederate Republic*, 59.

¹³⁸ Rable, *Confederate Republic*, 68.

Yet, Davis claimed in his inaugural that his countrymen “would see many errors to forgive, many deficiencies to tolerate.” Of these, however, patriotism would not be one of them: You “shall not find in me either a want of zeal or fidelity to the cause that is to me highest in hope and of most enduring affection.”¹³⁹ Jefferson Davis was the ultimate Confederate nationalist, but he recognized that he relied upon the people’s “wisdom and patriotism.”¹⁴⁰ Wrapping up his address, Davis was filled with joy to “look around upon a people united in heart, where one purpose of high resolve animates and actuates the whole.”¹⁴¹

By the first day of his presidency, Jefferson Davis had laid out his definition of the Confederate States of America. The new southern nation was composed of people united behind a common struggle for white liberty and self-government. Black enslavement was the foundation of this new nation, but Davis did not dwell on slavery as the Confederacy’s purpose. No mention of slavery is made in either of his addresses, besides the euphemism *domestic institutions*. Slavery was such an ingrained part of Confederate society that it did not seem necessary to explicitly defend it or define his new nation as ultimately a defense of it. Slavery figured prominently in Confederate identity and purpose, but at this early stage, Davis sought to build Confederate nationalism on something more unifying than slavery. Instead, unity and liberty served as the watchwords of the Confederate nation as Confederates set out to fulfill the American Revolution by preserving liberty (especially the liberty to own slaves) for the world.

¹³⁹ Inaugural Address, 18 February 1861, *PJD*, 7:49.

¹⁴⁰ Inaugural Address, 18 February 1861, *PJD*, 7:49.

¹⁴¹ Inaugural Address, 18 February 1861, *PJD*, 7:50.

Early in his presidency, Davis consistently defined the Confederacy in relation to liberty and the American Revolution. In an early speech in Richmond, Virginia, Davis greeted his listeners and thanked them for their attention. “The cause in which we are engaged is the cause of the advocacy of rights to which we were born,” Davis claimed.¹⁴² These rights had been paid for by the blood of Confederates’ fathers in the American Revolution—“the richest inheritance that ever fell to man, and which it is our sacred duty to transmit untarnished to our children.”¹⁴³ Great applause greeted his claim that Confederates had inherited “the high and holy responsibility of preserving the Constitutional liberty of a free government.”¹⁴⁴ In his Message to Congress in November 1861, Davis claimed that “the war which is waged to take from us the right of self-government can never attain that end.”¹⁴⁵ During the Confederacy’s first year, Davis wrote in a letter to his brother, Joseph, “It was fortunate that we separated from a people unfit to possess a free government before our people had too become unworthy to possess the inheritance of community independence with civil & religious liberty.”¹⁴⁶

According to Davis’s early speeches, messages, and writing the Confederacy existed to secure liberty—or at least the right of the white man to self-government. “We are not engaged in a conflict for conquest, or for aggrandizement, or for the settlement of a point of international law,” Davis told a crowd in Jackson, Mississippi. Instead, the

¹⁴² Speech at Richmond, 1 June 1861, *PJD*, 7:184.

¹⁴³ Speech at Richmond, 1 June 1861, *PJD*, 7:184.

¹⁴⁴ Speech at Richmond, 1 June 1861, *PJD*, 7:184.

¹⁴⁵ Message to the Congress of the Confederate States, 18 November 1861, *PJD*, 7:419.

¹⁴⁶ Letter to Joseph E. Davis, 18 June 1861, *PJD*, 7:203.

cause of the Confederacy was simple: “The question for you to decide is, ‘will you be slaves or will you be independent?’ Will you transmit to your children the freedom and equality which our fathers transmitted to you?”¹⁴⁷ The image of slavery was frequently contrasted to the liberty and freedom for which Confederates fought. Their intimate experiences with slaves and slavery gave them a front row seat to the dangers and dehumanization of slavery. “The issue then being,” Davis continued, “will you be slaves; will you consent to be robbed of your property; to be reduced to provincial dependence; will you renounce the exercise of those rights with which you were born and which were transmitted to you by your fathers?”¹⁴⁸

According to Davis, the liberty for which Confederates fought was inextricably linked to the American Revolution. His listeners would not have missed Davis’s claim that liberty was also linked to the holding of property. This did not refer to any property only, but primarily and most importantly property in slaves. The loss of slavery, for Confederates, was a loss of liberty. Neither was acceptable. For Jefferson Davis, the Confederate States of America was “the last hope...for the perpetuation of that system of government which our forefathers founded—the asylum of the oppressed and the home of true representative liberty.”¹⁴⁹

This liberty could not be defended except through unity of the people. In contrast to European monarchies, Davis claimed, the Confederate government “sprang from the people and the confidence of the people is necessary for its success.”¹⁵⁰ Yet,

¹⁴⁷ Speech at Jackson, MS, 26 December 1862, *PJD*, 8:573.

¹⁴⁸ Speech at Jackson, MS, 26 December 1862, *PJD*, 8:574.

¹⁴⁹ Speech at Richmond, 5 January 1863, *PJD*, 9:11.

¹⁵⁰ Speech at Jackson, MS, 26 December 1862, *PJD*, 8:574.

Confederates were divided amongst several states, and these states retained primary loyalty for many of his listeners. Davis understood this, but he sought to gloss over the potential divisions of a literal states-rights' ideology in favor of emphasizing the patriotism of the people. The Confederacy, Davis intoned in a speech to Richmonders, was cut from the same states-rights' cloth that had created the original Union: "States so distinct that each existed as a sovereign, *yet so united* that each was bound with the other to *constitute a whole*."¹⁵¹ The divisiveness of the old Union would not plague the Confederacy because of the unity of purpose to which her citizens were united. Davis himself, as President "determined to make no distinction between the various parts of the country—to know no separate State."¹⁵²

Davis could not forego these calls for unity. Communal unity was "so necessary but also problematic" because of "the amorphous character and uncertain intensity of Southern nationalism."¹⁵³ In 1862, Davis addressed the Confederate Congress and praised the people for upholding the government: "The valor and devotion of the people have not only sustained the efforts of the Government, but have gone far to supply its deficiencies."¹⁵⁴ Closing his address, Davis claimed to look forward to new representatives set to arrive in Congress. "I cordially welcome Representative who, recently chosen by the people, are fully imbued with their views and feelings, and can so ably advise me as to the needful provisions for the public service." The Confederate

¹⁵¹ Speech at Richmond, 1 June 1861, *PJD*, 7:184. *Emphasis Added*.

¹⁵² Speech at Jackson, MS, 26 December 1862, *PJD*, 8:566.

¹⁵³ Rable, *Confederate Republic*, 45.

¹⁵⁴ Message to the Congress of the Confederate States, 25 February 1862, *PJD*, 8:59.

Congress could rely on Davis's cooperation "for the common welfare of the country."¹⁵⁵

The theme of communal unity rested on the assumption of civic republicanism that the people would be united in sacrifice to the greater good. This was one benefit of the republican tradition Davis inherited: "by putting such a primacy on the participation of a virtuous citizenry Davis would have cover if/when the Confederacy struggled."¹⁵⁶ The republican tradition which Davis drew from liberally "had long heralded the importance of a homogenous population."¹⁵⁷ There was, however, a long-term danger in this rhetoric. Davis called on states to make enormous sacrifices for the common good, according to the dictates of civic republicanism, but simultaneously he empowered individual states to maintain their sovereignty, which gave them the right to say *no* to Davis's requests. During a time of peace, these positions could likely have been easily reconciled since almost all Confederate states could unite behind the institution of slavery. During a war that would threaten the institution of slavery this tension became deadly.¹⁵⁸

By the end of 1862, Jefferson Davis had established a clear identity for the Confederate nation: liberty sustained by the sacrifices of the people who had the common good of the nation foremost in their hearts and minds. Terms like *liberty*, *freedom*, *self-government*, *independence*, and *self-determination* all commingled together in Davis's addresses. This was the true importance and meaning of the Confederacy. These terms, however, should not be understood in the way Davis sought to idealize them after the war. This liberal agenda, after the Confederacy's downfall, would be lionized as the pure

¹⁵⁵ Message to the Congress of the Confederate States, 25 February 1862, *PJD*, 8:62.

¹⁵⁶ Atchison, *War of Words*, 35.

¹⁵⁷ Atchison, 40.

¹⁵⁸ Atchison, 38.

cry of a people who simply wanted to be free. These *rebels* were rebelling against a tyrant who threatened their God-given and Constitution-sanctioned rights. While true to a degree, what is striking, is the way Davis left slavery out of the national identity that he fashioned in the early stages of the war. He was forced to acknowledge the primacy of slavery, however, when he claimed that white liberty rested on property ownership. Without slavery, there could be no freedom. The second key theme in Davis's early Confederate identity used terms like *homogeneity*, *unity*, *patriotism*, and the *people*. In his republican understanding of politics and nationalism, the nation depended on the people and their commitment to liberty for survival. Davis imbued the people with ultimate responsibility for liberty's survival. Again, this utopian homogeneity had slavery as its foundation. All else considered, southerners had their whiteness in common. That whiteness was built on the inferiority of Blacks. That inferiority was institutionalized in slavery.

CHAPTER IV

1861

The message of self-government would permeate the Confederate message abroad. The Confederate Congress officially created the Confederate Department of State on 21 February 1861. Robert Toombs of Georgia, Davis's first appointee to the position, had a staff of four, including a messenger an assistant secretary, and some clerks. The department had other responsibilities besides foreign affairs. The Secretary of State was responsible for publishing the acts and resolutions of Congress; processing applications for marque and reprisal; collecting every copyrighted book; and placing the CSA seal on civil commissions.¹ Toombs had been in line for the Confederate presidency, and his "demotion" to the State Portfolio was difficult for him to endure. He always knew that his time in the Confederate government would be temporary at best.² The responsibilities that Toombs had in the early days of the Confederacy were miniscule. He often joked that he could fit the entire business of the department in his hat.³ Besides reading dispatches from commissioners and generals, there was little else to do, "and visitors at the State Department were likely to find him sitting idly discussing politics, recounting old stories from his days in Washington, and simply entertaining any caller with his inexhaustible fund of wit."⁴ It was good at least that he had his wit.

¹ Thompson, *Robert Toombs*, 166.

² William C. Davis, *The Union that Shaped the Confederacy: Robert Toombs & Alexander H. Stephens* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 136.

³ Thompson, *Robert Toombs*, 166.

⁴ Davis, *The Union that Shaped*, 122.

The Confederacy had a clearly defined foreign policy with three primary objectives: (1) peaceful separation from the United States; (2) recognition of Confederate independence from foreign powers; and (3) commercial relations with European nations.⁵ Foreign recognition was vital to Confederate survival, especially if peaceable separation from the United States could not be achieved. On 16 March 1861, Secretary of State Robert Toombs dispatched instructions to the Confederacy's first diplomats: William L. Yancey, Pierre A Rost, and A. Dudley Mann. Confederate foreign diplomats were to notify foreign powers that states composing the Confederacy, "by act of their people in convention assembled, severed their connection with the United States, have assumed the powers which they delegated to the Federal Government....and have formed an independent government, perfect in all its branches, and endowed with every attribute of sovereignty and power necessary to entitle them to assume a place among the nations of the world."⁶ Yancey, Rost, and Mann were told that it would "not be necessary to enter into a detailed statement of the reasons" for Southern independence.⁷

Across the nineteenth century, various people and groups rose up around the world claiming national independence.⁸ Most of the nationalist conflicts of the 1800s go by names other than civil war, but their characteristics are strikingly similar. "What unites these wars are the efforts of people to assert sovereignty over territory. They

⁵ Rembert Patrick, *Jefferson Davis and His Cabinet* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), 77.

⁶ *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, Series II, Vol. 3, (Washington, DC, 1922), 192. Henceforth abbreviated, *OR*.

⁷ *OR*, Series II, Vol. 3, 192.

⁸ Sheehan-Dean, *Reckoning with Rebellion*, 2.

sought political, economic, and cultural autonomy within a territorial space they considered their own.”⁹ Beginning in 1848, peoples across Europe revolted to create their own nations. Though most of these revolutions failed, they “opened a transatlantic dialogue regarding nationalism, worker’s rights, and the future of representative government at the precise moment Americans confronted the problems of sectionalism, slavery, and the expansion and later disintegration of the nation.”¹⁰ Americans believed that an increasing global acceptance of the ideals of their Revolution was the reason for the spread of nationalistic uprisings.¹¹ The designation of the nineteenth century American conflict as a civil war distorts the international and global understanding of the conflict that Southerners (indeed, all Americans) espoused. Aaron Sheehan-Dean has recently emphasized this point: “What might surprise some readers is that Americans were not thinking only about North American experience as they fought the Civil War—they knew and discussed a variety of global examples.”¹² For elite southerners whose task it was to define their new nation abroad, “an international vision of the aspiring southern nation as one of many new nations seeking membership in the family of nations was central to their national self-conception.”¹³

⁹ Sheehan-Dean, *Reckoning with Rebellion*, 7. Sheehan-Dean examines the American Civil War alongside the Sepoy, Taiping, and Polish rebellions.

¹⁰ Andre M. Fleche, *The Revolution of 1861: The American Civil War in the Age of Nationalist Conflict* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 3.

¹¹ Fleche, *The Revolution of 1861*, 12.

¹² Sheehan-Dean, *Reckoning with Rebellion*, 4.

¹³ Ann L. Tucker, *Newest Born of Nations: European Nationalist Movements and the Making of the Confederacy* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2020), 2.

As they engaged with the global nationalistic movement, how did southerners conceive of their new nation abroad? There were two general frames of reference that southerners used in taking Confederate national identity abroad. Liberal southerners drew on liberalism to claim that people have rights that the government should protect. Therefore, the new Confederate nation was simply emulating the nationalist movements of other peoples abroad. Conservative southerners drew on the conservative values of social order, hierarchy, structure, and ordered power. Fearing excess liberalism, the conservative southern internationalism emphasized the purifying role that the Confederacy had on the excessively liberal—and therefore failed—global revolutions.¹⁴

In contrast to many of the other national uprisings of the nineteenth century, Toombs claimed that Southern separation from the Union was “not taken hastily or passionately, but after long, patient, and mature deliberation,” Southerners “became convinced that their honor, social and material welfare demanded separation as the best means by which those vital interests could be preserved.”¹⁵ The creation of the Confederacy was presented to Europeans and the world as the act of deliberate self-interest. The CSA was simply following in the footsteps of other self-determining nationalistic movements of the era. Robert Toombs traced the self-determination of the Confederacy all the way back to the American Revolution. Confederates, Toombs wrote in his instructions, “have not violated any obligation of allegiance” to the United States. Instead, they “have merely exercised the sovereignty which they have possessed since their separation from Great Britain, and jealously guarded” by seceding to protect their

¹⁴ Tucker, *Newest Born of Nations*, 9-11.

¹⁵ *OR*, Series II, Vol. 3, 192.

authority, power, and right to self-rule. Like Davis, Toombs linked the Confederacy to the American Revolution, claiming to be its rightful heirs. “The Confederate States,” Toombs continued, “present themselves for admission into the family of independent nations and ask for that acknowledgment and friendly recognition which are due to every people capable of self-government and possessed of the power to maintain their independence.”¹⁶ Recognition by foreign powers was *due* the Confederacy simply by their act of declared independence. Toombs’s instructions cited the British recognition of Italian independence as evidence of the recognition due them. “Reasons no less grave and valid than those which actuated the people of Sicily and Naples to cast off a government not of their choice, and detrimental to their interests, have impelled the people of the Confederate States to dissolve” their union with the United States.¹⁷ The difficulty would be that Britain would not recognize the Confederacy until they saw that the Confederacy did in fact possess the power to maintain their independence. Toombs told Yancey, Mann, and Rost that the past experiences of the Southern people and “our hopes of the future, unite us cordially in a resolute purpose not again to identify our political fortunes with the Northern States.”¹⁸ Like Davis during his many public statements at the beginning of the war, Toombs painted a picture of a perfectly united nation committed to a common vision of the future.

¹⁶ *OR*, Series II, Vol. 3, 193.

¹⁷ *OR*, Series II, Vol. 3, 193. For an engaging, thoughtful comparison of the Confederate South and the experience of Italy during the nineteenth century, see Enrico Dal Lago’s *Civil War and Agrarian Unrest: The Confederate South and Southern Italy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

¹⁸ *OR*, Series II, Vol. 3, 193.

President Davis was also preparing to elaborate on his national definition. In a message delivered to the Confederate Congress on 29 April 1861, he called for speedy elections for those who would administer “the Government in its full proportions” and give it a substantial “basis of the popular will.”¹⁹ At its founding, Davis was confident that “at no distant day other States, identified in political principles and community of interests with those which you represent, will join this Confederacy.”²⁰ The uppcased “s” signified that it was not the people who were establishing the Confederate nation, but states, through which the people acted. Future Confederate States would add to the “splendor” of a nation that was a “constellation” of “free, equal, and sovereign States.”²¹

The future was not Davis’s reason for gathering the Congress. Instead, he wanted to review the history of civil discord among the northern and southern sections of the United States. He wrote, “During the war waged against Great Britain by her colonies on this continent a common danger impelled them to a close alliance and to the formation of a Confederation.”²² The Union was the Confederacy’s common enemy that would unite the states of the nation into a “close alliance.” After relaying the history and justification for Southern secession and nation-building, Davis directed the Congress to the reports of the various Cabinet departments. He noted that the State Department had given the

¹⁹ Jefferson Davis to the Confederate Congress, 29 April 1861, in Dunbar Rowland, ed., *Jefferson Davis Constitutionalist: His Letters, Papers and Speeches* (Jackson, MS: Mississippi Department of Archives & History, 1923), 5:67. Hereafter abbreviated, *JDC*.

²⁰ *JDC*, 5:67.

²¹ *JDC*, 5:67. When planning for a post-war world, Confederates envisioned Western territories entering the Confederate States of America as new states. “Confederate planners...laid claim to the Indian Territory, Arizona, and New Mexico and envisaged the annexation of parts of Mexico” (Brettle, *Colossal Ambitions*, 87). Additionally, they envisioned a separate, Pacific Confederacy that would be closely aligned with the Southern Confederacy both politically and economically (Brettle, 67).

²² *JDC*, 5:68.

“necessary instructions” to the three commissioners sent to Europe.²³ “As I deem it desirable that commissioners or other diplomatic agents should also be sent at an early period to the independent American powers south of our Confederacy,” Davis wrote (making sure to emphasize for all listening that these nations were *independent*), “I suggest the expediency of making the necessary appropriations for that purpose.”²⁴ The next month, those appropriations had been made and Secretary Toombs sent instructions to John T. Pickett who had been appointed minister to Mexico. Toombs did not give Pickett as many details as to the reasons for Confederate independence, pushing Pickett to “conclude a treaty of amity, commerce, and navigation with that Republic on terms equally advantageous of both countries.”²⁵ At this early stage of the Confederate experiment, Confederates were willing to look past Mexicans’ supposed racial inferiority for the sake of foreign commerce. White racial superiority, however, did prevent the Confederacy from expressly asking for recognition. “It is not the wish of this Government to ask for a formal recognition of the independence of the Confederate States by Mexico.”²⁶

Wrapping up his April Message to Congress, President Davis congratulated the Congress “on the fact that in every portion of our country there has been exhibited the most patriotic devotion to our common cause.”²⁷ A united people would not prevent

²³ *JDC*, 5:79.

²⁴ *JDC*, 5:80.

²⁵ *OR*, Series II, Vol. 3, 203.

²⁶ *OR*, Series II, Vol. 3, 204.

²⁷ *JDC*, 5:83.

hardship, Davis well knew. He told the Congress, though, that they need not worry. “A people thus united and resolved cannot shrink from any sacrifice which they may be called on to make.” Davis was positive that there was no “reasonable doubt of their final success, however long and severe may be the test of their determination to maintain their birthright of freedom and equality as a trust which it is their first duty to transmit undiminished to their posterity.”²⁸ The term *birthright* captured Confederates’ understanding that what they had by birth—race—made them worthy of freedom and equality. Governor Pickens of South Carolina had written to Davis only a view weeks before: “[I]f we can consolidate the slave holding race in one government it would give us the certainty of permanent peace and prosperity and secure the development of our peculiar form of civilization.”²⁹ For now, Davis understood the racial foundation of Confederate society, despite his efforts to establish other foundations. Later in the war, his willingness to abandon the racial foundation of the Confederate nation would cost him the harmony of the people that he so dramatically lauded and desperately needed.³⁰

Toombs consistently updated foreign diplomats. In May, he told Mann, Yancey, and Rost that it “is the unanimous desire of the people of the Confederate States that the President shall assume the chief direction of the military operations in the field, and shall proceed for that purpose to Virginia.”³¹ Like the gendered understandings of

²⁸ *JDC*, 5:84. Jason Phillips calls Davis’s attitude here “Southern Invincibility.” Diehard Rebels, he argues, tapped into an “ethos of invincibility.” This was different from Confederate nationalism, which was supposed to unify Southerners behind the Confederacy. Instead, the ethos of invincibility was a faith in Southern superiority, leaving no room for doubt in their ultimate success. *Diehard Rebels*, 2-3).

²⁹ F. W. Pickens to Jefferson Davis, 16 April 1861, *JDC*, 5:63.

³⁰ Jeffrey Zengrowski, *Jefferson Davis, Napoleonic France, and the Nature of Confederate Ideology, 1815-1870* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2019), 265-266.

³¹ *OR*, Series II, Vol. 3, 218.

Manifest Destiny, the Confederacy projected a gendered vision of Davis's leadership, one in which he would take the field personally to fight for self-rule. From London, the Confederate commissioners wrote to Toombs that "the British cabinet have no settled policy as to the recognition of our Government; that they will adhere to their declaration recognizing the Confederate States as belligerents, but will postpone a decision as to a recognition of the independence of those States as long as possible, at least until some decided advantage is obtained by them of the necessity for having cotton becomes pressing."³² The pressing necessity of cotton, many Confederates believed, would force Britain and other nations to recognize the Confederacy. Toombs looked to cotton as the "trump card" of diplomacy. Foreign powers' reliance on cotton would necessitate recognition and economic alliances. Toombs believed that foreign powers would break a Federal blockade as a result of their desperation for cotton.³³ Toombs claimed his job "consisted of being polite and hospitable to foreign nations, but not one of them would talk to him."³⁴

The twenty-first of July in 1861 was so hot in Richmond, that Secretary of Navy Stephen Mallory was forced out of his office.³⁵ In Manassas, a small Confederate force won a decisive over its Union opponent. A few days after the victory, Secretary of the Navy, Stephen Mallory wrote that the victory "is of vital importance, & cannot but

³² *OR*, Series II, Vol. 3, 220.

³³ Thompson, *Robert Toombs*, 169.

³⁴ Davis, *The Union that Shaped*, 111.

³⁵ Stephen Mallory, *Diary and Reminiscences of Stephen R. Mallory*, in the Stephen R. Mallory Diary and Reminiscences, #2229, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 21 July 1861 entry, I:5.

exercise a decided influence upon our relations abroad.”³⁶ Almost all Confederates understood the importance of the victory at Bull Run in similar terms. As late as June 1862, Chief of the Confederate Ordnance Bureau, Josiah Gorgas, remarked that England and France could have spared their own people and Confederates from much evil “had they acknowledged our independence after the battle of Manassas, when they could very properly have done so.”³⁷

By this point, Toombs had reached his breaking point with his service on the Cabinet. Toombs had a problem with being too loose with criticism. He would tell anyone and everyone who would listen to him about his dissatisfaction with Davis and the other Cabinet secretaries.³⁸ He wrote to his friend Alexander Stephens, Confederate Vice President, that “Davis works slowly, too slowly for the crisis.”³⁹ Toombs was not suited for office work, and his days in college had been an early indicator that he was not a good subordinate. He disliked his work and spent as little time as possible at the State Department offices.⁴⁰ Toombs’s ambition did not sit well with the nature of his work at the State Department. Until the Confederacy gained its independence, he would not have a chance to display his skills at statesmanship. And so, his ambition was stunted.⁴¹ In a letter to Governor Brown of Georgia, Toombs claimed that he was a “looker on” in the

³⁶ Mallory, *Diary*, 26 July 1861 entry, I:9.

³⁷ Josiah Gorgas, *The Journals of Josiah Gorgas, 1857-1878*, edited by Sarah Woolfolk Wiggins (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995), 20 June 1862, 46-47.

³⁸ Davis, *Union that Shaped*, 131.

³⁹ Quoted in Thompson, *Robert Toombs*, 172.

⁴⁰ Thompson, *Robert Toombs*, 166.

⁴¹ Patrick, *Jefferson Davis and His Cabinet*, 85.

Confederate government and that the other Cabinet secretaries had “little more to do with [it] than ordinary outsiders.”⁴²

Even had he been given the chance to display his statesmanship, it is not at all clear that he would have succeeded. On more than one occasion, Toombs had talked himself into near-duels. His rhetoric was impulsive, erratic, and emotional. Friends knew to dismiss the exaggeration that frequently accompanied Toombs’s speech, but in political discourse, that exaggeration came off as demagoguery.⁴³ His oratory, however, was powerful, and he was known for his effective use of it. He could be mistaken to lack intellect, J.B. Jones wrote, “but let him open his mouth, and the delusion vanishes.”⁴⁴ Robert Toombs “had a reputation for rashness, but those who knew him well knew also that this was largely conversational bluster.”⁴⁵ On the Cabinet, that rashness often displayed itself in Toombs’s calls for an aggressive military policy. Only he and Secretary of War Walker strongly advocated taking the fight to the North.⁴⁶ “He was for taking the initiative, and carrying the war into the enemy’s country,” War Clerk Jones recorded. “And as he warmed with the subject, the *man* seemed to vanish, and the *genius* alone was visible.”⁴⁷ When the Confederacy moved her capital to Richmond, Virginia, Toombs’s calls for an aggressive military policy became more frequent.⁴⁸

⁴² Quoted in Thompson, *Robert Toombs*, 174.

⁴³ Davis, *The Union that Shaped*, 1, 17.

⁴⁴ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 22 May 1861 entry, I:26.

⁴⁵ Davis, *Union that Shaped*, 88.

⁴⁶ Patrick, *Jefferson Davis and His Cabinet*, 83.

⁴⁷ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 22 May 1861 entry, I:26.

⁴⁸ Thompson, *Robert Toombs*, 173.

In July 1861, Toombs wrote to Stephens that he was looking to get out of the Cabinet as quickly as possible, but that he wanted to do it as “quietly & inoffensively as possible.”⁴⁹ His stunted ambition caused him to look elsewhere for glory and honor. A friend told Mary Chesnut that Toombs left due to an “incompatibility of temper. He rides too high a horse—that is, for so despotic a person as Jeff Davis.”⁵⁰ On 19 July, President Davis appointed Toombs as a brigadier general, and he accepted the post the next day. “Soldiering,” Mary’s friend noted, “is in the air. Everyone will have a touch of it.”⁵¹ His last day at the State Department was 24 July 1861, but he remained in Richmond until August before going to join his troops.⁵² He had a lackluster career in the Confederate military before he resigned, once again due to stunted ambition. “Presented the choice between what he all along proclaimed was his sense of duty and desire to fight for his country, and a perceived personal slight, he opted in the end to make his first loyalty himself.”⁵³

In the midst of Toombs’s appointment as brigadier general and his last day in the State Department, the Battle of Bull Run came and went. Toombs’s successor, Robert M. T. Hunter of Virginia reported to Confederate diplomats, the news of Bull Run. “It affords me extreme pleasure to announce to you in my first official communication,” Hunter wrote, “the glorious victory achieved by our Army over the forces of the United

⁴⁹ Quoted in Thompson, *Robert Toombs*, 174.

⁵⁰ Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, 157.

⁵¹ Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, 157.

⁵² Davis, *The Union that Shaped* 139-140.

⁵³ Davis, *The Union that Shaped*, 188.

States.”⁵⁴ Hunter also had to report to Confederate foreign diplomats that Virginia and Tennessee had been added to the Confederacy. The laws of the Confederacy, Hunter claimed, “extend over them as fully and completely as over the other States composing the same.”⁵⁵ The Confederate States continued to project itself abroad as a sovereign nation fully deserving of recognition from Britain and other foreign powers. That the laws of the Confederacy were in full force in Virginia and Tennessee, Hunter believed, spoke amply to that supposed reality.

Authority in the State Department was fluid during the last days of July 1861 and the beginning of August. A week following his official last day in the State Department, Toombs sent instructions to Albert Pike who had been appointed commissioner to the Native American tribes in the Confederate west.⁵⁶ During Hunter’s first weeks in office, Assistant Secretary of State William M. Browne maintained correspondence with the Confederacy’s foreign operatives. Hunter made his defense of the Confederate States in instructions dated 23 September 1861. Hunter asked James Mason to make a renewed appeal to the British government for recognition. Hunter presented the South as the aggrieved minority, opposing an oppressive majority who had violated a written contract.⁵⁷ The Confederacy, according to Hunter, was preserving the old Union. The example of the Southern states “therefore furnishes no precedent for the overthrow of the lawful authority of a regular government by revolutionary violence nor

⁵⁴ *OR*, Series II, Vol. 3, 227.

⁵⁵ *OR*, Series II, Vol. 3, 228.

⁵⁶ *OR*, Series II, Vol. 3, 235.

⁵⁷ *OR*, Series II, Vol. 3, 257.

does it encourage a resort to factious tumult and civil war by irresponsible bodies of men.”⁵⁸ The disunity that the South so desperately feared and caused would not follow them into the Confederacy because the government was more representative of the people.

Their cause was “sacred”, and Hunter reminded Mason that the Confederacy did not ask for physical aid—in the form of finances or military personnel—instead, they asked only “for the moral weight which they would derive from holding a recognized place as a free and independent people.”⁵⁹ If the Confederacy did not ask for material aid, Britain would benefit from an independent Confederate States. The “real interest” of the British is the “great question of cotton supply” which would be “satisfactorily settled” by an independent Confederacy.⁶⁰ Just as Toombs had before him, Hunter put his faith in King Cotton Diplomacy, believing that British demand for cotton would necessitate their recognition of Confederate independence. Because of the economic influence and the free trade “empire” that the Confederacy would establish, Hunter claimed that the Confederacy “in entering as a new member in the family of nations would exercise not a disturbing but a harmonizing influence on human society, for it would not only desire peace itself but to some extent become a bond of peace amongst others.”⁶¹ Just as Davis imagined a harmonious people comprising the Confederacy, Hunter took the vision of harmony and applied it to the world stage. Without the Confederacy, the world would

⁵⁸ *OR*, Series II, Vol. 3, 258.

⁵⁹ *OR*, Series II, Vol. 3, 258.

⁶⁰ *OR*, Series II, Vol. 3, 260.

⁶¹ *OR*, Series II, Vol. 3, 262.

continue in chaos. And recognition of the Confederacy was needed to establish peace across the earth. President Davis, Hunter told the British, believed that it was “the duty of the nations of the earth by a prompt recognition to throw the weight of their moral influence against the unnecessary prolongation of the war.”⁶²

If foreign recognition was prolonging the war, so too was Secretary of War Walker’s governance of the War Department. The day after the Battle of Bull Run, War Office Clerk Jones recalled a story about President Davis. The previous Sunday, the President startled Clerk Jones. It was after hours and everyone, even Walker was gone. Jones thought he heard someone approaching, but did not think much of it until he caught a glimpse of the President when turning around to grab a piece of paper. The President was looking for a letter “referred to him by the Secretary.” Jones asked for the author, and together, he and the President went into Walker’s office to find a horrendous organizational system. “The Secretary’s habit,” Jones recalled, “was to take the papers from his table, and after marking on them with his pencil the disposition he wished made of them, he threw them helter-skelter into a large arm-chair.” Perhaps Jones looked over at President Davis, his face reddening with embarrassment at the disorganization of his boss. The “President and I set to work in quest of the letter.” One-by-one, they removed a letter and examined it. The work was tiring and eventually, Davis said, “with an impatient smile, ‘it is always sure to be the last one.’ And so it was.”⁶³

⁶² *OR*, Series II, Vol. 3, 264.

⁶³ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 22 June 1861 entry, I:39-40.

The position of Secretary of War was the most important in the minds of Confederates, and most would not have been surprised to know that Davis was intimately involved in the Department's management. Like the United States from which it descended, the Confederacy created a military that was subordinate to civilian leadership. As Secretary of War under US President Pierce, Davis understood this position most intimately but had difficulty filling it with men of ability or longevity. Leroy Pope Walker was Davis's first War Secretary. A sickly man, he appeared several years older than his actual age.⁶⁴ Though he was a successful lawyer, he had never held a government job before. He would quickly succumb to the sheer volume of work. In May of 1861, Jones noted that Walker "has not yet learned how to avoid unnecessary labor." Jones feared that Davis, having previously been a War Secretary, would interfere too frequently with Walker's work, though he thought he would soon be consumed leading campaigns in the field. Additionally, he hoped that Congress would create a uniform method of filling field offices since appointments to various military posts were consuming Walker's and Davis's work.⁶⁵ A couple of months later, Walker still struggled with the amount of work that he was responsible for. "The Secretary works too much—or rather does not recognize his labor. He procrastinates final action; and hence his work, never being disposed of, is always increasing in volume."⁶⁶ War Clerk Jones heard Walker express "that no *gentleman* can be fit" for the War Secretaryship. Though Walker had "capacity," Jones feared "his nerves are too finely strung for the official treadmill."

⁶⁴ Jones, I:358n17. Walker was forty-four years old, though Jones thought that he was forty-eight or forty-nine (20 May 1861 entry, I:25).

⁶⁵ Jones, *Clerk's Diary*, 20 May 1861 entry, I:25.

⁶⁶ Jones, *Clerk's Diary*, 20 July 1861 entry, I:48.

The day before the Civil War's first serious military conflict, Jones asked, "Will his official life be a long one?"⁶⁷

President Davis became sick in August of 1861, greatly affecting his ability to work effectively. Stephen Mallory wrote on 1 September that Davis "has been sick with intermittent fever; and the general anxiety as to his condition shows how important his life is regarded by the public to our cause." Without the president, Mallory believed that "general dejection would ensue, and indeed our cause would have received a heavy blow & great discouragement."⁶⁸ Clerk Jones in the War Department felt similarly: "Some apprehension is felt concerning the President's health. If he were to die, what would be the consequences?" Jones avowed that he would stand by Alexander Stephens, the Confederate Vice President, "because I think he would make as efficient an Executive as any other man in the Confederacy. But others think differently; and there might be trouble."⁶⁹

The same day that Mallory was recalling Davis's illness, Jones wrote that the "press and congressional critics are opening their battering on the Secretary of War, for *incompetency*. He is not to blame."⁷⁰ Mallory was concerned by the lack of Cabinet meetings, deeming their infrequency "unwise." Many important "events or measures," he believed, "transpire & the heads of the Gov[ernmen]t know but little of them as a body."⁷¹ Despite the Cabinet's infrequent meetings, Mallory was still working long, hard

⁶⁷ Jones, *Clerk's Diary*, 20 July 1861 entry, I:48.

⁶⁸ Mallory, *Diary*, 1 Sept. 1861 entry, I:12.

⁶⁹ Jones, *Clerk's Diary*, 17 Aug. 1861 entry, I:56.

⁷⁰ Jones, *Clerk's Diary*, 1 Sept. 1861 entry, I:61. *Emphasis in original*.

⁷¹ Mallory, *Diary*, I:12-13.

hours. “I am making greater personal sacrifices than will ever be understood in this good cause of the South.”⁷² Three days later, Mallory called on the President where they spoke at length “over the loss of Hatteras Inlet & the probable designs of the enemy.” During the meeting, Davis was “feeble”, and Mallory tried to convince him to leave town and head to the country for a few days for his health. Benjamin and Treasury Secretary Memminger joined the meeting and all three “agreed in advising the Pres[iden]t to leave town for his health.” Davis refused cited primarily his concern that General “Walker could not manage the War Department.” Davis’s remark sparked a general discussion among the three secretaries about Walker’s abilities and opposition to the administration in Congress. Mallory noted a committee of five created by the Confederate Congress to look into the management of the military. The three Secretaries concurred with President Davis that this was a blow at the Executive Branch’s power, especially the War Department. Still, the Cabinet also agreed that Walker was unable to perform the duties of the War Department. President Davis “added that he did not think that any civilian could.—From the whole tenor of the conversation I look for a speedy resignation of Gen[era]l Walker.”⁷³

Shortly after Davis’s discussion with Mallory, Benjamin, and Memminger, Davis wrote to General J. E. Johnston in Manassas, Virginia. Apparently, his soldiers were impatient to take the battle to the enemy. “The cause of the Confederacy is staked upon your army,” Davis wrote. “The natural impatience of the soldier must be curbed by the devotion of the patriot.” The Confederate war effort would tax soldiers’ patriotic

⁷² Mallory, *Diary*, 4 Sept. 1861 entry, I:14.

⁷³ Mallory, *Diary*, I:14-15.

devotion. Military conflict was “the most powerful of all engines for fostering national self-consciousness, and the most reliable of all centralizing and unifying agents in human affairs.”⁷⁴

Davis spoke frequently to soldiers to foster their patriotic devotion. During a June 1861 speech in Richmond, a listener shouted, “Tell us something about Buena Vista!” Always happy to speak about his military experience, Davis responded, “Well, my friends, I can only say we will make the battle fields in Virginia another Buena Vista, and drench them with blood more precious than that shed there. We will make history for ourselves.”⁷⁵ Davis noted the long tradition of “Southern soldiers and Southern officers reflect[ing] their brave spirits in their deeds of daring” during wars fought on behalf of the United States.⁷⁶ Early on, Davis communicated the value and power and military success in defining the Confederacy. He understood that military service and shared experience of war was the primary ways in which Confederates would accumulate a “history” together *as Confederates*.

After the Battle of Bull Run and the Union armies’ retreat, Davis told a crowd, “We have taught them a lesson in their invasion of the sacred soil of Virginia; we have taught them that the grand old mother of Washington still nurses a band of heroes.”⁷⁷ Military service was not valued only for protecting the Confederate nation, but because bravery in battle protected the *sacred* land of Virginia, a state. For Confederates,

⁷⁴ Wilfred M. McClay, *The Masterless: Self and Society in Modern America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 23.

⁷⁵ Speech at Richmond, 1 June 1861, *PJD*, 7:185.

⁷⁶ Speech at Richmond, 1 June 1861, *PJD*, 7:185.

⁷⁷ Speech at Richmond, 23 July 1861, *PJD*, 7:261.

the sacredness of Virginia's land spoke not only to the ways nineteenth-century Americans valued their states, even above the nation, but also to the importance to national survival of land possession.

Confidence in the administration, specifically in Walker's ability in the War Department was evaporating. Davis approached Walker "in connection with the manifestation by the Congress a want of confidence in the administration of affairs of the War Department" and offered him a position as representative to Europe. Walker refused the offer, likely citing ill-health, and Davis inquired on 9 September "whether there is any other position to which I could assign you"? Davis assured Walker of the "personal regard" that he held for the Secretary and he hoped that Walker could see Davis's "desire to promote your welfare and happiness." The Secretary and President were "so closely united" that to end Walker's service in the War Department, Davis claimed, "is so repugnant to my sentiment." Only "public necessity" forced Davis's hand to ask for Walker's resignation.⁷⁸

The next day, Walker wrote a separate letter to Davis. "For reasons unofficially communicated I most respectfully tender to you my resignation." Davis's term as Confederate President, thus far, had "been one of great trial and enduring fortitude." As War Secretary, Walker had witnessed Davis's "singular power" to daily bring "order out of chaos." He closed with an invocation for God's guidance and blessing on the Confederate cause.⁷⁹ Later in the evening, Walker received Davis's letter of the

⁷⁸ *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC, 1900), Series IV, Vol. 1, Jefferson Davis to Leroy Walker, 9 September 1861, 600. Hereafter abbreviated, *WROR*.

⁷⁹ *WROR*, Series IV, Vol. 1, 602-603.

previous day. He understood Davis's position and returned the expressions of personal regard. Walker claimed Davis was "the only man I had ever met whose greatness grew upon me the nearer I approached him, and whose rare fidelity to principle often wounded when he most preferred to oblige." Answering Davis's question as to what position he would like to be assigned in the Confederate Government, Walker would "not conceal from" Davis his "intention to become a candidate for the Senate" if one of the current Alabama occupants did not desire to return. Since Davis was not able to appoint Walker to the Senate and since he had turned down the offer as a commissioner to Europe, "a military position is the only one to which I could be assigned."⁸⁰ Five days later, Davis finally responded to Walker's letter of resignation. "Our long and close connection during the most trying period...has created relations personal and official which is painful to sunder."⁸¹ Davis again expressed his wish for Walker's future happiness and success, and he appointed him brigadier-general over some Alabama troops.⁸²

Mallory wrote in his diary on Monday 16 September 1861 that Walker's resignation "takes effect this day." The President, even at this late date, was "embarrassed" that he did not know whom to appoint. General Robert E. Lee, Leonidas Polk, Braxton Bragg, and "Branch of N. C. Were all spoken of" as possible options.⁸³ Because Congress was in recess, Davis appointed Judah Benjamin, his Attorney General, acting Secretary of War until he could find a more permanent replacement.

⁸⁰ *WROR*, Walker to Davis, Series IV, Vol. 1, 603.

⁸¹ *WROR*, Series IV, Vol. 1, 613.

⁸² *WROR*, Series IV, Vol. 1, 614.

⁸³ Mallory, *Diary*, 16 September 1861 entry I:16-17.

Benjamin was the first Jew appointed by any American President to a cabinet position.⁸⁴ His first appointment to the Confederate cabinet was to the Justice Department as Attorney General. Benjamin's earliest biographer thought that Benjamin was appointed to the lowest position because of Davis's mistrust of him. Back in 1858, while Davis and Benjamin were US senators, the former thought his honor insulted by the latter, and a duel was averted only after Davis accepted a formal apology from Benjamin presented on the Senate floor.⁸⁵ More likely, as Davis himself remembered, Benjamin was selected because of his known skills as a lawyer. In fact, Benjamin had declined a nomination to the US Supreme Court from Millard Fillmore.⁸⁶ At such an early stage of his career, to be considered for a Supreme Court appointment was a powerful testament to his skill as a lawyer. Still, it is likely that Benjamin would have been better utilized as a commissioner to Europe or as Secretary of State from the beginning.⁸⁷ Quickly, Benjamin would prove that he was the "only genius" in the cabinet.⁸⁸

As Attorney General, Benjamin was in charge of organizing the new nation's courts. Since the Confederate Congress never established a Supreme Court, there was

⁸⁴ Hudson Strode, "Judah P. Benjamin's Loyalty to Jefferson Davis," *The Georgia Review* 20, no. 3 (1966): 251.

⁸⁵ Robert Douthat Meade, *Judah P. Benjamin: Confederate Statesman* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 162.

⁸⁶ Eli N. Evans, *Judah P. Benjamin: The Jewish Confederate* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 83.

⁸⁷ Meade, *Judah P. Benjamin*, 161. Meade claims that Benjamin was "unsuited" for the Attorney General position because it was too unimportant for a man of his abilities. Meade's logic seems to suffer from hindsight. It is unlikely that at such an early date, Davis could have known fully Benjamin's true potential. As I argue here, Benjamin *grew* into his privileged position of leadership on the Cabinet.

⁸⁸ Robert Douthat Meade, "The Relations Between Judah P. Benjamin and Jefferson Davis: Some New Light on the Working of the Confederate Machine," *The Journal of Southern History* 5, no. 4 (1939): 469.

little for Benjamin to do. Much of his time was spent offering legal opinions to the cabinet secretaries of other departments. He issued thirteen in total, seven of which were for the Secretary of War.⁸⁹ As part of his functions as Attorney General, and because of his overall genial personality, Benjamin “became the official greeter of those who came to the Capital.”⁹⁰ In this role, Davis and Benjamin first began to work more closely together since Davis was inundated with office-seekers, and Benjamin was frequently the one who had greeted them and connected them with the President. “The President quickly perceived the Secretary’s value to him and called on him for many duties, at first of a minor nature, then more important as time passed.”⁹¹ Serving as Attorney General for less than seven months, Benjamin had made a name for himself with the President and Confederate society.

“Mr. Benjamin’s hitherto perennial smile faded almost away as he realized the fact that he was now the most important member of the cabinet.” The new War Secretary, Jones wrote, was well aware of the difficulties that came with running the nation’s most important Cabinet-level department. Unlike Walker before him, Benjamin, “was in robust health, and capable of any amount of labor.” Judah Benjamin, Jones noted, was only acting Secretary of War, but the clerk had no doubt that he would be fully-confirmed to the position once Congress returned to session. Benjamin would “please” the President; “he knows how to do it.”⁹²

⁸⁹ Patrick, *Jefferson Davis and His Cabinet*, 158-159.

⁹⁰ Patrick, 160.

⁹¹ Patrick, 161.

⁹² Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 16 Sept. 1861 entry, I:63.

Right away, it became obvious that Benjamin was not a good fit for the position. President Davis intercepted a letter from General Beauregard in Manassas, Virginia. He noted receipt of the general's previous letters and claimed to "hasten to reply without consulting the Sec[re]t[ar]y of War. This enables me to say without connecting his expression of feeling with the present case, that you have alike his admiration and high personal regard, evinced by so many signs that it can not be to me a matter of doubt." Evidently, Secretary Benjamin was not getting along with the military high command. "As the essence of the offense," Davis continued, "is the motive with which words are spoken, I have thus, it is hoped, removed the gravest part of the transaction."⁹³ Davis interjected himself between his War Secretary and Confederate Generals because of harsh words that assaulted the generals' prized honor. Davis closed the letter, "P. S. The Sec[re]t[ar]y has not seen your letter, and I will not inform him as to this correspondence."⁹⁴ Though Benjamin had the personal trust of Davis and his wife, as War Secretary, his administration was off to a rocky beginning and Davis was interjecting himself into the Department's business. Benjamin "lacked sufficient tack and knowledge of military procedure to deal with sensitive generals, and he could not handle phases of his work requiring detailed military knowledge."⁹⁵ Generals quickly became annoyed with Benjamin. The rest of the Confederate government, and many of the

⁹³ *JDC*, 5:150.

⁹⁴ *JDC*, 5:151.

⁹⁵ Meade, "Relations Between," 473. Benjamin's lack of military knowledge affected the way President Davis administered the War Department. Davis already struggled with micromanagement, and Benjamin "brought none of his own preconceptions to the task of implementation, no way to sift and weigh the President's demands and balance their reasonableness against the inertia of the military and governmental bureaucracies." (Evans, Judah P. Benjamin, 134).

Confederate people believed that Benjamin was still too loyal to the Union. “They charge him with hob-robbing too much with Northern friends,” J. B. Jones wrote, “and that he still retains membership in several clubs in New York and Boston.”⁹⁶ He took all criticism quietly and with grace.⁹⁷

Toward the end of his second month in office, there were rumors that Benjamin, like Walker, desired a seat in the CSA Senate, although members of the Louisiana legislature reported that he would lose should he run.⁹⁸ Clerk Jones’s premonition was correct: Davis did appoint Benjamin as permanent War Secretary in November 1861, and he was confirmed by the Senate. This left a vacancy in the Justice Department, and Davis appointed Thomas Bragg of North Carolina to the position. This kept with his desire to have each state represented on the Cabinet. North Carolina was part of a wave of secessions that followed President Lincoln’s call for volunteers to suppress the Southern Rebellion. They had not been represented in the original Cabinet appointments, and Davis sought to solidify their loyalty to their new nation by bringing Bragg into his official family.

“I rec[eive]d a letter from President Davis dated the 11th instant, tendering me the Office of Atto[rney] Gen[era]l of the Confederate States.” Bragg accepted the position, though he confided in his diary that he was not convinced of his qualifications for the position. “I must labor hard however, and endeavor to make up for some

⁹⁶ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 31 Oct. 1861 entry, I:73.

⁹⁷ Meade, “Relations Between,” 473.

⁹⁸ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, I:73.

deficiencies.”⁹⁹ Bragg arrived in Richmond on November 20th, and the following Tuesday (the 26th), he called on the President who welcomed him to the Confederate Capital and asked him to attend a Cabinet meeting. Bragg was acquainted with all except Treasury Secretary Memminger before his appointment.¹⁰⁰ The Cabinet meeting, Bragg thought, was not productive and he returned to his office, finding lots of work to do since Benjamin’s hands had been full running both the Justice and War Departments during his stint as acting Secretary of War.¹⁰¹

One of the first tasks that Bragg engaged in during his term as Attorney General was to meet with General Robert Toombs, former State Secretary, to go over treaties with Native American tribes. “They are very important,” Bragg wrote to his diary. The treaties allowed the tribes to send a delegate to Congress and could eventually apply for stateship. The Confederacy, Adrian Brettle has shown, intended to expand its borders by dominating over the Native American tribes on its Western frontier.¹⁰² Debates over the criteria for admitting new states was heated, and Bragg believed that Congress would probably change the portions of the treaties that allowed for Native American statehood.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Thomas Bragg, *Diary of Thomas Bragg*, Vol. I: January 3, 1861-May 15, 1862, in the Thomas Bragg Papers, #3304-z, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Friday 6 December 1861 entry, I:65.

¹⁰⁰ Bragg, *Diary*, 26 Nov. 1861 entry, I:65.

¹⁰¹ Bragg, *Diary*, 26 Nov. 1861 entry, I:66.

¹⁰² Adrian Brettle, *Colossal Ambitions: Confederate Planning for a Post-Civil War World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2020), 39.

¹⁰³ Bragg, *Diary*, 30 Nov. 1861 entry, I:72.

The Cabinet met on Friday 6 December 1861 to discuss in more detail the treaties with the Native American tribes. The Cabinet believed that the treaty negotiated by Indian Agent Albert Pike had no authority to specify the formation of new states since, according to the Confederate Constitution, new states could only be admitted by Congress. Bragg elaborated on the discussion: “But the thing is objectionable in itself. It is important to have these Indians on our side, but they are an inferior race and ought not to come in now without any limit to population (that is, the number) to entitle them admission.”¹⁰⁴ Not surprisingly, racism was deeply entrenched in Confederate leadership and the governing policy that they advocated. Despite being of an inferior race, Bragg’s comment shows that racial inferiority necessitated a limiting of the *quantity* of the race within the Confederacy. Old fears of insurrections and societal ruin because of contamination by inferior races continued to powerfully sway Confederate political leadership and their policies. Indeed, the war likely exacerbated these fears as the very existence of the nation was in doubt due to the onslaught of Union forces.

The Cabinet continued their discussion with Secretary Memminger reviewing the financial state of the new nation. Bragg wrote that the “prospect is a gloomy one indeed, as all admitted, unless the Blockade can be raised.”¹⁰⁵ In addition to financial troubles, the national administration was getting pushback from state governors. Mainly the governors of Georgia and South Carolina were giving the administration trouble about troops. Attorney General Bragg had never “seen the President apparently so

¹⁰⁴ Bragg, *Diary*, 6 Dec. 1861 entry, I:77-78.

¹⁰⁵ Bragg, *Diary*, 6 Dec. 1861 entry, I:78.

gloomy.”¹⁰⁶ In contrast to the governors, Clerk Jones recorded to his diary: “The fathers and mothers and sisters of our brave soldiers continue to send their clothing and provisions. *They* do not relax in the work of independence.”¹⁰⁷

The next day, the Cabinet convened again (Robert M.T. Hunter, newly appointed Secretary of State, and Stephen Mallory were absent). The Cabinet was primarily reviewing propositions from the provisional government of Kentucky. Unanimously, the Cabinet advised the President to submit the proposals to Congress and let them deal with the thorny issue of statehood, similar to their policy regarding requests from Native Americans. The whole ordeal, Bragg feared, was rushed and abnormal, but he did not see another option. The “whole thing was admitted to be irregular, but it was deemed a *necessity*.” He did not want to see the Confederacy behave similarly to the Lincoln Government, but “we are almost compelled to adopt” similar policies.¹⁰⁸ On the last day of 1861, JB Jones wrote that Northern newspapers showed that the Union was “pretty accurately informed of the condition of our defenses and the paucity of the numbers in our regiments.”¹⁰⁹ “Upon the whole,” Attorney General Bragg wrote, “there is trouble brewing. God help us! I fear the worst has not come.”¹¹⁰

By the end of 1861, several things were clear to Confederate leaders. First, foreign recognition was vital to national survival. The Confederate State Department worked tirelessly to gain this recognition, though their efforts were hindered by military

¹⁰⁶ Bragg, *Diary*, I:78.

¹⁰⁷ Jones, *Clerk's Diary*, 28 Dec. 1861 entry, I:87.

¹⁰⁸ Bragg, *Diary*, 7 Dec. 1861 entry, I:79-80.

¹⁰⁹ Jones, *Clerk's Diary*, 31 Dec. 1861 entry, I:87.

¹¹⁰ Bragg, *Diary*, 6 Dec. 1861 entry, I:79.

setbacks at the hands of the Union armed forces. A collaborative tone to Confederate governance was emerging. Cabinet secretaries expected to be consulted regarding important matters related to their departments. More than that, it seems they also expected to gather as a group to advise the President. Their opinions, at this stage in the war, were unanimous, and President Davis frequently adopted their proposed policies. Additionally, the Executive Branch would not assume any additional responsibilities not given to it by the Confederate Constitution. The Executive Office took up the question of admitting new states before sending the proposals to Congress. At this date, the exigencies of war did not require that Davis take unilateral action.

When speaking to their own citizens and foreign nations, Confederate leaders emphasized the legal foundation upon which Confederate independence rested. This emphasis was designed to connect the Confederacy to other nationalistic movements of self-determination of the decade in an effort to gain foreign recognition. Davis's emphasis on Confederate societal homogeneity spoke to a very real fear Confederates harbored: the internal destruction of their society through sloth or contamination. From the beginning, Confederate leaders understood that their nation rested on the sacrificial commitment of the people. When the people failed to live up to this expectation, Confederates feared for their nation's survival. At the end of 1861, the opposition from State Governors was especially troubling to Confederate leaders who understood their cause as necessitating homogenous commitment and purpose.

Despite their fears and concerns, Confederate Cabinet officers never engaged with Confederate citizens directly, either through speeches or published writings. Instead, their fears and commentary are confined to their personal diaries. Davis spoke frequently

to the public, but at this early stage of national life, his lengthy messages were formal reports to Congress devoid of passion that would not have excited a wide listening audience. The Cabinet has never been an overly public institution in American history. Instead, Cabinet Secretaries work behind the scenes to keep government functioning properly. During 1861, poor leadership within the Cabinet meant that most government work was falling to Davis, especially in the War Department. Cabinet Secretaries bemoaned the lack of effective work that they could accomplish because of military setbacks and hindrances. Instead, as 1861 ended, they were left wondering what the fate of their new nation would be.

CHAPTER V

1862

President Davis was irritated. As 1862 began, the opposition from state governors was straining the ability of the national government to raise troops for the prosecution of the war. “Upon the whole,” Attorney General Thomas Bragg wrote on Friday 17 January 1862, “the President was much irritated and declared if such was to be the course of the States towards the Gov[ernmen]t [then] the carrying of the war was an impossibility.” He told Cabinet Secretaries that they needed to be prepared to flee the country since they would have the most to lose if the country faltered because of societal decay and fracture. “I have not seen him so gloomy,” Bragg continued.¹

Confederate morale was at an all-time low. “There seems to me to be a more general feeling of despondency prevailing at this time than ever before since the war began,” wrote Robert Garlick Hill Kean, Head of the Confederate Bureau of War.² Low public morale had deep roots, Kean noted, but the major cause was “the apathy of the people, their anxious desire to avoid military service, and the apparent cowardice of the legislature, which seems afraid to do anything worthy of the occasion.”³ In the midst of this web of blame, Bragg wished that Davis were dictator. “He is an able and honorable man - somewhat irritable when opposed - wants to have his own way, but left to himself

¹ Bragg, *Diary*, 17 January 1862 entry, I:115-116.

² Robert G. H. Kean, *Inside the Confederate Government: The Diary of Robert Garlick Hill Kean*, edited by Edward Younger (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 28 January 1862 entry, 23. The Bureau of War did not have a tightly defined function. It oversaw the coordination of other bureaus within the War Department, and kept a lot of the Department’s paperwork moving. Kean was required to sign orders issued by the War Secretary and issue passports. For a brief overview of the Bureau of War, see Peterson, *Confederate Cabinet Departments and Secretaries*, p. 112-114.

³ Kean, *Inside*, 23.

he would conduct things more wisely, safely and energetically than he can now.”⁴ At such an early stage of the Confederate experiment, senior government officials were already calling (at least privately) for Davis to be dictator. The desire for a dictator by Confederate leadership and the perception of weak popular morale supports to a hierarchical scale of Confederate nationalism that historians too frequently ignore when writing as part of an either-or debate. Those in senior level government positions were willing to try almost any endeavor to gain national independence. On the ground, the people generally faced other responsibilities and concerns that made the very real risks of war unbearable for them.

Throughout the early weeks of January 1862, President Davis and Secretary of War Benjamin were frequently closeted away in private deliberations, especially regarding troop movements in Kentucky. Bragg complained that, as of Thursday 23 January 1862, the Cabinet had yet to convene. “The President & Sec[retar]y of War keep military matters to themselves.”⁵ He returned to his diary a week later, again, to note: “No Cabinet meeting this week.”⁶ The next day, however, Bragg was called to a meeting of the Cabinet to debate what should be done about two Union commissioners that had been appointed by the War Department to proceed to Richmond to determine the condition of Union prisoners of war. During the course of the debate, the “opinion of each member was called for.”⁷

⁴ Bragg, *Diary*, 17 January 1862 entry, I:115-116.

⁵ Bragg, *Diary*, 23 January 1862 entry, I:123.

⁶ Bragg, *Diary*, 30 January 1862 entry, I:128.

⁷ Bragg, *Diary*, 31 January 1862 entry, I:129.

The Cabinet met again only a few days later (Tuesday 4 February 1862) where Davis gave to the present members a Congressionally-approved bill that repealed all US naturalization laws. The only mode of naturalization left to Confederate aliens was through military service. “Foreigners compose so large a portion of the Northern Army that there is a strong feeling here against them,” Bragg opined.⁸ After a detailed discussion, the Cabinet concluded that Davis should veto the bill for various reasons. Immigrants were not coming to the CSA at this time, and the bill seemed unnecessary. Additionally, the Cabinet did not think it wise to exclude immigrants entirely from citizenship. To exclude foreigners from citizenship would dissuade immigration and potential military service. For a nation that existed at the expense of an entire segment of the population, the importance of citizenship is remarkably ironic. In another irony that reveals the nuance of the Confederate experiment, Bragg wrote that to pass the bill would be “impolitic” and “would be regarded as a slur cast upon” all foreigners “as a class.”⁹ The next day, Bragg witnessed the Confederate Congress’s debate over the President’s vetoed Alien Bill. After the debate a vote was called with a majority of eight states supporting the bill (three states were opposed to it, and two congressional delegations were divided). “Can there be better evidence of hasty and inconsiderate action by Congress?” Bragg asked.¹⁰

Confederate unity was fragile, even at this early stage of the War. During the 4 February Cabinet meeting, the issue of the press came up, with the Cabinet and the

⁸ Bragg, *Diary*, 4 February 1862 entry, I:132.

⁹ Bragg, *Diary*, I:132-133.

¹⁰ Bragg, *Diary*, 5 February 1862 entry, I:135.

President expressing their desire for one that was more favorable to the government. Davis also addressed the loyalty of Virginia with then-Secretary of State Robert M. T. Hunter who replaced Toombs on the Cabinet to represent his home state of Virginia after that state entered the Confederate union. There was a stirring among the non-cotton states for a “middle Confederacy, on the ground that the border States had different interests from those of the Cotton States.” Attorney General Bragg did not doubt that there was such a division within the new country, and Secretary Hunter agreed but did not think the Border States could garner enough support to tear apart the new nation.¹¹

On Thursday of this first week of February (the 6th), Davis held yet another Cabinet meeting. The primary focus of the discussion surrounded the imminent departure of Secretary of State Hunter who was going to take up a term in the Confederate Senate. Given the questionable loyalty of the middle/border states, the Cabinet advised that the newest addition to the Cabinet not be from the Cotton States. In their continued efforts to keep Virginia loyal to the Confederacy, it was agreed that Hunter’s replacement should also be from Virginia. James A. Seddon and William C. Rives, both prominent Virginians, were discussed as options. Bragg preferred Rives, believing that he possessed “eminent qualifications.” Additionally, Bragg believed that his appointment would “allay the growing discontent among men of his politics.” The other members, including Hunter, objected to Rives, not least because he still had children in the Union and some of whom were connected to the North by marriage. There was “some fear...as to whether he would, when the time [came] stand firm and not yield too much when our troubles were to be settled.” The Cabinet could not reach a firm conclusion, and the meeting

¹¹ Bragg, *Diary*, I:135.

ended without anyone having been chosen, although Bragg thought Seddon would be Hunter's replacement.¹²

With the permanent Confederate government set to be instituted only a couple of weeks away, there was lots of business to be conducted. Monday 10 February, the Cabinet met once again, and the governor of Virginia was present. There was a general feeling of gloom among the Confederate people, according to Bragg, and the national and state governments were divided over how best to fill the ranks of the army.¹³ During Monday's Cabinet meeting Governor Letcher discussed a military bill that was in the state legislature that would enroll able-bodied men into the military. The Confederacy was taking its first steps toward the draft. "For the first time," Bragg wrote, Secretary of War Benjamin "looked gloomy and seemed not to know what to do. The President, it seemed to me, was desponding also."¹⁴

The expiration of the provisional government of the Confederacy was great cause for alarm. The provisional government expired on Monday 17 February 1862. The President invited the members of the Congress to his home that evening. Bragg was "on the whole" glad to see the Congress dissolved. "The body had become inefficient and careless, exceedingly so, in its legislation." With the permanent Congress scheduled to begin the next day (18 February 1862), Bragg wondered if the Confederacy would endure. "Can we repel the enemy?" he confided to his journal. "Dangers surround us & it

¹² Bragg, *Diary*, 6 February 1862 entry, I:137.

¹³ Bragg, *Diary*, 7 February 1862 entry, I:138.

¹⁴ Bragg, *Diary*, I:140-141.

commences at our darkest period since the war began. Time only can endure - I am by no means confident as to the issue.”¹⁵

Tuesday ushered in the permanent Congress, but little assurance of success. President Davis received a letter from Charles Minnigerode, Rector of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Richmond. Minnigerode believed that Davis was God’s chosen instrument to see the Confederacy through to survival. Calling the Confederacy a “holy cause,” Minnigerode believed that the success of Davis and the new nation rested in the hands of God and upon His favor. Though Davis was doing everything in his physical and spiritual power to bring God’s favor upon the Confederate cause, Minnigerode believed that the time had come for more. “In God’s Providence your Inauguration and the beginning of our permanent government have fallen upon days, when we are surrounded by greater dangers than heretofore, when the enemy is making his greatest efforts and the most important events are transpiring.” Davis’s upcoming inauguration was a divinely-ordained opportunity for the purposes of God to be clearly united with the life of the Confederacy. Minnigerode was confident that Davis would invoke God’s providence, but “*I think the times justify something more,*” he pleaded. “Oh, Mr. President,” the minister begged, “if immediately upon taking the oath you would yield to the spontaneous outbursting of your heart, and—raising your hands to heaven—can utter so well and effectively, such as will ring through every heart there...it would send a thrill through the whole land, and from every state and every Southern home would ascend a loud ‘Amen.’”¹⁶ Just as the voice of God was omnipresent to those who would listen,

¹⁵ Bragg, *Diary*, 17 February 1862 entry, I:151.

¹⁶ JDC, 5:193-194. *Emphasis in Original.*

Davis's voice, Minnegerode suggested, could be a national call-to-arms for all of those tuned to God's will, which was intricately connected with the Confederacy.

The coming of a permanent Congress was occasion for desperation for Thomas Bragg. "It will be a singular coincidence if our rapid fall shall date from the expiration of the 'Provisional Government.' Yet for aught that I can see it will be so," he wrote the same day Minnigerode was calling on the President to act as an Old Testament-style prophet of God. With Tennessee overrun, Bragg believed the only option was to withdraw from the coast and make a final stand at various places in the Confederacy's internal regions. This would result in sucking dry the "immense fabric" of the Confederate people and nation. The nation's foundations, then, both "within and without must topple and fall - and by its own weight all will be buried in the ruin. Such, I more than fear, will be the inevitable and probably speedy result." The Southern people were "disheartened," and Bragg could see no alternative for success. He was fully prepared for the worst, he claimed, and would "try and submit to whatever may be in store for us."¹⁷

In the midst of this despair, Davis set out to write his annual message to Congress. The Cabinet met on 19 February to discuss the contents of the speech. The Cabinet members were asked for their opinions and criticisms, but Bragg thought the whole thing a waste of time. "My mind was away, and I was thinking of how we were to escape the Storm which threatened to overwhelm both Gov[ernmen]t and people."¹⁸ Unlike Minnigerode, Bragg was unconvinced of the power of words to rally the Confederate people out of their despair. The Cabinet met again the next day beginning at

¹⁷ Bragg, *Diary*, 18 February 1862 entry, I:152-153.

¹⁸ Bragg, *Diary*, 19 February 1862 entry, I:155-156.

eleven Thursday morning and did not adjourn until five that evening. During the six-hour session, Davis's speech was again discussed. It "is the best seasoned document surely that ever was issued," Bragg complained. "Every word weighed as if the fate of the country depended upon it."¹⁹ The position of Secretary of State was again brought up. Bragg and Mallory supported the appointment of Rives, believing that he would satisfy the Unionist element of the Confederacy. Davis, it seemed, was determined to offer the position to Seddon, and he had the support of Hunter. "I fear old prejudices have operated upon his usually well balanced mind."²⁰

"Such a day!" War Clerk Jones exclaimed on 22 February 1862. It was George Washington's birthday and Jefferson Davis's inauguration as permanent President of the Confederate States of America. The weather seemed to match the bleak outlook of the new nation's life. "The heavens weep incessantly. Capitol Square is black with umbrellas; and a shelter has been erected for the President to stand under."²¹ Davis stood beneath a monument of George Washington as he ushered in the "existence" of the permanent government of the Confederacy, "under the favor of Divine Providence." Through their permanent government, "we hope to perpetuate the principles of our revolutionary fathers."²² Davis promised "a zealous devotion of every faculty to the service of those who have chosen me as their Chief Magistrate."²³

¹⁹ Bragg, *Diary*, 20 February 1862 entry, I:156.

²⁰ Bragg, *Diary*, I:157.

²¹ Jones, *Clerk's Diary*, 22 February 1862 entry, I:96.

²² *JDC*, 5:198.

²³ *JDC*, 5:199.

He immediately jumped into a defense of the South's course of action as the only reasonable course given the injustices they faced at the hands of a Northern-controlled Union. The Confederacy's purpose was to maintain the "ancient" institutions of the old Union enshrouded in the Constitution. "The experiment instituted by our revolutionary fathers, of a voluntary Union of sovereign States for purposes specified in a solemn compact, had been perverted" by a North that was determined to direct the old Union for their own good. The Confederacy was formed by Southern States to avoid the "silent but rapid[ly] progress[ing]" revolution that North sought to carry out. Their new nation was composed of "States homogeneous in interest, in policy, and in feeling."²⁴

To any foreign nations that may be listening or reading Davis's speech, he praised the swift efforts through which the Confederacy erected the trappings of a nation. The institutions and machinery of government were "put in operation over an area exceeding seven hundred thousand square miles."²⁵ The specific mention of the Confederacy's physical size was deliberate and important. Aaron Sheehan-Dean writes, "The world's established powers pointed to their control of territory as evidence of their sovereignty, and they expected insurgents to demonstrate the same capacity if they merited support."²⁶ At the time of the Confederacy's formation, they claimed a territory larger than continental Europe! The key question would be whether they could maintain sovereignty over that territory. Additionally, Davis pointed out that since the implementation of the provisional government, the Confederacy had grown from six to

²⁴ *JDC*, 5:200.

²⁵ *JDC*, 5:200.

²⁶ Sheehan-Dean, *Reckoning with Rebellion*, 45.

thirteen states. The people within the states “have rallied with unexampled unanimity to the support of the great principles of constitutional government, with firm resolve to perpetuate by arms the right which they could not peacefully secure.”²⁷ Even as members of his own Cabinet doubted the survival of the nation at this early hour of its existence, Davis believed in the unanimity of the people whom he served.

President Davis “seemed self-poised in the midst of disasters, which he acknowledged had befallen us,” Jones wrote that day.²⁸ Davis believed that the difficult times in which the Confederacy found itself would only “awaken in the people the highest emotions and qualities of the human soul.” These difficulties, he proclaimed, are “cultivating feelings of patriotism, virtue, and courage.”²⁹ Since 1848, a “rising tide of...liberal nationalism gave voice to a transatlantic dialogue that spoke of the enduring promise of self-determination.”³⁰ Davis positioned the Confederacy as the epitome of the struggle for self-government. The struggle of the American revolutionaries “consecrated” the present struggle of Confederates to throw off the “tyranny of an unbridled majority, the most odious and least responsible form of despotism.” The Confederate people must “in arms...renew such sacrifices as our fathers made to the holy cause of constitutional liberty.”³¹ Those listening to Davis’s speech must make themselves worthy of the inheritance given to them by the Revolutionary generation. Confederates “must emulate

²⁷ JDC, 5:200.

²⁸ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 22 February 1862 entry, I:96.

²⁹ JDC, 5:201.

³⁰ Andrew F. Lang, *A Contest of Civilizations: Exposing the Crisis of American Exceptionalism in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 92.

³¹ JDC, 5:202.

that heroic devotion which made reverse to them but the crucible in which their patriotism was refined.”³² Having claimed the holy mantle of the American Revolution, Davis closed his address by praying to God to bless him, his new country, and the holy crusade of constitutional liberty on which she embarked. That the President spoke candidly about their difficulties was a good omen to Jones. Davis’s confessions “augur a different policy hereafter, and we may hope for better results in the future. We must all stand up for our country.” He closed out his entry for 22 February by noting that Hunter had left the State Department for the permanent Confederate Senate.³³

The Cabinet gathered Tuesday 25 February from 11:00 AM until about six that evening to discuss the message Davis was to deliver to the permanent Confederate Congress. “The Message is short,” Attorney General Bragg wrote, and it “attempts to put the best face upon everything, but will be regarded as an abortion I fear. It expresses a confidence which truth to say none of us feel. But what could we do?”³⁴ In yet another Cabinet meeting on Thursday 27 February, Davis expressed “some uncertainty” about the Cabinet’s make-up because he was “pressed to bring into [it] part of the Union element.” Despite his rhetoric of a homogenous nation full of people united behind common purposes and national ambitions, Davis was forced to deal with the reality of a large segment of the populace that demanded reunification. Bragg offered to leave his position as Attorney General, believing it the easiest to fill. Davis mentioned that “Watts of

³² *JDC*, 5:202.

³³ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 22 February 1862 entry, I:96.

³⁴ Bragg, *Diary*, 25 February 1862 entry, I:161.

Alabama had been mentioned to him for the post but that he knew nothing of him....I would gladly retire,” Bragg wrote, “if it can be done honorably.”³⁵

The permanent government of the Confederacy was beset with battles over federal authority. During a Cabinet meeting during mid-March, 1862, Bragg remembered a discussion of a bill creating the office of the Commanding General of the Army. President Davis objected to the bill, claiming it impeded his prerogatives as commander-in-chief. A bill had originally been proposed by Secretary Benjamin that would make the Commanding General the head of the Military Bureau and would be subordinate to the War Secretary. However, the bill proposed by Congress empowered the officer “to enter the field” at any time “and take command of any of our armies - thus setting aside, virtually, the constitutional power of the President, as Commander in Chief, unless he thought proper to *abolish* the office created, in order to control the Officer.”³⁶ Davis prepared a veto message with the advice of his Cabinet officers.

The following Monday, Thomas Bragg was called to Davis’s office. When he arrived, Treasury Secretary Memminger was departing. Bragg was summoned to speak of the make-up of the Cabinet. Davis said “he was entirely satisfied with it, but that the old Whig & Union party in Congress were insisting on being represented, and that he was informed that the Cabinet could not be confirmed by the Senate if nominated as it now stood.”³⁷ Given the dismal state of the Confederacy’s military fortunes at the time, many in Congress were calling for Benjamin and Mallory to be replaced in the War and Navy

³⁵ Bragg, *Diary*, I:167.

³⁶ Bragg, *Diary*, 14 March 1862 entry, I: 183-184.

³⁷ Bragg, *Diary*, 17 March 1862 entry, I:185.

Departments, respectfully. Davis, however, believed that to change both the War and Navy Departments at this juncture “would produce much inconvenience and difficulty.” He did not know anyone else with Mallory’s naval expertise. He was prepared to move Benjamin and replace him with someone from the military, likely General George Wythe Randolph, grandson of Thomas Jefferson and a Brigadier General in the Confederate Army who had recently resigned to run for the House of Representatives. Davis believed that Congressional, Whig, and Union critics could be placated if Benjamin was removed from the War Department and Bragg was replaced with Thomas Watts (of Alabama). Bragg understood that Benjamin would likely be moved to the State Department which Hunter had vacated almost a month before.³⁸ “So I alone go out,” Bragg noted. “I am content, especially if it will have the effect desired - But will it?” Bragg was doubtful that any adjustments in the Cabinet would create meaningful change in the Confederacy’s prospects. He agreed to resign so Davis could reorganize to incorporate the Unionist element of the nation into the highest civilian body. Upon returning to his office, Bragg discovered a note from Davis thanking him for his service and his regretting his departure from the Cabinet. Bragg had served in the Cabinet for roughly three months. “I have endeavored to do what was right and best under all the circumstances,” he confided to his diary, “and I have nothing to regret.”³⁹

The very next day, Bragg reported that the new Cabinet had been nominated and confirmed, although there had apparently been a “fierce struggle” over Benjamin’s

³⁸ William M. Browne, assistant Secretary of State, had been acting as interim Secretary of State.

³⁹ Bragg, *Diary*, 185-186.

and Mallory's confirmations.⁴⁰ No longer Attorney General, Bragg could not leave because Watts had not yet arrived to assume the office. "I am anxious to get away," Bragg moaned. "It is by no means pleasant to me to continue to discharge the duties of the Office, when it is known that I am to go out."⁴¹ Evidently, Watts had been appointed without first agreeing to assume the position, and Bragg was worried that he would not agree to take the position and relieve him as Attorney General. "I have no regrets," he again intoned. "All I might complain of is that I have had so little to do with the conduct of public affairs & have been so little consulted."⁴² Bragg's friends were surprised and disappointed when they discovered that he was no longer on the Cabinet. On the 19th, Davis asked Bragg to continue in the office until Watts arrived. Bragg agreed although it was not clear when Watts would make it to Richmond and he greatly preferred to retire.⁴³ Two days later (21 March 1862), Watts had still not arrived to assume his post, and Bragg worried that he "will not come for some time. In the meantime my position is unpleasant. I almost regret that I did not retire at once."⁴⁴

The next week, Monday 24 March, Bragg reported that Randolph had finally arrived and taken up his duties as Secretary of War. Randolph, Bragg observed, was not afraid to express his opinion. "Upon the whole I was favorably impressed with him & hope he will make an efficient officer."⁴⁵ Benjamin's replacement and Randolph's arrival

⁴⁰ Bragg, *Diary*, I:189.

⁴¹ Bragg, *Diary*, I:188.

⁴² Bragg, *Diary*, I:188.

⁴³ Bragg, *Diary*, I:189.

⁴⁴ Bragg, *Diary*, I:191.

⁴⁵ Bragg, *Diary*, I:192.

were evidently not discussed at lower levels of Confederate Command. War Department Clerk Jones reported to his journal on 27 March a rumor that Benjamin was being dismissed and had resigned from the Cabinet. The next day, he wrote, “Mr. Benjamin has been promoted. He is now Secretary of State.” Jones was skeptical of Randolph’s potential in the new position. He had lived in Richmond for many years, Jones wrote of Randolph, but “he does not seem to have a dozen acquaintances.” Additionally, Randolph received no votes after quitting the military to run for the Confederate Congress.⁴⁶ As Randolph and Benjamin were getting settled in their new positions, Bragg had yet to hear anything from Watts. “I doubt whether he will leave the Army now. Yet we ought to hear from him.”⁴⁷

On 6 April, Benjamin wrote a detailed update for the Confederate commissioners abroad. It was sorely needed. In a communication from London dated 11 March 1862, Commissioner Mason closed the letter, “I have seen through the *Northern papers* that Mr. Hunter has been transferred to the Senate, but I have not heard who has succeeded him in the Department of State and thus address this dispatch accordingly.”⁴⁸ Benjamin informed the commissioners that the permanent government of the Confederacy had been instituted and he listed the newest rendition of the Cabinet. Each secretary’s native state was included in Benjamin’s list, showing the importance that states had in the Confederacy’s understanding of its national make-up. All Cabinet

⁴⁶ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 27 March 1862 entry, I:102.

⁴⁷ Bragg, *Diary*, 26 March 1862 entry, I:196.

⁴⁸ *WROR*, Series III, Vol. II, 360. *Emphasis added*.

secretaries were discharging their duties, Benjamin wrote, “except Hon. T. H. Watts, who has not yet arrived in Richmond.”⁴⁹

Benjamin then wrote about the recent military setbacks that the Confederacy had experienced, especially the loss of Forts Henry and Donelson. These forts, along the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers, respectively, were essential to maintaining Confederate access to these waterways for easier internal supply of their armed forces. With the fall of these forts, the Confederate west was slowly coming under the control of Union occupation.⁵⁰ The loss of Forts Henry and Donelson was not all bad news for Confederates, Judah Benjamin claimed. “It is gratifying to observe that the series of disasters...have had a most beneficial effect on the temper, tone, and spirit of our people.” These defeats had a “magical” effect on the Confederate populace that was growing weary of the war. Now, Confederates “are alive to the magnitude of the conflict.” As a result, their spirit was strengthened and resolved to see the conflict through to final victory, Benjamin claimed.⁵¹

The resolved spirit of the Confederate people was evidently not enough to sustain the number of soldiers in the army. Toward the end of March 1862, the President held a Cabinet meeting (Secretary of War Benjamin and Postmaster General John Reagan were absent) where a conscription bill was discussed. The Cabinet unanimously supported Davis’s plan of conscription, which would also force those still enlisted to remain enlisted, despite the approaching end of their initial year-long enlistment

⁴⁹ *WROR*, Series III, vol. II, 373-374.

⁵⁰ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 395-400.

⁵¹ *WROR*, Series III, vol. II, 376.

agreements. Bragg was doubtful that the plan could be successful and openly expressed “doubt whether it was practicable to retain in the service the troops now in *against their will*.”⁵² Secretaries Benjamin and Mallory were consulting with Congressional committees regarding the exact nature of the bill. “It will produce an awful stir, but it is the most vigorous and wholesome measure yet proposed, if it can be carried out.”⁵³

Secretary Randolph inherited this entirely new legal and constitutional issue in American history. At no other period in the young nation’s history had a forced conscription of persons for the military been put into place. Despite the importance of the conscription legislation, it quickly became clear that Randolph would exercise little authority in the cabinet. A month into his tenure, General Henry Wise came to meet with Secretary Randolph to request a new command position. Returning to his officers, they discovered that he was not issued a promotion. Wise fumed, “There is no Secretary of War!” One officer, confused, asked, “What is Randolph?” Perhaps Wise chuckled when he said, “He is not Secretary of War!...he is merely a *clerk*, an underling, and cannot hold up his head in his humiliating position.”⁵⁴ Both Benjamin and Walker, perhaps due to their inexperience as civilians, were happy to concede authority to Davis and occupy a clerk-like status. Randolph, however, was not willing to occupy a cabinet position

⁵² Bragg, *Diary*, 24 March 1862 entry, I:192-193. *Emphasis added*.

⁵³ Bragg, *Diary*, I:193.

⁵⁴ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 13 April 1862 entry, I:104-105. *Emphasis in original*.

without authority.⁵⁵ Despite Randolph's chaffing under the heavy work load of the War Secretaryship, he and Davis collaborated frequently on military decisions.⁵⁶

The Confederate Congress passed the first conscription law in American history on 16 April 1862. The law called for all able-bodied men between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five to join the military; those who had initially signed on for one-year enlistments were required to stay on an additional two years. The law was designed to increase enlistments by the threat of coercion rather than actually following through on the threat, and generally it was successful. But, a leading historian of the Civil War notes, it "was the most unpopular act of the Confederate government."⁵⁷ Ten days after the act was passed, Davis wrote an internal memo to each Cabinet secretary ordering that those men who could be spared within the executive departments be sent to the military in compliance with the law.⁵⁸

Letters expressing opposition to the conscription law came swarming at Davis and War Secretary Randolph. At the end of April, James Chesnut wrote to Randolph, "The act which provides for exemptions from service under the late conscription law of Congress does not embrace one of the most important classes of our people. The masters or owners of negroes in this State [South Carolina], are, for the most part, now in the

⁵⁵ Jones, "Secretary Randolph," 59. Jones, "Some Aspects," 313.

⁵⁶ Jones, "Some Aspects," 312. Archer's article offers an excellent overview of Randolph's time as Secretary. Archer notes that Randolph made some positive contributions to the Confederate military. He helped to draft the conscription law and helped Davis reorganize the command structure in the military. Despite these contributions, his relationship with Davis was not good.

⁵⁷ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 430-432.

⁵⁸ *JDC*, 5:235-236.

Army.”⁵⁹ With many owners away from the plantation, Confederates feared the reaction that their enslaved persons might have with so little supervision. Almost a month previously, Attorney General Bragg wrote, “The negroes are flocking” to the Union army “from the abandoned country and are immediately put to work.”⁶⁰ For slave owners who had long feared slave insurrection and violence, the conscription law put at risk the entire homefront, especially such innocents as women and children. Most slave owners had put into place overseers to maintain order and control on their plantations. “If the overseers should now be taken,” Chesnut continued in his letter, “the agricultural industry of this State must be immeasurably damaged and diminished.” He went on to suggest that an order be issued that would exempt managers and overseers between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five.⁶¹

Several days later, Georgia’s Governor, Joseph Brown, wrote to President Davis about his concerns related to the Conscription act. Brown felt the need to write to Davis because “principles are involved” with the conscription law, “of the most vital character.” This new legislation, he believed, threatened the “rights and sovereignty of the States, [and] the very existence of State Government.” Brown would not consent to abide by the new law because of this threat to his state’s sovereignty and the “principles for which Georgia entered into this revolution.”⁶² Brown believed that it was possible to

⁵⁹ Letter from James Chesnut to George W. Randolph, in Wallace Hettle, ed., *The Confederate Homefront: A History in Documents* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017), 52.

⁶⁰ Bragg, *Diary*, 21 March 1862 entry, I:191.

⁶¹ Letter from James Chesnut to George W. Randolph, *The Confederate Homefront*, 52.

⁶² Letter from Gov. Joseph Brown to Jefferson Davis, 8 May 1862, *The Confederate Homefront*, 59.

dismiss his concerns on the argument that necessity demanded setting aside the Confederate Constitution, but he did not believe that necessity had been adequately shown. Further, “it would be a dangerous policy to adopt were we to admit that those who are to exercise the power of setting aside the Constitution, are to be the judges of the necessity for so doing.”⁶³

Davis responded to Brown toward the end of the month. The constitutionality of the law had been thoroughly debated by himself, his Cabinet, and both houses of Congress before the passage of the legislation. He submitted Brown’s letter of 8 May to his Cabinet for review and asked his Attorney General, Watts by this point, for a ruling on the law’s constitutionality. Davis proceeded to defend his thinking regarding the conscription legislation. States were “amply competent to administer and control [their] own domestic government[s],” Davis opined. But these sovereign states joined together in unions or confederations to combine the limited powers of individual states together behind a common government. When this was done, states delegated powers to the national government, one of the primary ones being to raise and maintain armies. Davis quoted at length from the Confederate Constitution, claiming it was “impossible to imagine a more broad, ample and unqualified delegation of the whole war power of each State.”⁶⁴

The next day, Davis also sent a letter to J. J. Pettus, Governor of Mississippi who had raised objections to the lack of exemption provided to overseers. Davis had sent Pettus’s complaint to Secretary Randolph, who admitted that he had received numerous

⁶³ Letter from Gov. Joseph Brown to Jefferson Davis, 8 May 1862, *The Confederate Homefront*, 60.

⁶⁴ *JDC*, 5:254-255.

similar complaints. The War Department, Randolph claimed, did not have the authority to extend exemptions to plantation overseers. Instead, the issue would have to be raised and debated by Congress when that body reconvened in August.⁶⁵

The war was taking an incredibly chaotic turn as it drug on to a length hardly anticipated by most contemporaries. Attorney General Bragg's replacement, Thomas Watts, arrived on 9 April 1862, and Bragg departed from Richmond for Petersburg the next morning. He found Petersburg to be dull as most of "her people have nearly all gone into service," except for those soldiers that he complained about were claiming to be ill to avoid military duty. "Many of them are all - mere skulkers from duty."⁶⁶ He kept up with military news and events, groaning on 19 April that we "are loosing ground slowly in every quarter, and without several successful blows, and that soon, we are likely to have the worst of it."⁶⁷ Several days later he reported a rumor he'd heard that Richmond was preparing to be invaded and that the Executive Departments were packing up their belongings and papers. "I hardly think so," Bragg wrote, "the President would scarcely allow that to be done."⁶⁸ At the beginning of May Bragg had "little hope that we can keep" the enemy away from Richmond. "Every chance is against us...Ruin seems almost inevitable."⁶⁹ A couple of weeks later, he was closing his diary, believing the end of the

⁶⁵ *JDC*, 5:262-263.

⁶⁶ Bragg, *Diary*, 9 & 12 April 1862 entries, I:205-208.

⁶⁷ Bragg, *Diary*, 19 April 1862 entry, I:214.

⁶⁸ Bragg, *Diary*, 23 April 1862 entry, I:217.

⁶⁹ Bragg, *Diary*, 4 May 1862 entry, I:226.

Confederacy was approaching. "I must close this diary," he wrote on 15 May 1862, "I close here - almost without hope - I cannot keep this longer...I close in gloom."⁷⁰

That same Thursday (15 May), Mallory confided in his diary: "God only knows what his providence may yet subject us to. The hour is dark & gloomy for our beloved South. The enemy is strong & eager, and our people are not as devoted to our cause as it merits." Reunion with the North, Mallory believed, would be "political degradation" and the South would be subjected, gradually, to a place of "inevitable inferiority" within the Union, and "its stamp would thereby be fixed upon them [Southerners] & their children."⁷¹ That the South was a badly outnumbered and under-resourced minority was a common Confederate trope even before the outbreak of the war. Yankees were "barbarous and destructive....They were abolition fanatics determined to strike at the very heart of the southern social order through emancipation and miscegenation." Confederates feared that Northerners, aligned with Black Americans, sought the ultimate extermination of southern whites.⁷² In October 1862, Josiah Gorgas reported on the growing radicalism in the Union government, citing Lincoln's announced Emancipation Proclamation. The proclamation, Gorgas wrote, "is opposed by many" in the North and it "encounters marked opposition at the north, & is denounced by the democrats generally."⁷³ The turn toward abolition in the Union was evidence for Confederates of the United States' "descent into a dark night of political oppression"

⁷⁰ Bragg, *Diary*, 15 May 1862, I:232-233.

⁷¹ Mallory, *Diary*, 15 May 1862, I:18.

⁷² George C. Rable, *Damn Yankees!: Demonization and Defiance in the Confederate South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), 7, 10.

⁷³ Gorgas, *Journals*, 17 October 1862 entry, 53-54.

which fit well with Southern notions of states' rights and their claims that they had been oppressed while a part of the Union.⁷⁴ Mallory bemoaned that he would “gaze and glory in, the chance of sacrificing” his life for Confederate victory. “Our horizon looks dark, but such has been the character of all great issues at times.”⁷⁵

The Confederacy's impending doom continued into the summer. Mallory confided to his diary in June that he is “as sick” and “disgusted with the cravings and complaints of ignorance & presumption, that I have not built a navy!” He was confident that he had given the Confederate Cause his whole devotion, “of having done all that any man could have done with the means at hand.”⁷⁶ He was frustrated that the President did not consult with the Cabinet “as to plans or arrangements of campaign, or the appointments of military men to office & I think he errs in not doing so. Such information upon interesting matters touching these subjects could be laid before him.” In other words, by not consulting his Cabinet, Mallory believed that Davis was missing out on vital information and advice that departmental secretaries were uniquely positioned to give.⁷⁷

President Davis most frequently consulted with the Cabinet regarding his messages to Congress. After the war, in a lengthy letter to his son, Stephen Mallory remembered that roughly a month before the Congress was to assemble, Davis would call the Cabinet together, and “in a session of four or five hours, talk over the subjects which

⁷⁴ Rable, *Damn Yankees!*, 26.

⁷⁵ Mallory, *Diary*, 24 June 1862 entry, I:20.

⁷⁶ Mallory, *Diary*, I:21.

⁷⁷ Mallory, *Diary*, I:21.

should be presented & the views of them to be elaborated.”⁷⁸ During these meetings, there was “free conversation.” Over the course of the following week, Davis would compose the message based on his Cabinet officer’s feedback, then present the draft to a reconvened Cabinet for criticism.⁷⁹ Before the August 1862 gathering of the Congress, there was an “[a]nimated Cabinet meeting” in which each minister was given the opportunity to “express his views.” The Cabinet meeting adjourned with a request from Davis to reconvene the following day at noon with written opinions. At the following meeting, each officer read his paper.⁸⁰

In the message that was approved and delivered to Congress on 18 August 1862, Davis opened by praising the army and the sufferings that its soldiers had endured. He then contrasted the gallantry of the Confederate soldiers with the evil and increasingly barbaric Union soldiers. The passions of the Union army “changed the character of the hostilities waged by our enemies, who are becoming daily less regardful of the usages of civilized war and the dictates of humanity.”⁸¹ The Union forces, Davis claimed were unnecessarily destroying private property and waging war on noncombatants.⁸² In stressing the barbarism of Yankees, Davis sought “to win sympathy for the Confederate cause abroad and sustain patriotic sacrifice at home.”⁸³

⁷⁸ Mallory, *Diary*, 8 December 1865 entry, II:203-204.

⁷⁹ Mallory, *Diary*, II:204.

⁸⁰ Mallory, *Diary*, 1 August 1862 entry, I:22-23.

⁸¹ *JDC*, 5:321.

⁸² *JDC*, 5:321.

⁸³ Rable, *Damn Yankees!*, 55.

The nature of warfare was incredibly important to the Confederacy's international claims to nationhood. Uncivilized modes of conflict greatly affected foreign intervention. If the Confederacy could claim that the Union was not fighting by the recognized international laws of war, they would be one step closer to foreign recognition. In contrast to the barbaric enemies, Confederates claimed to represent "the European tradition of civilized military action."⁸⁴ The Confederacy regretted, Davis told the world in his Congressional message, "the character of the contest into which we are about to be forced, we must accept it as an alternative which recent manifestations give us little reason to hope can be avoided."⁸⁵ After directing attention to various aspects of his Cabinet secretaries' reports, Davis closed his message thanking God for the protection He had thus far provided the "infant Confederacy." In response to God's favor, Davis called on his fellow Confederates to "reverently return our thanks and humbly...ask of his bounteousness that wisdom which is needful for the performance of the high trusts with which we are charged."⁸⁶

The internal social divisions of the Confederacy were beginning to show through Davis's wishful rhetoric of a homogenous people fighting against an uncivilized enemy. The challenge of global rebellions of self-government during the era was their need "to gain the broad consent of the people and make insurrection appear respectable and just."⁸⁷ Confederates understood this necessity, which explains Davis's continued

⁸⁴ Sheehan-Dean, *Reckoning with Rebellion*, 74.

⁸⁵ *JDC*, 5:322.

⁸⁶ *JDC*, 5:326.

⁸⁷ Sheehan-Dean, *Reckoning with Rebellion*, 14, 38.

appeals to Confederate unity and social homogeneity. Clerk Jones wrote that “the people have made the nation. It is a people’s war, and it is the momentum of a united, patriotic people, which carries everything with it.”⁸⁸ Whether the people were actually united, Jones understood that the commitment of the people behind the national government was essential to the Confederacy’s national future. “Our brave men win victories under adverse circumstances, and often under incompetent officers,” Jones continued, “and the people feed and clothe the armies in spite of the shortcomings of dishonest commissaries and quartermasters.”⁸⁹ The people’s commitment to the Confederacy was very likely real, but when foreign powers looked at the Confederacy, they saw that the population was nonetheless divided, and that’s because it was divided.⁹⁰

In addition to the troubles of a divided populace that the Confederacy faced in 1862, it faced continual military setbacks. These setbacks threatened their rhetorical sovereignty over their claimed land holdings. As more and more land fell to Union occupation, the Confederacy threatened its national existence through the very irregular warfare for which it accused the Union. The physical space occupied by the Confederacy was important to soldiers because of their homes, farms, and families that were threatened by encroaching Union forces. In a study of Virginian soldiers, Aaron Sheehan-Dean describes military motivation and nationalism this way:

“As men refined their inspiration for fighting over time, they created a new language to express their commitment to Confederate independence. In place

⁸⁸ Jones, diary entry, 9 November 1862, *Clerk’s Diary*, I:165.

⁸⁹ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, I:165.

⁹⁰ Sheehan-Dean, *Reckoning with Rebellion*, 103.

of the political conceptualizations common early in the conflict, Virginians developed an explanation for fighting that expressed itself most clearly through the men's involvements in their families."⁹¹

In the Confederate nation, soldiers had a government that they thought embodied the values they held most dear, including slavery and local autonomy.⁹² With military defeats, especially on her western frontier that left large swaths of Confederate land abandoned by the regular army, Confederate soldiers turned to irregular and guerrilla tactics to oppose the Yankee enemy. Guerrillas supported the Confederate nation by making large sections of the south at least *contested* and not clearly under Union control, thus questioning the validity of Union occupation. Most devastatingly, however, "irregular fighting implicates civilians in the process of war...[and] unleash[es] unpredictable waves of violence, in the form of counterinsurgencies, that threaten all noncombatants. The result is that irregular wars run the risk of alienating the populace they are supposed to protect."⁹³

Having accused the Union of refusing to abide by the civilized laws of war, guerrilla combatants threatened Confederate recognition by foreign powers. Realizing that he could not afford to reject irregular soldiers outright, Davis urged the Confederate Congress to "legitimate" them, which it did in 1862 when it passed the Partisan Ranger Act. This act "was supposed to enable Confederates to organize irregular fighters and

⁹¹ Aaron Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought: Family & Nation in Civil War Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 6.

⁹² Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought*, 10.

⁹³ Sheehan-Dean, *Reckoning with Rebellion*, 38.

bring them within the control of the regular army.”⁹⁴ In reality, those combatants sanctioned under the act operated with little oversight from Richmond, but Davis regarded the Act as sufficient to give legitimacy to the many guerrilla units sprawled across the South. The actions of irregular soldiers weakened claims of autonomy made by Confederates. In hindsight, historians can see that “Confederates lost partly because they fought a guerrilla war.”⁹⁵ At the time, however, there was still hope that foreign powers would look past Confederate guerrillas and internal division and recognize their efforts toward self-determination. “If we gain our independence by the valor of our people, or assisted by European intervention,” JB Jones pondered, “I wonder whether President Davis will be regarded by the world as a second Washington?” As he was writing this reflection, Jones could only know for certain that contemporaries were calling Davis “a small specimen of a statesman, and no military chieftain at all. And worse, still, that he is a capricious tyrant.” The only comfort Jones could find was that “Washington was maligned.”⁹⁶

As 1862 ended, the Cabinet was poised to reflect the social divisions within the Confederacy. As Secretary of War, Randolph “sought not merely to administer the war but to mobilize the resources of the Confederacy and give strategic direction to the Confederate armies.”⁹⁷ Despite his hard work, Secretary of War Randolph and the President came to an irreconcilable conflict in November of 1862. Randolph, apparently

⁹⁴ Sheehan-Dean, *Reckoning with Rebellion*, 23.

⁹⁵ Sheehan-Dean, *Reckoning with Rebellion*, 50.

⁹⁶ Jones, *Clerk's Diary*, 31 October 1862 entry, I:158.

⁹⁷ Archer, “Some Aspects,” 313-314

without first consulting President Davis, made some adjustments to the command structure in the Western theater of the war.

Davis dashed off two letters to Randolph on 14 November 1862. “Confusion and embarrassment [*sic*] will inevitably result unless all orders, and directions in relation to movements and stations of troops and officers, be sent through the established channel,” Davis lectured Randolph.⁹⁸ “In these matters and in all cases of selection of persons to be appointed commissioned officers,” President Davis continued, “I have to request a reference before action is taken.”⁹⁹ In a second letter, Davis clarified that because the appointment of generals and positioning of their armies was a matter of “the public defence [*sic*]” he required consultation as commander-in-chief.¹⁰⁰ “The appointment of commissioned officers is a constitutional function which I have neither power or will to delegate, and much which is disagreeable will be avoided by consultation in the first stage of selection.”¹⁰¹

Tensions in the War Department could be cut with a knife. It “looks like a rupture,” wrote Jones. “It seems, after acting some eight months merely in the humble capacity of clerk, Mr. Randolph has all at once essayed to act the PRESIDENT.”¹⁰² Robert Kean, Head of the Confederate Bureau of War, believed that “Mr. Davis became jealous of the independent character of the Secretary [Randolph]...and that the issue

⁹⁸. Letter to George W. Randolph, 14 November 1862, *PJD* 8:490.

⁹⁹. Letter to George W. Randolph, 14 November 1862, *PJD*, 8:490-491.

¹⁰⁰. Letter to George W. Randolph, 14 November 1862, *PJD*, 8:491.

¹⁰¹. Letter to George W. Randolph, 14 November 1862, *PJD*, 8:492.

¹⁰². Jones, diary entry, 15 November 1862, *Clerk's Diary*, I:168.

made was factitious.” Kean thought that “No one can administer the War Office, or the Government, on the terms laid down by the President.” It was absurd for the President to consult on every troop movement or officer assignment. Randolph was “reduced” by Davis “in very truth, as the people have long charged, to a mere clerk.”¹⁰³ In frustration, Secretary Randolph resigned on 15 November 1862, and the President accepted it immediately. “Usually when a Cabinet officer resigns,” Mallory wrote, “he remains in possession of the post until the installation of his successor; but Gen[era]l Randolph walked out of it on Saturday, leaving much business that he might have concluded on that day, unattended to.”¹⁰⁴

Several days later, Mallory reflected on the disruption caused in the functions of the government and Cabinet. Mallory regretted Randolph’s resignation “for he was a hard working Secretary, & more familiar with the details of the office than any successor will probably be.”¹⁰⁵ Davis’s had made a good decision moving away from civilian Secretaries and establishing a Secretary with more familiarity with the military and its importance to the survival of the Confederacy. Though a good decision, it was not one that President Davis could allow because the War Department was his domain. “The fact is,” Secretary Mallory wrote, “that the President’s familiarity with army matters induces his desire to mingle in them all & to control them; & this desire is augmented by the fear that details may be wrongly managed without his constant supervision.”¹⁰⁶ As most other

¹⁰³ Kean, *Inside*, 25 November 1862 entry, 30.

¹⁰⁴ Mallory, *Diary*, 19 November 1862 entry, I:28-29.

¹⁰⁵ Mallory, *Diary*, I:28.

¹⁰⁶ Mallory, *Diary*, I:29.

observers noted, Mallory remarked that Randolph “disliked the President’s habituall [*sic*] interference” and “this doubtless begot in him a readiness to resign whenever an occasion might offer.”¹⁰⁷ It is possible that Randolph hoped he could use his initiative in making appointments to leverage Davis into giving him more responsibility in Confederate military strategy.¹⁰⁸ He underestimated Davis’s protection of presidential authority. The public criticized President Davis for Randolph’s departure, but J. B. Jones had little sympathy for Randolph who knew “very well that the latitude allowed him became less and less circumscribed.”¹⁰⁹

A week after Randolph’s rupture with Davis, Jones reported that “Hon. James A Seddon (Va.) has been appointed Secretary of War.” In the first Cabinet of the permanent Government, Davis had appointed Thomas Watts to appease the increasingly vocal Unionist faction of Confederate society, and Randolph had been placed in the War Department because of his military experience for which Congress and the public had clamored. Now, Davis was returning to his friend Seddon, whom he had originally planned to place in the State Department after Hunter’s resignation. Additionally, Seddon was a civilian, and Davis likely anticipated Seddon would defer to the President’s military experience. Jones thought Seddon “an able man” and was pleased that he had been one of the founders of the Confederate nation, though he did note that there were some who claimed he restrained the progress of nation-making rather than advising “decisive action.” Seddon was an orator and sickly, and Jones believed he would “not

¹⁰⁷ Mallory, *Diary*, I:29.

¹⁰⁸ Jones, “Secretary Randolph,” 58-59.

¹⁰⁹ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 17 November 1862 entry, I:169.

remain long in office if he attempts to perform all the duties.”¹¹⁰ The best advice that Jones could muster for the new War Secretary was: “Beware, Mr. Seddon! The President is a little particular concerning his prerogatives; and by the advice you now give, you stand or fall.”¹¹¹

The year 1862 had proved to be a difficult one for the Confederate States of America. Despair at the highest levels of the government reflected a populace that was increasingly losing the will to continue in the struggle for independence. On 8 December, Davis wrote to General Robert E. Lee that he proposed “to go out [to Tennessee and Mississippi] immediately with the hope that something may be done to bring out men not heretofore in service, and to arouse all classes to united and desperate resistance.”¹¹² As 1862 was drawing to a close, Davis was preparing to take the case for the Confederacy to the people themselves. If he would not literally be taking up arms for his country, he would be doing so rhetorically. He departed Richmond on 9 December 1862 with two aides and a servant. Davis was “attempting to reach out to Southerners as he had never done before—as he had never really had to do before.”¹¹³ As Abraham Lincoln was preparing to declare Confederate enslaved persons emancipated, Jefferson Davis was traveling the tattered edge of his own fraying country to encourage whites to fight for their political “emancipation.”

¹¹⁰ Jones, *Clerk's Diary*, 19 November 1862 entry, I:170.

¹¹¹ Jones, *Clerk's Diary*, 29 November 1862 entry, I:176.

¹¹² *JDC*, 5:384.

¹¹³ Hattaway & Beringer, *Confederate President*, 185-186. Hattaway and Beringer are of the opinion that Davis may have been developing “a sense of what the twentieth-century polices call PR, public relations.”

CHAPTER VI

1863-1864

Writing to James A. Seddon, Secretary of War, President Davis reported that morale in the western Confederacy was less than ideal. “The feeling in East Tennessee and North Alabama is far from what we desire.” Davis was away from Richmond, visiting troops and attempting to carry the ideals of the Confederacy directly to the people. “There is some hostility and much want of confidence in our strength.”¹ On his way back to Richmond, Davis made several stops where he spoke to gathered crowds. On 1 January 1863, the day Lincoln issued his Emancipation Proclamation which gave enslaved persons legal freedom across Union-occupied portions of the South, Jefferson Davis spoke in Atlanta. He passed through Augusta, Georgia where he spoke briefly and on 3 January 1863, he found himself in Raleigh, North Carolina.

A crowd gathered to see and hear their President. Davis acknowledged such a “hearty reception” and praised the people of Raleigh and North Carolina in general for being true to their Revolutionary history.² To the people of North Carolina, President Davis fibbed slightly in an effort to keep their spirits high. He had gone West “to find dissatisfaction and confusion. But he found, on the contrary, as at other places, our gallant boys ready to meet five times their numbers, and to whip them.”³ Gone was his concerned missive to Seddon claiming that there was hostility and distrust of the government. Instead, to people gathered in Raleigh that day, Davis was participating in

¹ Telegram to James A. Seddon, 18 December 1862, *JDC*, 5:386.

² Speech at Raleigh, NC, *PJD*, 9:7.

³ *PJD*, 9:8.

the Confederate culture of invincibility which projected Southerners as unconquerable.⁴ There was a great amount of sacrifice involved in fighting for the Cause, Davis recognized, but the “man who, at a time like this, cannot sink such considerations, is unworthy of power.” The prospects of the Confederacy, Davis claimed, were “bright.” The crowd roared with “deafening cheers” as Davis returned to his train that would take him back to Richmond.⁵

The next day, Davis made it into Petersburg where he gave another brief address. Like in North Carolina, Davis claimed that he “was not the bearer of bad news....The West...is thoroughly aroused, and her enthusiasm equals that of Virginia.”⁶ He arrived home in Richmond the next evening. He found several hundred spectators gathered at the Confederate White House around 11:00 PM clamoring for a speech. Davis appeared on the White House portico and thanked the crowd for their enthusiasm. “I am happy to be welcomed on my return to the Capital of our Confederacy—the last hope, as I believe, for the perpetuation of that system of government which our forefathers founded—the asylum of the oppressed and the home of true representative liberty.”⁷

As late as 1863, Davis was still trying to give Confederates a sense of a shared past. He called Virginia “ancient” in an effort to connect the “great battles for freedom” which were fought there during the Revolution with the current Confederacy which sought to purify “the grand system” of government that was being overturned by

⁴ Jason Phillips, *Diehard Rebels: The Confederate Culture of Invincibility* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 2.

⁵ *PJD*, 9:8.

⁶ Speech at Petersburg, 4 January 1863, *PJD*, 9:9.

⁷ Speech at Richmond, 5 January 1863, *PJD*, 9:11.

the Yankees. There was no mention of the morale in the West. Instead, Davis praised Virginians for their sacrifices in the Revolution and now in the Confederate War for Independence. Confederate blood had been spilt on Virginia's soil, "and it is now consecrated by blood which cries for vengeance against the insensate foe of religion as well as of humanity, of the altar as well as of the hearthstone." The Union was the very epitome of barbarism, and Davis was beginning to call upon Confederates to sacrifice everything for religion, the legacy of the Revolution, family and home, and humanity itself. The cause of the Confederacy bound Confederates "together more firmly than" the Revolution of their forefathers. The Revolutionary generation fought merely for independence from Britain; Confederates fought for independence from "the offscourings of the earth"—independence from barbaric, less-than-human, Northerners.⁸ Davis's rhetoric was becoming more desperate.

Early in the war, Davis articulated more clearly what the Confederacy was fighting *for*, although he never did this as elegantly or poetically as did Lincoln for the Union. The Confederacy existed to preserve representative government, self-determination, white supremacy, and African slavery. After returning from the West, Davis's speeches began to be more infused with rhetoric that especially demonized the Confederates' enemy. "Every crime which could characterize the course of demons," Davis bellowed from the White House portico, "has marked the course of the invader."⁹ Though they were losing control of physical land, and therefore threatening their standing in the family of nations which demanded insurgents to maintain control over claimed

⁸ *PJD*, 9:11.

⁹ *PJD*, 9:11.

land, Davis drew on his rhetoric to establish Confederate sovereignty. By labeling Northerners “invaders,” Davis sought to use the language of imperialism to claim that the Union was an imperialistic power threatening the sovereign South, and attempting to make it a Northern colony.¹⁰ The actions of the imperialistic North were evidence of their barbarity: “They have murdered prisoners of war; they have destroyed the means of subsistence of families; they have plundered the defenceless, [*sic*] and exerted their most malignant ingenuity to bring to the deepest destitution those whose only offense is that their husbands and sons are fighting for their homes and their liberties.”¹¹ When maintaining physical land was difficult, insurgents of the era turned to other methods to assert sovereignty, primarily rhetoric. “A key part of this language, as it concerned a peoples’ fitness for inclusion in the family of nations, was respect for the laws of war,” Sheehan-Dean has noted.¹² President Davis sought to use his rhetoric to show that, through their actions, the Union had violated the laws of war which, at the very least, gave the Confederacy a right to national existence.

The Presidency was difficult for Davis, but he gave his full devotion to his work and to the Confederacy. “My friends, constant labor in the duties of office, borne down by care, and with an anxiety which has left me scarcely a moment for repose, I have had but little opportunity for social intercourse among you,” Davis told the crowd gathered outside the White House. In the midst of war and a higher purpose, “there is little time for the cultivation of the social enjoyments that pertain to a time of peace. I can

¹⁰ Sheehan-Dean, *Reckoning with Rebellion*, 120-121.

¹¹ *PJD*, 9:12.

¹² Sheehan-Dean, *Reckoning with Rebellion*, 46.

only give this as my excuse for my seldom appearance among you.”¹³ Davis did not regret any of the sacrifices that the war forced him to make, “But I now feel if they had been greater they would have served only to render me more devoted to you.”¹⁴ Because all Confederates were making similar sacrifices, Davis did not doubt the power of the “severe crucible” to “cement us together....I trust,” he said to applause, “we will be united forever.”¹⁵ Davis closed out his speech to the serenaders by acknowledging that one “year ago many were depressed and some despondent. Now deep resolve is seen in every eye, an unconquerable spirit nerves every arm.”¹⁶

The next day, J.B. Jones wrote in his diary: “To-day we are all *down* again. Bragg has *retreated* from Murfreesborough.”¹⁷ Davis had been there not even a month before and already the city was abandoned to the enemy. Six days later, Davis’s message was delivered to the newly convened Confederate Congress. Reviewing the two years of the Confederacy’s existence, Davis claimed, necessitated praise and thanksgiving to “the Almighty Father, who has blessed our cause. We are justified in asserting, with a pride surely not unbecoming, that these Confederate States have added another to the lessons taught by history for the instruction of man; that they have afforded another example of the impossibility of subjugating a people determined to be free; and have demonstrated that no superiority of numbers or available resources can overcome the resistance offered

¹³ *PJD*, 9:13.

¹⁴ *PJD*, 9:14.

¹⁵ *PJD*, 9:14.

¹⁶ *PJD*, 9:15.

¹⁷ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 5 January 1863 entry, I:205.

by such valor in combat, such constancy under suffering, and such cheerful endurance of privation as have been conspicuously displayed by this people in the defense of their rights and liberties.”¹⁸

Davis reviewed the efforts of the Confederacy to gain foreign recognition, then turned to delegitimizing the Northern war effort by reading “examples of every conceivable atrocity” which they allegedly committed.¹⁹ Davis formally reported on Lincoln’s proclamation “in which he orders and declares all slaves within ten of the States of the Confederacy to be free.” Basic human reason, implanted in each man by “a beneficent Creator,” told any man willing to listen that the freedom of “several millions of human beings of an inferior race, peaceful and contented laborers in their sphere, are doomed to extermination, while at the same time they are encouraged to a general assassination of their masters.”²⁰ The Emancipation Proclamation revealed to Confederates the true nature and designs of the Republican Party that now controlled the Union.²¹ Davis reprinted in its entirety a portion of Lincoln’s inaugural address where he promised that Southerners’ property in slaves was not threatened by a Republican Administration. “The people of this Confederacy, then, cannot fail to receive this proclamation as the fullest vindication of their own sagacity in foreseeing the uses to which the dominant party in the United States intended from the beginning to apply their power.”²² Davis saw that the Emancipation Proclamation as a positive driving force to

¹⁸ Message to Congress, 12 January 1863., *JDC*, 5:397.

¹⁹ *JDC*, 5:408.

²⁰ *JDC*, 5:409.

²¹ *JDC*, 5:410.

²² *JDC*, 5:411.

send more men to arms to defend their way of life that was now so obviously threatened. That the Union had stooped to such a low level as issuing a proclamation of emancipation showed Davis that the US government was unable “to subjugate the South by force of arms.”²³

Jones wrote that the President’s message was “highly applauded. It is well written; but I do not perceive much substance in it, besides some eloquent reproaches of England and France for the maintenance of their neutrality.” Through his message, Jones recognized, Davis sought “to encourage the people to continued effort and endurance—and such encouragement is highly judicious at this dark epoch of the struggle.”²⁴ It was becoming increasingly obvious to Jones and others that “President Davis would be the last man to abandon the ship Independence.”²⁵ In his humble position in the War Department, Jones sought to abide by the patriotism that Davis called for. He addressed a letter to President Davis advising that an appeal be sent out to the people to voluntarily donate food and clothing for the men in uniform. The letter was given to the Secretary of War who would then consult the Commissary and Quartermaster-General. Jones believed that the “plan will not be adopted, in all probability” because these men “will oppose any interference with the business of their departments. Red tape will win the day, even if our cause be lost.”²⁶ Indeed, he received a missive from Secretary Seddon on 27 February which informed Jones that “it is not deemed judicious, unless in the last

²³ *JDC*, 5:411.

²⁴ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 15 January 1863 entry, I:211.

²⁵ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 26 January 1863 entry, I:219.

²⁶ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 22 February 1863 entry, I:233.

extremity, to report to the means of supply suggested. The patriotic motives that dictated the suggestion,” Seddon wrote, are “appreciated and acknowledged.” Jones fumed: “Red tape is mightier than patriotism still.”²⁷

There was one Executive Department that the Confederacy demanded be fiscally efficient. The Confederate Constitution mandated that by 1 March 1863, the Confederate Postal System had to be completely self-sustained. “This self-sufficiency mandate stemmed from Southern antipathy for US postal subsidiaries, which were perceived as a form of taxation whose benefits accrued mostly to Northern commercial interest and urban areas.”²⁸ John Reagan of Texas, Confederate Postmaster General, got to work immediately after his appointment to create the postal department of the Confederate States of America.

Reagan wrote to several Union postal employees and leaders in Washington, DC asking for their loyalty and assistance. Almost all came to the Confederacy’s aid, bringing with them supplies and machinery.²⁹ For new postal employees, Reagan organized an evening “school” from 8-10 PM on weekdays to lay out routes and provide proper training.³⁰ At a cabinet meeting in early April 1861, Reagan “was able to state that the Post Office Department was as completely organized as that at Washington.”³¹

²⁷ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 27 February 1863 entry, I:234.

²⁸ John Nathan Anderson, “Money or Nothing: Confederate Postal System Collapse during the Civil War,” *American Journalism* 30, no. 1 (2013): 67.

²⁹ Walter Flavius McCaleb, “The Organization of the Post-Office Department of the Confederacy,” *The American Historical Review* 12, no. 1 (1906): 68.

³⁰ L. R. Garrison, “Administrative Problems of the Confederate Post Office Department, I,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (1915): 112.

³¹ John H. Reagan, *Memoirs with Special Reference to Secession and the Civil War*, edited by Walter Flavius McCaleb (New York, NY: The Neale Publishing Company, 1906), 126.

President Davis was shocked by Reagan's announcement.³² When the special session of the Confederate Congress convened on 29 April 1861, Reagan reported that his department was ready to begin delivering mail and requested that he be allowed to retain those postal employees previously employed by the United States government. "The Congress promptly gave me this authority, and I at once issued my proclamation."³³ On 13 May 1861, Secretary Reagan issued a proclamation that announced 1 June 1861 as the date when the Confederate government would take full responsibility in delivering the mail.³⁴ Either by coincidence or design, Lincoln's Postmaster General Montgomery Blair issued a similar proclamation announcing that the United States would cease mail delivery in rebellious southern states on the same date.³⁵ Reagan believed "it was most probably the result of a purpose to...avoid a clash in the service and to maintain the responsibility and enforce the obligations of those connected with the postal service."³⁶ As early as 18 June 1861, Reagan was already receiving complaints about the Confederate postal service, especially near portions of the new nation under military disruption, such as Bull Run.³⁷

From its very inception, the Confederate Post Office Department was to have troubles. These were not solely the result of war. In addition to the difficulties that

³² Reagan, *Memoirs*, 127.

³³ Reagan, *Memoirs*, 127.

³⁴ McCaleb, "The Organization of the Post-Office," 72.

³⁵ Garrison, "Administrative Problems," I:114.

³⁶ Reagan, *Memoirs*, 133.

³⁷ Garrison, "Administrative Problems," I:115.

accompany the necessity of delivering mails in war-torn regions, Reagan's department was required by the Confederate Constitution to be fully self-sustaining by 1 March 1863. The United States government had spent \$2,879,530.79 on postal services in the southern states, but only made \$938,105.34.³⁸ Needless to say, Reagan's task would be daunting. Reagan hiked postal rates and cut certain areas of service.³⁹ The result was general disdain for the Confederate Post Office. Reagan's biographer has written that the "postal service of the Confederacy was never satisfactory to the public."⁴⁰ The *Houston Trip-Weekly Telegraph* wrote, "The Post Office Department is very justly said to be an institution that no one feels but in its failures."⁴¹ The pressures of financial self-sufficiency and military occupations meant that the Confederate postal service was frequently failing.

Service to the country was not Reagan's only problem. Due to a sudden loss of income, the Confederacy failed to appropriate funds for postal contractors for the fiscal year ending 1 June 1861, so postmasters went unpaid for six months, with many abandoning their posts.⁴² In addition to lack of pay, changing national borders as a result of military abandonment and Union occupation made reliable postal service difficult.⁴³ Further, limited supplies of paper, especially the kind needed to print stamps, meant that

³⁸ Reagan, *Memoirs*, 133. These figures are for the fiscal year ending 30 June 1860.

³⁹ Anderson, "Money or Nothing," 68.

⁴⁰ Ben H. Procter, *Not Without Honor: The Life of John H. Reagan* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962), 139.

⁴¹ Quoted in Garrison, "Administrative Problems," I:115.

⁴² Garrison, "Administrative Problems," I:115-116. Anderson, 70.

⁴³ Anderson, "Money or Nothing," 80.

the department rarely functioned fully or properly.⁴⁴ Reagan stated in his first annual report that rail transport of mail was “so irregular, as to make it an accident, now, instead of the rule, to have regular connections between any distant and important points.”⁴⁵ The result of poor service was decreased morale among the Confederate military and populace.⁴⁶ The *Augusta Chronicle* wrote on 4 December 1864, “The Post Office Department in all countries has hitherto been regarded as a public convenience. But the controllers of it in the Confederacy appear to look upon it as a money-making machine. The way it has been managed shows that they care nothing for the people.”⁴⁷ At the cost of morale and a more united citizenry, the Confederate Post Office Department met its constitutional mandate to be self-sustaining by 1 March 1863. Reagan reported a surplus of \$675,000.⁴⁸ From that point forward, “each year there was a net income of receipts over expenditures.”⁴⁹

Early historians of the Confederacy and the Post Office Department praised Reagan for getting the Post Office in the black. Walter McCaleb writes, “To have organized so intricate an establishment and carried it on satisfactorily for four years amid the raining of the bloodiest war storm of the century is to have achieved an unusual triumph.”⁵⁰ There are reasonable grounds to question these conclusions. Historians of the

⁴⁴ Garrison, “Administrative Problems,” I:117.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Anderson, “Money or Nothing,” 73.

⁴⁶ Anderson, “Money or Nothing,” 80.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Anderson, “Money or Nothing,” 83.

⁴⁸ Anderson, “Money or Nothing,” 83.

⁴⁹ McCaleb, “The Organization of the Post-Office,” 74.

⁵⁰ McCaleb, “The Organization of the Post-Office,” 74.

Early American Republic have noted the nationalizing effect of the postal service. Sam Haselby notes that the “contemporary federal institution that did the greatest nationalizing work was probably the postal system.”⁵¹ Through the mail, citizens of various states were connected to each other in a web of letters, periodical and newspaper subscriptions, and political propaganda. The United States congress envisioned a well-informed political citizenry, and they continued to support the postal system as a method to achieve this goal. The result was at least some semblance of national cohesion.⁵² By choosing economic stability as the primary goal of the post office department, Confederates deprived their postal system of the opportunity to serve a similar, nationalizing function.

John Reagan seems to be the most querulous Cabinet officer. He clashed frequently with almost every other Cabinet secretary and even the President. As a point of pride, Reagan remembered,

It happened that I disagreed with the views of the President oftener than any other member of the Cabinet, and on one occasion I mentioned this to him, expressing my willingness to surrender my post if I were causing any embarrassment. He answered me that...if the Cabinet should accept without question the opinions of the President, he did not well see what their use could be as advisers of the President, and that he was far from being displeased with my course in this respect.⁵³

⁵¹ Sam Haselby, *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 243.

⁵² Anderson, “Money or Nothing,” 65-66.

⁵³ Reagan, *Memoirs*, 162.

Reagan clashed most frequently with the Secretary of War over conscription policy. When conscription was first enacted, he wrote often to Secretary Randolph. "The mail service is in a most deplorable condition, and I am powerless to remedy its conditions without your assistance," Reagan wrote Randolph on 2 April 1862. "I...must ask that orders be issued requiring that the mail cars be allowed to pass with other trains, and that when persons profess to stop the mail cars by military authority, they be required to show the authority for their action."⁵⁴ Randolph acquiesced to Reagan's request, but just over a month later he received another complaint that soldiers were seizing valuable post office supplies. This complaint of 24 May 1862 is the only one of its kind, so it appears Randolph also satisfactorily addressed this issue as well.⁵⁵ In the first conscription law of April 1862, all postal employees were exempt from the draft, but by the second law passed in October 1862, postmasters and contractors between the ages of eighteen and forty-five were eligible to be drafted into the military. Only those postmasters appointed by the President and approved by the Senate were exempt. Reagan complained to Davis that unless conscription regulations were relaxed, he would have to discontinue the mails to large segments of the Confederate population. Davis submitted his complaint to the Confederate Congress in April 1863. The result was an extended list of exemptions with several restrictions and qualifications.⁵⁶

Reagan also clashed with Secretary of the Treasury Christopher Memminger. The Post Office funds were not being kept separate from the general operating fund of

⁵⁴ Quoted in Garrison, "Administrative Problems," I:126.

⁵⁵ Garrison, "Administrative Problems," I:126-127.

⁵⁶ Garrison, "Administrative Problems," I:127-129.

the Confederate government, and Memminger was denying Reagan access to funds that he had deposited with the Treasury. So serious was the dispute that it was sent to the Attorney General (Thomas Watts) who ruled that Reagan had full possession of his funds.⁵⁷ Despite these conflicts, Reagan would remember after the war that the “Cabinet of Mr. Davis was so much of one view as to the necessities of our situation , that, while there were occasional differences of opinion among them, as was to be expected of thinking men, there was no passion nor strife.”⁵⁸

Reagan was proud of his accomplishment in following the Constitutional mandate set before him. In his post-war memoirs, he expressed his belief that the United States postal service could learn something from the efficiency of the Confederacy’s service. “I shall not forego the opportunity,” he wrote, “to observe that there is much in” his reports as Postmaster General “to suggest economy in the Post Office Department of the United States; and I dare say, from recent divulgements, that this is greatly needed.”⁵⁹ Despite his post-war gloating, War Clerk Jones encountered a very concerned Reagan that day in March. “I thought he seemed dejected,” the clerk wrote. “He said if the enemy succeeded in getting command of the Mississippi River, the Confederacy would be ‘cut in two;’ and he intimated his preferences of giving up Richmond, if it would save Texas...for the Confederacy.”⁶⁰ Reagan’s loyalty to his home state was greater than his

⁵⁷ L. R. Garrison, “Administrative Problems of the Confederate Post Office Department, II,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (1916): 232-233.

⁵⁸ Reagan, *Memoirs*, 162.

⁵⁹ Reagan, *Memoirs*, 135.

⁶⁰ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 1 March 1863 entry, I:236.

ultimate loyalty to the Confederate capital. He clearly grasped the dangers of a Confederacy that lost more and more control of its claimed territory.

Similar concerns as those expressed by Reagan were coming in from Texas. Major Guy M. Bryan, in a letter dated 9 March 1863, wrote to President Davis that there was “a growing feeling of discontent among the people [in Texas] at what is regarded as ‘the unwarranted exercise of powers by the military authorities, and the unwise and illegal interference of the same with the rights of the citizen and civil authorities.’”⁶¹ Major Bryan feared the election of General Sam Houston because his election would confirm “to the Lincoln government...the existence of a strong Union sentiment in Texas.”⁶² Because Texans were being spread thin across the rest of the Confederacy, the pro-Confederate candidate would not be able to be elected; “the Mexicans, Germans, discontented and disloyal will all support Houston,” Bryan fumed.⁶³

At the end of March, Texas Governor F. R. Lubbock wrote to President Davis about the exposed Texas frontier and of the “horrors of a cruel and savage warfare” that this opened the Confederacy to from barbaric Native American tribes. Lubbock wanted to remind Davis, “not for the purpose of self-laudation,” of the sacrifices that Texans had made on behalf of “our holy cause.”⁶⁴ Because of their patriotism, Texans had abandoned family and home to fight for the Confederacy, “leaving their wives and children on the frontier subject to be butchered by savages.” Lubbock expressed the disappointment that

⁶¹ Guy M. Bryan to Jefferson Davis, 9 March 1863, *JDC*, 5:442-443.

⁶² *JDC*, 5:443.

⁶³ *JDC*, 5:443. Davis would not receive Bryan’s message until 22 May 1863 (5:444).

⁶⁴ Gov. F. R. Lubbock to Jefferson Davis, *JDC*, 5:454-455.

these sacrificial patriots felt at being abandoned by the Confederate federal government. Texans put “implicit trust in Texas, that their State would in every exigency, promptly put forth all her energies and resources for her own and their protection, and consequently for the general defense.”⁶⁵ As a result of this trust and the recent acts of the Texas State Legislature, Governor Lubbock was required to keep some funds and men behind to defend the frontier border of Texas. As the Union made their way down the Mississippi River, Confederates became increasingly disconnected and disheartened at the failure of their national government to maintain control of the land over which they claimed sovereignty. Varina Davis wrote to her husband while she was visiting family in Alabama: “[H]ere they don’t care for Richmond only the West.”⁶⁶

During the summer of 1863, Confederate military setbacks at Gettysburg and Vicksburg splintered the Confederate nation, leaving the western portion essentially abandoned. News of Lee’s retreat from Gettysburg on 3 July 1863 and of Vicksburg’s surrender the following day reached Richmond on 8 July. War Clerk Jones wrote, “This is a terrible blow, and has produced much despondency.”⁶⁷ The fall of Vicksburg alone “does not make this the darkest day of the war,” Jones believed. But connected with the “appalling” news from Lee’s army at Gettysburg, the fate of the nation seemed settled. President Davis was ill during the retreat from Gettysburg and fall of Vicksburg. Josiah Gorgas had noted on 2 July that Davis “is ill to-day, and his physician is seriously alarmed about him. The death of the President would indeed be the most serious calamity

⁶⁵ *JDC*, 5:456.

⁶⁶ Varina Davis to Jefferson Davis, 5 April 1863, *PJD*, 9:128.

⁶⁷ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 8 July 1863 entry, I:332.

that could befall us.”⁶⁸ After the news of Gettysburg and Vicksburg, Gorgas, filled with despair, believed that “absolute ruin seems to be our portion. The Confederacy totters to its destruction.”⁶⁹

Because he was ill, Davis was directing Secretary of War Seddon to send “him copies of all correspondence” coming into the War Department from the field.⁷⁰ James Seddon would become one of Davis’s most trusted advisors in the cabinet. If any portion of Davis’s cabinet could be considered a “revolving door,” it was the War Office. Already by November 1862, Davis had had three War Secretaries.⁷¹ Seddon would serve until February 1865, almost twenty-seven months.⁷² His tenure, longer than all other occupants of the War portfolio combined, would bring much-needed stability to the war effort.⁷³ Seddon had the appearance of an “eccentric rabbi.”⁷⁴ One historian has described Seddon this way: “His lean, lank, darkly-clothed figure, in the ever-present

⁶⁸ Gorgas, *Journals*, 2 July 1863 entry, 72.

⁶⁹ Gorgas, *Journals*, 28 July 1863 entry, 75.

⁷⁰ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 8 July 1863 entry, I:332.

⁷¹ These were: Leroy Pope Walker (February 1861–September 1861); Judah P. Benjamin (September 1861–March 1862); and George W. Randolph (March 1862–November 1862). Randolph’s tenure had been the longest at nine months. See “Table 6. Confederate Secretaries of War,” in Dennis L. Peterson, *Confederate Cabinet Departments and Secretaries* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2016), 92.

⁷² Ludwell H. Johnson, “Jefferson Davis and Abraham Lincoln as War Presidents: Nothing Succeeds Like Success,” *Civil War History* 27, no. 1 (1981): 52.

⁷³ Roy Watson Curry, “James A. Seddon, A Southern Prototype,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 63, no. 2 (1955): 123. Given Seddon’s tenure in the war office, and his role in the Confederate war effort, the lack of secondary source materials for Seddon is surprising and glaring. There is not monography biography of Seddon. Part of the problem undoubtedly is owed to the fact that Seddon destroyed many of his private papers. A brave student of southern history should consider filling this hole in Confederate and Civil War historiography.

⁷⁴ Gerard Francis John O’Brien, “James A. Seddon, Statesman of the Old South” (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 1963), 300.

black skull cap, from under which protruded his long, graying hair, became a familiar sight in Richmond.”⁷⁵ Robert Kean remembered Seddon as “physically weak” but also “a man of clear head, strong sense, and firm character.”⁷⁶ Clerk Jones reflected on Seddon’s appearance in his diary:

Secretary Seddon is gaunt and emaciated, with long straggling hair, mingled gray and black. He looks like a dead man galvanized into muscular animation. His eyes are sunken, and his features have the hue of a man who had been in his grave a full month. But he is an orator, and a man of fine education—but in bad health, being much afflicted with neuralgia. His administrative capacity will be taxed by the results.⁷⁷

Exiting Secretary Randolph wrote, “Mr. Seddon’s appointment is manifestly a declaration that the President intends to be his own Secretary.” Seddon’s “want of familiarity with military matters must make him dependent on the President.”⁷⁸ Seddon seems to have understood this and did not mind the arrangement.

Because he was sickly, Seddon did not have ambitions of military glory which likely contributed to his contentedness in his role.⁷⁹ He wrote to his brother-in-law, “I accepted my position from a sense of duty, and a desire since I was debarred by my frail constitution from the nobler field of exertion to render all in my power to our great

⁷⁵ Curry, 139.

⁷⁶ Kean, *Inside*, 13 December 1862 entry, 33.

⁷⁷ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 6 May 1863 entry, I:277.

⁷⁸ Quoted in O’Brien, 302.

⁷⁹ O’Brien, 304.

and holy Cause.”⁸⁰ Throughout the war, Davis and Seddon consulted frequently. Early in Seddon’s tenure as War Secretary, Clerk Jones noted that Davis sent something “for his *advice*. He wants to know Mr. Seddon’s views on the subject—a delicate and embarrassing predicament for the new Secretary, truly!”⁸¹ Later during his time in the War Office, Davis “had the Secretary of War closeted with him nearly all day.”⁸² He and the President sought to act in unanimity. Seddon did not push back against Davis when his decisions were overruled.⁸³ In a rare example of delegation, Davis wrote to North Carolina Governor Zebulon Vance, “I have referred to the Secretary of War your statements respecting particular officers alleged to have been concerned in the riot, and the matter will receive proper inquiry.”⁸⁴ No other Secretary of War, besides, perhaps, Benjamin garnered the trust and faith of Davis as did Seddon. Based on his lengthy tenure, it is clear that Davis and Seddon found a mutually beneficial working relationship.

Robert Kean thought that perhaps Seddon sacrificed departmental efficiency through his deferral to Davis. “There have accumulated on Mr. Seddon’s table since he came in some 1500 papers, *all* touching appointments to officers,” Kean wrote. “He does not look at them because on the terms on which impliedly he took office, he cannot act on them. They are for the President.”⁸⁵ Seddon supported the conscription measures

⁸⁰ Quoted in O’Brien, 304.

⁸¹ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 29 November 1862 entry, I:176.

⁸² Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 13 May 1864 entry, II:187.

⁸³ O’Brien, 304.

⁸⁴ Letter to North Carolina Governor Zebulon Vance, 15 September 1863, *PJD*, 9:388.

⁸⁵ Kean, *Inside*, 22 December 1862 entry, 35.

instituted by Secretary Randolph, and he was a strong nationalist. In 1864, he advocated nationalizing the young nation's railroad system, a shocking act of consolidation for a nation that espoused states' rights as part of its official ideology.⁸⁶ As a civilian, Seddon was not used to the speed of official government work. "The new Secretary staggers under his load," wrote Kean.⁸⁷ His administrative style was deliberate and plodding. Out of necessity, he delegated his work better than most Secretaries. His civilian perspective brought practical suggestions to problems, and he was frequently persuasive, though he was insecure of himself when making military decisions. If he was not an exceptional military strategist, Davis did not seem to mind. Their shared health issues, common devotion to Confederate independence, and Seddon's deference to Presidential authority all contributed to an amicable working relationship.⁸⁸

When he arrived in the War Office, Seddon understood the importance of the West to Confederate success. His influence possibly contributed to Davis's decision to travel West in December 1862, during Seddon's second month in the War Department.⁸⁹ With Vicksburg fallen to the Union and defeat at Gettysburg, tensions rose within the official "family" and the nation at large. Kean observed that "the Secretary has little or no

⁸⁶ O'Brien, 399. This consolidation, though, is not in conflict with the global understanding of nations as essentially centralizing entities (see Sheehan-Dean, *Reckoning with Rebellion*). Additionally, it should be noted that some historians have argued that the Confederacy—and Southerners in general—were more in favor of centralization than historians may have traditionally conceded. John Majewski, in *Modernizing a Slave Economy: The Economic Vision of the Confederate Nation* (UNC Press, 2009), argues that "many secessionists envisioned industrial expansion, economic independence, and government activism as essential features of the Confederacy" (3). These Southerners "believed that some form of collective action would strengthen the long-term prospects for slavery and the southern economy" (3-4).

⁸⁷ Kean, *Inside*, 13 December 1862 entry, 33

⁸⁸ O'Brien, 500-504.

⁸⁹ O'Brien, 314, 324.

influence with the president and is getting tired of it. He constantly speaks...of pressing things, which have not been adopted.”⁹⁰ Davis’s popularity dropped. Jones observed that the “*Examiner* had a famous attack on the President to-day,” 5 August 1863. The paper called Davis stubborn and claimed he disregarded the “public voice” through the appointments he made to the Cabinet and the military.⁹¹ Later, Jones confided to his diary: “[T]he President ought not to forget that he is not a ruler by Divine right to administer justice merely, but the servant of the people to aid in the achievement of their independence.” The opinions of the people, Jones wrote, must be respected, whether they were right or wrong. Left without choice, the people could “deprive him of honor, and select another leader.”⁹²

In the midst of defeat and low morale, Davis’s Cabinet was again reshuffling. Thomas Watts, Attorney General who replaced Thomas Bragg, had been elected Governor of Alabama. In the War Department, Robert Kean was not disappointed to see him leave: “The Attorney General ...while a most amiable gentleman, is hardly qualified to assist to sound opinions....He has had but little experience in dealing with the large questions of administration and public law....Nor should I take him to be much read in the law of nations.”⁹³ Kean believed that the wisest thing Davis could do “would be to call to that post the Assistant Secretary of War, Judge J. A. Campbell. But I fear that there is little chance of such a selection.”⁹⁴ Indeed, Davis seemed to become more

⁹⁰ Kean, *Inside*, 26 July 1863 entry, 84.

⁹¹ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 5 August 1863 entry, II:3.

⁹² Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 29 August 1863 entry, II:22.

⁹³ Kean, *Inside*, 13 August 1863 entry, 93.

⁹⁴ Kean, 93.

defensive as the criticism against him mounted. “The President seems determined to respect the opinions of no one,” Gorgas recorded in his diary only a few days before Kean’s reflections. Gorgas thought Davis “an indifferent judge of men, & is guided more by prejudice, than by sound, discriminating judgment.” The Chief of Ordnance was shocked to hear some of Davis’s complaints about military measures and his subordinates. Davis “sneers continually at Mr. Mallory and his navy,” Gorgas reported, and does not “conceal his opinions before that secretary.”⁹⁵

Davis regretted to lose Watts from his Cabinet, but he found “consolation in the fact that the event which withdraws your services from the Confederate Administration, only transfers you to another post of public duty to which you have been called by the deserved confidence” of the people of Alabama. Davis warmly thanked Watts for his “aid and co-operation in the trying period during which we have been associated.” He closed the letter asking “Divine Omnipotence” to “bless your efforts to serve your country in the important and difficult labor in which you are soon to enter.”⁹⁶

Davis, too, decided that it was time to depart from Richmond. Likely due to his immense unpopularity and the low morale after Gettysburg/Vicksburg, Davis again decided to travel West, primarily to General Braxton Bragg’s army “where it is understood dissensions have arisen among the chieftains.”⁹⁷ He left Richmond on 6 October and arrived in Atlanta on the eighth. He traveled to General Bragg’s

⁹⁵ Gorgas, *Journals*, 10 August 1863 entry, 78. This entry in Gorgas’s journal was defaced by the author and restored by editor Sarah Wiggins.

⁹⁶ Letter to Thomas Watts, 18 September 1863, *JDC*, 6:41.

⁹⁷ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 8 October 1863 entry, II:56.

headquarters to morning of 9 October where Governor Brown met the President and introduced him to a gathered crowd. He complimented the State of Georgia, especially the bravery of her soldiers. He also specifically complimented “the ladies of Georgia for their exertions [on] behalf of the wounded,” and he expressed his thankfulness for “the readiness manifested by the people to rally to the defence [*sic*] of our borders.”⁹⁸

Continuing on his journey, Davis gave a speech at Missionary Ridge. “He reminded them that obedience was the first duty of a soldier.”⁹⁹ His emphasis on a soldiers’ obedience was necessary to off-set the intense drop in morale as Western portions of the Confederacy fell to Union occupation and soldiers defected to protect home and family. In closing his speech, Davis “expressed his deep conviction of our eventual success under the blessing of Providence.”¹⁰⁰ Four days later, 14 October 1863, he addressed soldiers at the Headquarters of the Army of Tennessee. “Defenders of the heart of our territory,” Davis told the soldiers, “your movements have been the object of intensest anxiety. The hopes of our cause greatly depend upon your achieving whatever, under the blessing of Providence, human power can effect.” The Confederacy was a noble cause fighting to preserve “the political rights, the freedom, equality, and State sovereignty” which were “purchased by the blood of your revolutionary sires.” The Union was a “ruthless invader” that preyed on the South’s innocent women and threatened Confederates with “slavish submission to despotic usurpation.” Independence would be secured by “vigorous, united, [and] persistent effort.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ *JDC*, 6:58.

⁹⁹ Speech at Missionary Ridge, *PJD*, 10:21.

¹⁰⁰ *PJD*, 10:21.

¹⁰¹ Address to the Army of Tennessee, *JDC*, 6:61

When the address was published in Richmond papers, Clerk Jones thought it “eloquent.”¹⁰² His colleague, Robert Kean was not as impressed. He did not know why the President had gone West. “No fruits of his visit to the army at Chattanooga,” Kean pouted, “have yet transpired. I confess I do not look for any.” In Kean’s opinion, Davis “was not a man of quick and vigorous resolves.” Tennessee would ultimately fall to the enemy, Kean predicted. “The dismissal of the English consuls” by Benjamin and the Cabinet and the withdrawal of the Confederacy’s minister to England told Kean that foreign recognition and aid were not likely to be forthcoming.”¹⁰³

Though Kean and others harbored their doubts, Davis diligently attempted to raise the spirits of his compatriots. On his way back to Richmond, he gave several speeches. Speaking to a crowd in Wilmington, North Carolina on 5 November, Davis said the stakes of the Civil War were simple: The issues on the one hand were “freedom, independence, prosperity—on the other hand, subjugation, degradation and absolute ruin.” Everyone who could bear arms should do so, Davis nearly begged. Freedom and independence did not just require a full military, it also required an almost mythic unity: “If we were unanimous, if all did their duty manfully, bravely, disinterestedly, then our subjugation would be impossible.” Should self-interest be placed beneath the interest of the country, ruin would certainly result.¹⁰⁴

Two days prior, Davis had spoken in Charleston, South Carolina where he told gathered listeners that the work of liberty was beyond one, single man, the

¹⁰² Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 19 October 1863 entry, II:65.

¹⁰³ Kean, *Inside*, 18 October 1863 entry, 111-112.

¹⁰⁴ Speech at Wilmington, NC, *PJD*, 10:49.

implication being that he was that one man. “It is by united effort, by fraternal feeling, by harmonious cooperation, by casting away all personal consideration, and looking forward with an eye devoted singly to the salvation of our country, that our success is to be achieved.”¹⁰⁵ The Confederate “who would attempt to promote his own personal ends” and “who is not willing to take a musket and fight in the ranks” is not worthy of the “liberty for which we are fighting.”¹⁰⁶ In North Carolina, Davis continued his emphasis on unity and fraternity. “We are all engaged in the same cause. We must all make sacrifices.”¹⁰⁷ The setbacks the Confederacy was currently experiencing, Davis told Wilmingtonians, were only temporary; therefore, they must not “yield to despondency” or despair.¹⁰⁸

Davis returned to Richmond on Monday 9 November. Kean observed: “The Cabinet has been in session all day. Truly they have much to do.”¹⁰⁹ Davis’s tour West had been reported favorably by most of the press.¹¹⁰ The Cabinet, during this period was likely focused on getting Davis’s message to Congress ready. Davis completed a lengthy message on 7 December where he recognized the “[g]rave reverses” the country faced. Despite these, the “resolute spirit of the people soon rose superior to the temporary despondency naturally resulting from these reverses.”¹¹¹ The Confederacy had not been

¹⁰⁵ *JDC*, 6:78.

¹⁰⁶ *JDC*, 6:78.

¹⁰⁷ *PJD*, 10:51.

¹⁰⁸ *PJD*, 10:51.

¹⁰⁹ Kean, *Inside*, 9 November 1863 entry, 121.

¹¹⁰ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 7 November 1863 entry, II:80.

¹¹¹ Message to Congress, 7 December 1863, *JDC*, 6:94.

successful in driving the enemy from their soil, but they would nevertheless experience success. “Whatever obstinacy may be displayed by the enemy in his desperate sacrifices of money, life, and liberty in the hope of enslaving us, the experience of mankind has too conclusively shown the superior endurance of those who fight for home, liberty, and independence to permit any doubt of the result.”¹¹² Davis closed his message praising the people. Despite his recent trip West and the low morale he encountered there, Davis claimed: “The patriotism of the people has proved equal to every sacrifice demanded by their country’s need. We have been united as a people never were united under the circumstances before.”¹¹³

Eighteen sixty-three drew to a close much the way 1862 had: Davis had just returned from a trip West to combat low morale in the Western Confederacy, which was slowly being occupied by Union forces. The Northern “anaconda” was splicing the Confederacy in two, separating the West from East. Union forces under Generals Ulysses S. Grant and William T. Sherman turned their attention to the Eastern strongholds of Richmond and Atlanta, respectively. The President planned a public reception on 1 January 1864 to ring in the new year. J. B. Jones wrote that Davis’s enemies “allege that this is with a view to recovering popularity!”¹¹⁴

¹¹² *JDC*, 6:96.

¹¹³ *PJD*, 6:128.

¹¹⁴ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 31 December 1863 entry, II:108.

1864: The Cabinet and the Debate over Slavery

January 1864 began slowly. “No military event of any sort has happened lately,” Josiah Gorgas wrote on 5 January 1864. He reported again five days later that “[n]o military events have transpired,” and on 17 January there was “little news of a military character.”¹¹⁵ A growing sense of military desperation was forcing Confederates to consider extreme measure to ensure national independence. “There is much talk everywhere,” Jones wrote on the third day of 1864, “on the subject of a dictator, and many think a strong government is required to abate the evils we suffer.” If the President’s New Year’s Day reception had been intended to gain him popularity, it was not successful: “The President has temporarily lost some popularity.”¹¹⁶ At the end of January 1864, the Confederate Senate passed a new Conscription Act and thus “the President becomes almost absolute,” Jones wrote, “and the Confederacy” becomes “a military nation.”¹¹⁷

The Confederate government was becoming more consolidated and was demanding more of its citizens. As white men joined the military and died in the field of battle, they left behind homes and property. Their property in Black men and women especially posed a security risk. A year had passed since Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, and as the Union Army gained more military control over Confederate-claimed territory, enslaved persons took their freedom into their own hands. On 15 February 1864, Jones included the following excerpt from the *Dispatch*: “Another of

¹¹⁵ Gorgas, *Journals*, 5, 10, 17 January 1864 entries, 90-91.

¹¹⁶ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 3 January 1864 entry, II:110.

¹¹⁷ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 30 January 1864 entry, II:123.

President Davis's Negroes run away." Cornelius, a Black man "in the employ" of Davis, ran away. Cornelius was found a few hours later. On his person, authorities found food enough for a long journey "and a large sum of money he had stolen from his master." Imprisoned, Cornelius asked for water from his jailer. The jailer left the door opened as he gave Cornelius his water. Seeing his opportunity, Cornelius knocked over his captor. He was pursued by the watchman, Peter Everett, but Everett stumbled, "injuring himself severely."¹¹⁸

This was not the first time enslaved people had fought back against the Davis family personally. In July 1863, a slave led Federal troops to the home of Owen B. Cox. At the Cox home was stored books and papers from Brierfield Plantation. Robert E. Melvin was a local lawyer, teacher, minister, and clerk. He wrote Davis on 22 July that the "secret of its existence [the library], together with the place of its concealment was betrayed by the treachery of a negro, formerly the property of Mr. Cox, who ran away and went to the Federal army in May last."¹¹⁹ The escaped slave was Alfred, and he "began to point out place after place where property was concealed." It was soon discovered the papers belonged to Davis and boxes "were torn open and emptied of their contents; books and papers were strewed over the yard and scattered through the woods for miles." The plundering done by the Union troops was done "with a ruthlessness worthy of Attila himself."¹²⁰ All the while, Alfred "looked on the general destruction with perfect fiendish delight."¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Jones, *Clerk's Diary*, 15 February 1864 entry, II:134.

¹¹⁹ Letter from Robert E. Melvin, 22 July 1863, *PJD*, 9:300.

¹²⁰ *PJD*, 9:300.

¹²¹ *PJD*, 9:301.

The actions of Cornelius and Alfred were repeated across the South, especially in the wake of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. The southern homefront "became a place of instability," writes historian Aaron Sheehan-Dean, as Blacks "used the uncertainty of the war...to attack the institution of slavery."¹²² Stephanie McCurry writes, "In the Civil War South slaves moved tactically and by stages, men and women both, equal and active participants in the whole array of insurrectionary activities calculated to destroy the institution of slavery, their masters' power, and the prospects of the C.S.A. as a proslavery nation."¹²³

As Black southerners began to take their liberty into their own hands, Confederates were forced to begin considering drastic measures to maintain Blacks' loyalty or at least whites' control over the inferior race. In late 1863, Leonidas N. Walthall, an Alabaman artilleryman, wrote to Davis. "The main purpose of /this/ letter," Walthall wrote, "is to make a suggestion in relation to employing the Negroes in the army."¹²⁴ Southerners, "who have been raised with our Negroes and know how to command them," Walthall believed, could "make them more efficient than the Yankees."¹²⁵ Walthall suggested that a percentage of slaveowners' slave property be conscripted into military service or at least removed from Union-occupied territory so that they would not be able to assist the Union war effort. If Walthall's recommendation

¹²² Sheehan-Dean, *Calculus of Violence*, 175.

¹²³ McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*, 262.

¹²⁴ Leonidas N. Walthall to Jefferson Davis, 11 August 1863, *PJD*, 9:339.

¹²⁵ *PJD*, 9:339.

was not shocking enough, he closed his letter by offering to command and regiment of Black soldiers himself!¹²⁶

Within the Cabinet, James Seddon, Secretary of War, wrote to Davis to personally recommend slave impressment into the armed services of the Confederacy. He wrote in November 1863 that the “use of negroes may, likewise, swell the number of men in arms in the field by substituting teamsters, cooks, and other camp employees who are now largely supplied from the ranks.”¹²⁷ Davis could reasonably expect opposition to “enforcing the service of slaves,” but Seddon recommended that these objections could be overcome “on the principle of impressing them *as property*.”¹²⁸ For Seddon, slave impressment was a logical decision. As things stood, when the Union overran Confederate territory, slaves were flocking to the Union war machine. Allowing slaves to join the Confederate army, therefore, would give the Confederacy much needed labor and deprive the Union of the same labor. Following Walthall’s suggestion, Seddon claimed that it was “a clear obligation of the military authorities of the Confederacy to remove” *male* slaves “from any district exposed” to occupation by Union forces.¹²⁹ Once removed, these slaves “capable of arms, in such cases should, on the approach of the enemy, be at once removed by military authority to more secure districts, where they may be reclaimed by their masters,” or if they were not, “be employed on reasonable terms of hire by the

¹²⁶ *PJD*, 9:340.

¹²⁷ James Seddon to Jefferson Davis, 26 November 1863, in Hettle, *Confederate Homefront*, 142-143.

¹²⁸ Hettle, 143. *Emphasis added*.

¹²⁹ Hettle, 143.

Government.”¹³⁰ With such “mighty issues” weighing on Confederates and the success of her military, “it is apparent,” Seddon believed, “our people have only with united wills and a supreme effort to put forth their entire strength to assure the prize of peace and independence.”¹³¹ Seddon’s letter to the President signified a shift in Confederate thinking regarding victory and nationhood.¹³²

The aftermath of Vicksburg/Gettysburg challenged Southerners to debate what Confederate identity. “If the South chose to create a greater role for the slave in the Confederacy,” Philip Dillard writes, “they would be choosing independence rather than slavery as their primary war aim.” To use slaves in some capacity would be to recognize, in some sense, their identity as more than property. The Confederacy, then, would be a new nation, and not the conservation of an old nation for which Confederates claimed to fight. Should Southerners adopt the policies of Seddon, and later Davis, they “would be replacing the plantation South with new social, political, and economic foundations.”¹³³ Across the South, common Southerners took up the debate for slave impressment in newspapers. That they would do so, Dillard believes, “underscores the[ir] sincerity...as

¹³⁰ Hettle, 144.

¹³¹ Hettle, 144.

¹³² Historians have traditionally claimed that Confederates’ willingness to abandon slavery (at least partially) represents their national commitment. Stephanie McCurry, instead, argues: “Slaveholders, it seems, were more concerned with property than nation” (*Confederate Reckoning*, 285). True, Confederates remained committed to property, but they wanted their property within a separate nation, if possible. That Southerners could base their entire national existence on the “cornerstone” of slavery and yet attempt to abandon it in some way, seems to suggest to me that the more traditional view is still strongly persuasive. See Gary Gallagher, *The Confederate War* (Belknap, 1996) and Philip Dillard, *Jefferson Davis’s Final Campaign* (Mercer University Press, 2017).

¹³³ Philip D. Dillard, *Jefferson Davis’s Final Campaign: Confederate Nationalism and the Fight to Arm Slaves* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2017), 15.

they weighed southern independence against the preservation of slavery.”¹³⁴ Though Davis rarely publicly defended slave impressment and freedom, in private he and his Cabinet “conducted a well-designed political operation to ignite the slave-soldier debate.”¹³⁵

Most of the rest of the Cabinet seems to have been silent on the question of slave impressments. Mallory does not record his position on the issue in his detailed diary. In his memoirs, Postmaster General Reagan writes of a secret Cabinet discussion as early as 1862 in which the topic of slave impressment into the military was discussed. “I believed,” Reagan wrote after the war, “in the necessity of arming the negroes, and supported that belief” by referring to a map showing portions “of the Confederacy where the greater numbers of negroes were found, and by pointing out that” the Union Army was “making their campaigns largely through the negro districts and were enlisting the negroes in their service.”¹³⁶ Despite his efforts, no other Cabinet member agreed with him, and the subject was dropped “until the latter years...when it again became a serious question for discussion.”¹³⁷

Josiah Gorgas wrote in September 1864, “The time is coming now when it will be necessary to put our Slaves into the field & let them fight *for their freedom*, in other words give up on *the institution* to save the country, *or the whole* if necessary to win independence.”¹³⁸ That same month, Seddon again took up the issue with Davis. The

¹³⁴ Dillard, 45.

¹³⁵ Dillard, 121.

¹³⁶ Reagan, *Memoirs*, 148.

¹³⁷ Reagan, *Memoirs*, 148.

¹³⁸ Gorgas, *Journals*, 20 September 1864 entry, 133. *Emphasis in original*.

need to fill Lee's army protecting Richmond was becoming serious, and Seddon thought that the time had come "to make some compromise of conflicting necessities."¹³⁹ He suggested that some substitutions be made "of negroes as Cooks[,] Teamsters &c and the Generals have been called on to state the number of slaves, that may be so advantageously employed."¹⁴⁰ The downside of this proposal, as Seddon saw it, was that "a considerable number of Whites, especially as Teamsters, must be retained to direct and compel providence and fidelity with the negroes."¹⁴¹

The debate over Black Confederate soldiers "was a very serious one," wrote Reagan. To have allowed them to be soldiers "would have involved their liberation" with the implication that non-soldier slaves would also have to be freed. Additionally, to employ them *as persons* in the military deserving of freedom would be to sacrifice their "property value" and it was not entirely clear who would take-up the bill.¹⁴² In his 1864 Message to Congress, Davis made a formal, public recommendation that slaves be offered military service in exchange for their freedom. There was a distinction, Davis claimed, between "the use of slaves as soldiers in defense of their homes and the

¹³⁹ James Seddon to Jefferson Davis, *PJD*, 11:6.

¹⁴⁰ *PJD*, 11:6.

¹⁴¹ *PJD*, 11:6.

¹⁴² Reagan, *Memoirs*, 149. The slave impressment debate mirrors the debates of early Atlantic Protestants who debated the status of Blacks if/when they converted to Christianity. Katharine Gerbner has noted that Protestant missionaries and Protestant slaveowners clashed "between Protestant Supremacy, which excluded enslaved people from Christianity, and Christian Slavery, which sought to include slaves with the Protestant community" (*Christian Slavery: Conversion and Race in the Protestant Atlantic World* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018], 3). Confederates were beginning to debate whether there could exist a Christian Citizenship in which Blacks could potentially be freed, but still remain inferior to whites. They would continue the debate and find a solution after the war. See Elizabeth L. Jemison, *Christian Citizens: Reading the Bible in Black and White in the Postemancipation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020).

incitement of the same persons to insurrection against their masters. The one is justifiable, if necessary, the other is iniquitous and unworthy of a civilized people.”¹⁴³

Should the alternative “ever be presented of subjugation or of the employment of the slave as a soldier, there seems no reason to doubt what should then be our decision.”¹⁴⁴ What was unthinkable in 1861 was now contemplated in a Confederate President’s official message to Congress. Davis called for 40,000 slaves to be trained for military service. “It is certain that even this limited number, by their preparatory training in intermediate duties, would form a more valuable reserve force in case of urgency than three-fold their number suddenly called from field labor.”¹⁴⁵ At this late stage of the conflict, Davis sought “to create a new Confederate identity based in the experience of war rather than in the shades of the Old South.”¹⁴⁶ The Confederate public, it seems was not convinced. Jones wrote, “The press is mostly opposed to the President’s *project* of employing 40,000 slaves in the army, under promise of emancipation. Some indicate the belief that the President thinks the alternatives are subjugation or abolition, and is preparing the way for the latter.”¹⁴⁷

As had the previous two years, 1864 ended with a trip by President Davis to take his case directly to the Confederate people. Davis departed Richmond on 20 September 1864 to address Confederates after the fall of Atlanta. He spoke briefly in

¹⁴³ Message to Congress, 7 November 1864, *JDC*, 6:396.

¹⁴⁴ *JDC*, 6:396.

¹⁴⁵ *JDC*, 6:397.

¹⁴⁶ Dillard, *Jefferson Davis’s Final Campaign*, 274.

¹⁴⁷ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 9 November 1864 entry, II:297.

several North Carolina cities the following day. In Greensboro, he was glad to see the gathered crowd “looking so cheerful and hopeful.” He could only offer his “hope that we would be early blessed with peace and independence.” In Salisbury, he again praised the patriotism of those gathered and admitted that “a gloom hung over us” because of recent military setbacks. “Let every soldier now absent return at once to his command,” Davis told the crowd in near desperation.¹⁴⁸ His desperation increased as he spoke to Charlotte residents who gathered around his special rail car. Now “was the crisis of our fate and we must crush the enemy before he was reinforced by overwhelming numbers, and for that purpose every man who could be spared should rush to the field.”¹⁴⁹

Arriving in Macon, Georgia two days later, Davis again projected confidence: “What, though misfortune has befallen our arms...our cause is not lost.”¹⁵⁰ Davis firmly believed that Confederate soldiers would rally to turn away their enemy in a drama repeated frequently throughout history where the underdog dramatically vanquishes his superior opponent. “How can this be the most speedily effected?” Davis asked the Georgians listening to him. His simple answer: “By the absentees of Hood’s army returning to their posts.”¹⁵¹ At a time of immense difficulty, Davis continued to appeal to (or more accurately, conjure up) Confederate unity. “It does not become us to revert to disaster,” he intoned. “Let us with one arm and one effort endeavor to crush Sherman....The end must be the defeat of our enemy.”¹⁵² The only way the enemy would

¹⁴⁸ Speech at Greensboro and Salisbury, 21 September 1864, *PJD*, 11:58.

¹⁴⁹ Speech at Charlotte, 21 September 1864, *PJD*, 11:59.

¹⁵⁰ Speech at Macon, 23 September 1864, *PJD*, 11:61.

¹⁵¹ *PJD*, 11:61.

¹⁵² *PJD*, 11:61.

be defeated, however, was if those absent from the military would return: “If one-half the men now absent without leave will return to duty, we can defeat the enemy. With that hope I am going to the front. I may not realize this hope, but I know there are men there who have looked death in the face too often to despond now. Let no one despond. Let no one distrust.”¹⁵³ The bravery and fortitude of those men still in the Confederate armies steeled Davis against his enemies. As he continued South, he hoped that others would follow in their example.

In Montgomery, Alabama, Davis said, “The time for action is now at hand. There is but one duty for every Southern man. It is to go to the front. Those who are able for the field, should not hesitate a moment, and those who are not should seek some employment to aid and assist the rest, and to induce their able-bodied associates to seek their proper places in the army.”¹⁵⁴ As he had claimed upon initially being chosen President, Davis again spoke of “his repugnance to the office of chief, and his desire for the field.” Davis held himself up as the True Confederate, sacrificing all for the Cause. “He alluded to his long political career, and the animosities and ill-feeling which an active part in the affairs of the country had engendered.”¹⁵⁵ Amazingly, Davis saw a hopeful future for the Confederacy. “There be some men,” Davis said, “who, when they look at the sun, can only see a speck upon it. I am of a more sanguine temperament perhaps, but I have striven to behold our affairs with a cool and candid temperance of heart, and applying to them the most rigid test, am the most confident the longer I behold

¹⁵³ *PJD*, 11:63.

¹⁵⁴ Speech at Montgomery, 28-29 September 1864, *JDC*, 6:346.

¹⁵⁵ *JDC*, 6:346.

the progress of the war, and reflect upon what we have failed to do, we should marvel and thank God for the great achievements which have crowned our efforts.”¹⁵⁶

Confederate territory was falling into the hands of Union invaders almost daily. As early as 1862, members of Davis’s own Cabinet had despaired of the Confederacy’s future. Never Davis himself. He would always hold ultimate success in his mind’s eye.

Arriving in Columbia, South Carolina Davis acknowledged the revolutionary nature of the Confederate experiment. South Carolinians, Davis claimed, “understood the nature of the compact” that they entered into as a sovereign state. They did not fear that the national government would sometimes oppose their state government “for which...you had been so long struggling.” Instead, “[u]nderstanding the means of preserving your State Governments, you have not been frightened by the clamor of those who do not breathe the pure air of State sovereignty.” As a result, they had no difficulties organizing their state’s armed forces for the benefit of the whole.¹⁵⁷ The far-sightedness of South Carolina reminded Davis of his own vision and commitment to the Confederacy. “I should have some hopes,” Davis said, “that I will not be a corpse before our cause is secured.”¹⁵⁸ The implication, of course, was that he would willingly become a corpse should it guarantee the ultimate victory of the Confederacy.

Upon his return to Richmond, Davis gathered with his Cabinet, as was his custom, to review his message to be delivered to Congress. The message was finalized by

¹⁵⁶ *PJD*, 6:346-347.

¹⁵⁷ Speech at Columbia, 4 October 1864, *PJD*, 11:86. See John Majewski, *Modernizing a Slave Economy: The Economic Vision of the Confederate Nation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009) for the argument that Confederates were willing to accept some centralization.

¹⁵⁸ *PJD*, 11:87.

7 November. This was the message in which Davis proposed training 40,000 slaves for military service. This proposal marked an incredible shift in Davis's understanding of Confederate national identity. Throughout the war, in his speeches and writings, he had sought to balance the demands of war with a nationalism that opposed centralization. His Message to Congress in 1864 "signaled the end of this struggle. He was no longer willing to make overtures to any principle that would place slavery, states' rights, or individual property over the survival of the Confederacy."¹⁵⁹ Independence for independence's sake was the new national identity.

Early in the speech, Davis dramatically altered the definition of a *nation* as then understood by the nineteenth-century world. Aaron Sheehan-Dean has noted that land ownership and control constituted a primary method of national legitimacy and sovereignty.¹⁶⁰ Davis, however, turned the Confederacy into an *idea*, an abstract reality, more than a physical one. "We may in like manner judge that if the campaign against Richmond had resulted in success instead of failure...the Confederacy would have remained as erect and defiant as ever."¹⁶¹ Physical space no longer defined Confederate nationality. "There are no vital points of the preservation of which the continued existence of the Confederacy depends. There is no military success of the enemy which can accomplish its destruction. Not the fall of Richmond, nor Wilmington, nor Charleston, nor Savannah, nor Mobile, nor of all combined, can save the enemy from the constant and exhaustive drain of blood and treasure for which must continue until he shall

¹⁵⁹ Atchison, *War of Words*, 76.

¹⁶⁰ Sheehan-Dean, *Reckoning with Rebellion*, 45-46.

¹⁶¹ *JDC*, 6:386.

discover that no peace is attainable unless based on the recognition of our indefeasible rights.”¹⁶²

The Confederate nation, Stephanie McCurry notes, was “founded in defiance of the spirit of the age.”¹⁶³ The Confederacy would end in defiance to the age as well. Confederate nationalism was empty of any real idealism and now, Davis’s definition of a nation detached the Confederacy from the very things for which it originally had popular support: families, land, homes, slavery, and political self-determination. To maintain Davis’s 1864 conception of the Confederacy would require the abandonment of all Southerners had set out to preserve. Davis’s November 1864 message to Congress “was more about what was missing than what was present.” Davis was unable to “articulate a vision of the imagined community without slavery and states’ rights.”¹⁶⁴ And so, by the end of 1864, the Confederacy was dying. The efforts of President Davis and the Cabinet did not provide rhetorical or ideological “meat” to the “bones” of the nation erected in February 1861. Neither could women and the social life of the Cabinet provide extra-political support for the Confederacy

¹⁶² *JDC*, 6:386-387.

¹⁶³ McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*, 2.

¹⁶⁴ Atchison, *War of Words*, 88.

CHAPTER VII

Women, the Personal Cabinet, and Extra-Official Governance in the Confederacy

“Women’s history,” historian Stephanie McCurry has recently written, “*is* the history of war, of politics, and of statehood.”¹ The history of the Confederacy has recently been deepened by the inclusion of women’s perspectives and experiences. The advent of social history in the late 1980s caused historians to assess the ways women influenced the war’s outcome, especially on the homefront. The Civil War, Drew Gilpin Faust observes, was a time “for both reassertion and reconsideration of gender assumptions.”² Faust has claimed that reconsiderations of women’s role in society was not as progressive as might be imagined. Instead, the “staunch commitment” of southern women “to many of the fundamental values and assumptions of their prewar world ultimately enabled them to contain much of the change war seemed destined to inaugurate.”³

The work of women, however, was not confined to the home. New opportunities arose during the war that required women to embrace more public roles in their communities and to develop a more contractual relationship with their government. “It is not too much to say that the war forged a new understanding of the relationship between citizens, subjects, and the state, [and] that it forged a renegotiation of the social

¹ Stephanie McCurry, *Women’s War: Fighting and Surviving the American Civil War* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2019), 14.

² Drew Gilpin Faust, “Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of War,” *The Journal of American History* 76, no. 4 (1990): 1200.

³ Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 7.

contract for those who were not parties to the original contract.”⁴ Women’s history has expanded understandings of politics in the nineteenth century. If “we define politics broadly,” Elizabeth Varon writes, “to include not only electoral contests but a variety of battles for social authority, we bring into focus not only the stunning range of women’s public activism, but also their private agonies and triumphs.”⁵ Expanding nineteenth century politics to include women and the sphere they were relegated to by men opens a new dimension to examine the ways power is negotiated and wielded.

Typically, historians have emphasized the ways women have wielded expanded political power to undermine the Confederacy. Faust has argued that as the hardships of southern women increased, what was previously understood as sacred sacrifice came to be seen as oppression.⁶ By rejecting the narrative created by the Confederacy to maintain women’s loyalty to the Cause, “women undermined...the Confederate cause itself. And without the logistical and ideological support of the home front, the Southern military effort was doomed to fail.”⁷ There is no doubt that women on the homefront helped to bring about Confederate defeat, what is less understood is the ways women—especially elite women—affirmed and supported the Confederate government and nation.

⁴ Stephanie McCurry, “Women Numerous and Armed: Gender and the Politics of Subsistence in the Civil War South” in *War Within a War: Controversy and Conflict Over the American Civil War*, edited by Joan Waugh and Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 1.

⁵ Elizabeth R. Varon, “Southern Women and Politics in the Civil War Era,” in *Women and the American Civil War: North-South Counterpoints*, edited by Judith Giesberg and Randall Miller (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2018), 19.

⁶ Faust, “Altars of Sacrifice,” 1225.

⁷ Faust, “Altars of Sacrifice,” 1228.

Catherine Allgor, a pioneering women's historian, writes about the ways the social functions and private lives of elite women in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries formed an extra-official channel through which the young American nation was given legitimacy and social power. "I am detecting a new 'turn' toward studies of aristocracy in America and court studies in the wider literature," Allgor notes.⁸ These studies of aristocracy connected to the creation of the United States moves women out of the private sphere and instead sees them as "political actors in their own right, using social events and the 'private sphere' to establish the national capital and to build the extraofficial structures so sorely needed in the infant federal government."⁹ Early Americans understood that the personal is political, and they recognized that the private, social functions hosted by women were highly political events. Politicians "could not isolate issues of government completely from the realms of society and social life, from family life, material possessions, and issues of style."¹⁰

These social functions were divisive during the first political transfer of power after Thomas Jefferson and the Republicans took over from John Adams and the Federalists.¹¹ Eighteenth-century understandings of "society" referred to an arena that was separate from the political sphere, but not the same as the more intimate, private family. Jefferson knew that society was important to maintaining the civic harmony of

⁸ Catherine Allgor, "'Believing the Ladies Had Great Influence': Early National American Women's Patronage in Transatlantic Context," *American Political Thought* 4 (Winter 2015): 40.

⁹ Catherine Allgor, *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 1.

¹⁰ Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 17.

¹¹ These Republicans are not the same as the Republicans who elected Lincoln. Henceforth, "Republicans" refers to the early political party of Jefferson—sometimes called Democratic-Republicans—and the phrase "Lincoln Republicans" will be used to denote the party to which Lincoln belonged.

Republican society, but he did not approve of the levees of the Federalists where “promiscuous” women intermingled with men in overt political gatherings. Despite Jefferson’s personal dislike, there was no getting around the fact that social events served as “both private events and political arenas, often at the same time.”¹²

Women played a powerfully political role even beyond the social functions that they hosted. Their style and dress were important to setting the “tone” of the new nation. Style has been defined as “the different ways that people perceive, speak, and act politically,” and involves the ways political leaders “implement political power and resolve conflict.”¹³ The ways that citizens understand their government and their relationship with that government often stems from their “reading” of political style. Aristocracy was a powerful style that women and public politicians employed to project authority. The liberal ideals of the American Revolution “did not wipe out an earlier commitment to rank.” Instead, the cultural and social chaos following the American War of Independence “created a need for the stability and dignity that status symbols carried.”¹⁴ In British and colonial politics, women within elite circles had worked to connect members of the ruling class through family lineage and marriage. In the chaos of the postwar years, “European American bourgeois women eagerly assumed this task. Through their marriages, their self-consciously politicized social engagements, and their salons, they worked to solidify a nationalist elite.”¹⁵ These “gentlewomen refined and

¹² Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 23.

¹³ Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 53-54.

¹⁴ Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 57.

¹⁵ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *This Violent Empire: The Birth of an American National Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 297-298.

improved” the men that they were connected to (whether as mothers, sisters, or wives).¹⁶ They “proved” a gentleman’s mannerliness and class standing, and, by extension, they “confirmed the young Republic’s cultural equality” with the nations of the Old World.¹⁷

The social functions and personal styles of women served to validate the new nation on the world stage by infusing the United States with an air of legitimacy. Elite white women sought

...to legitimate the new nation both in the eyes of the world and in the eyes of its citizenry...; to create a New World, where republican virtue and simplicity not only would dictate the government but also would infuse and transform every aspect of American life; and to materialize the theoretical blueprint for government, making the Constitution concrete.¹⁸

To accomplish this, ruling women employed “court practices,” such as advocating for patronage in an effort to “garner legitimacy from the populace, amass personal power, and facilitate the business of politics.”¹⁹

Perhaps the most powerful of the elite women connected to political policymakers was (and debatably, still is) the First Lady. The academic study of the First Lady is a relatively recent development in historical inquiries.²⁰ In last years of the

¹⁶ Smith-Rosenberg, 359.

¹⁷ Smith-Rosenberg, 378.

¹⁸ Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 240.

¹⁹ Allgor, “Believing the Ladies,” 44. See also her earlier conclusion that “Washington [DC] women used old-fashioned court behaviors to create the new structures that would support and nurture a new kind of government: democracy” (Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 241).

²⁰ Robert P. Watson’s 2003 article in *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, “Toward the Study of the First Lady: The State of the Scholarship,” addresses the history and development of the field. Unfortunately, it seems to remain largely stagnant since his overview

1990s, several researchers called for a serious investigation of the influence and power of American First Ladies. “Though women have not served in elective or appointive office in significant numbers until the last few decades, they have long wielded political influence which we define as impact on public policy, executive decision-making, or the course of a political career.”²¹ Robert Watson has written that “White House wives have had considerable influence on their husband’s careers, decision, and policies.”²² The influence and power of nineteenth century political women is truly impressive.²³

The role of the First Lady has been largely ceremonial and social in nature. Martha Washington set the precedent for later presidential wives. She “quickly moved to host parties to assist her husband in achieving his political goals.” The Washingtons even used their own finances when the cost of these social events began to grow beyond what Congress was willing to allot. Their social efforts ensured that “the new nation did not seem impoverished to foreign diplomats and other senior statesmen.”²⁴ Robert Watson has labeled the First Ladies between 1817-1869 as “absent spouses: idled by illness and death.”²⁵ During these years, presidential wives were less influential and less politically

²¹ Karen O’Connor, Bernadette Nye, and Laura Van Assendelft, “Wives in the White House: The Political Influence of First Ladies,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (1996): 836.

²² Robert P. Watson, “The First Lady Reconsidered: Presidential Partner and Political Institution,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (1997): 805.

²³ Several women who eventually became United States First Ladies openly expressed political ambitions. Abraham Lincoln’s wife, Mary Todd Lincoln, dreamed of being First Lady from childhood, and Sarah Polk (James Polk’s wife) “accepted her husband’s proposal of marriage on the condition that he first run for the state legislature” (O’Connor, Bernadette, and Van Assendelft, “Wives in the White House,” 839). O’Connor, Bernadette, and Van Assendelft speculate that the low number of children that First Ladies had likely contributed to their political ambitions. First Ladies have had an average of 3.6 children which “may be an important factor in some first ladies’ political involvement and interest” (840).

²⁴ O’Connor, Bernadette, and Van Assendelft, “Wives in the White House,” 844.

²⁵ Watson, “The First Lady Reconsidered,” 810.

active. They also hosted fewer social events compared to their predecessors. These women suffered from mental health issues, physical ailments, grief, family death, and some even died before their husbands entered office. The presidency was also stagnant during these years. “The roles and responsibilities of the first lady during this period were not expanded and the institution was much less visible.”²⁶ If the First Lady is only recently garnering a scholarly interest, little of the research and gleaned insight has been applied to Varina Davis, First Lady of the Confederate States of America. Yet, as becomes clear, her role and the social roles of elite women, especially in Richmond served important nationalistic functions that have garnered little comment from historians.

Varina Banks Howell was born 7 May 1826. She was the second child, and first daughter, of Margaret and William Howell.²⁷ Her family had an illustrious history that was intimately intertwined with American nationalism. Her grandfather was a veteran of the American Revolution and was a good friend of George Washington.²⁸ After the war, he served four terms as governor of New Jersey as a member of the Federalist Party. During the Whiskey Rebellion, he led New Jersey troops against the rebels alongside President Washington. At the time, New Jersey was the only state that enfranchised women, although this was unintentional. This political legacy likely

²⁶ Watson, “The First Lady Reconsidered,” 811. Sarah Polk and Harriet Lane (James Buchanan’s niece who served as his hostess because he was not married) are the only exceptions identified by Watson (812).

²⁷ Carol Berkin, *Civil War Wives: The Lives & Times of Angelina Grimke Weld, Varina Howell Davis, & Julia Dent Grant* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009), 108.

²⁸ Berkin, 108.

contributed strongly to Varina's unorthodox views of gender norms.²⁹ William Howell, Varina's father, served as a second lieutenant during the War of 1812 and was commended for bravery in the Great Lakes campaign. Following the war, the Howells settled in Natchez, Mississippi. Despite having been born in the south, Varina was never at home there and was always proud of her grandfather and other northern kinfolk.³⁰ At the age of ten, Varina was sent to Philadelphia where she attended Madame Grelaud's school for two terms.³¹ Varina "was a tomboy and she liked to roam" outside. She "was also courageous" and was known for her sense of humor and "generous nature."³²

As a young girl, William Howell was forced to declare bankruptcy, which deeply troubled and haunted Varina for the rest of her life. Due to the bankruptcy, the Howells lacked money which made it all but impossible for Varina to live up to the social ideal of the "southern belle."³³ Unmarried women between the ages of fifteen and twenty-three "actively contributed to the honor and status of their respective families."³⁴ These "belles" had incredible power over their family's social status and standing. Their manners, social behaviors, and ultimately marriage increased the social "value" of the

²⁹ Joan E. Cashin, *First Lady of the Confederacy: Varina Davis's Civil War* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2006), 12. New Jersey gave women the right to vote in 1776, but it was repealed in 1807. It should be noted that giving the women the right to vote was an unintended consequence of legislation that allowed all *property owners* to vote. It was assumed property owners would be men, but some women (through various circumstances) outright owned property, and, therefore, could vote. (Thanks to Dr. Nancy Baker for bringing this clarification and context to my attention).

³⁰ Cashin, 13.

³¹ Berkin, *Civil War Wives*, 108.

³² Cashin, *First Lady of the Confederacy*, 19-20.

³³ Cashin, 22.

³⁴ Giselle Roberts, "The Confederate Belle: The Belle Ideal, Patriotic Womanhood, and Wartime Reality in Louisiana and Mississippi, 1861-1865," *The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 43, no. 2 (2002): 193.

family. With the Howell's financial ruin, they were not able to equip Varina with the necessary dress and education to make her worthy of belle hood. In a vicious cycle, she in turn, could not increase their honor and social standing as a result. Varina remembered her father's bankruptcy for her entire life. She was "haunted forever after by the spectacle of a man going broke and taking his family down with him."³⁵

At the age of seventeen, Varina met Jefferson Davis who hand delivered an invitation for the Howells to visit Brierfield Plantation. To Davis, Varina

...seemed a perfect combination of beauty and intelligence. She was more than physically attractive, although she was surely that. She was tall and graceful, and her thick dark hair framed her face well and accentuated her strikingly large, dark, and deeply set eyes. But, as Jefferson came to appreciate during their long, engaging conversation, she also had 'a fine mind.'³⁶

Their courtship was "intense and serious" that occurred during daily horseback rides that gave the couple some privacy from prying family.³⁷ Despite the intensity (or more likely *because* of it) their engagement came quick, but got off to a rocky start. Varina's mother likely disapproved of the match, and the age difference between Jefferson and Varina was greater than the average five or six years; they also soon discovered that they did not think alike on many issues.³⁸ Not least of these issues was the role of women in a marriage. Jefferson did not view marriage as a partnership, once writing, "Woman's part

³⁵ Cashin, *First Lady of the Confederacy*, 22.

³⁶ Berkin, *Civil War Wives*, 112.

³⁷ Berkin, 112.

³⁸ Cashin, *First Lady of the Confederacy*, 37.

in the social economy, as she had been made beautiful and gentle, should be to soothe...her true altar is the happy fireside.”³⁹

There were other social objections to the match because of the Howell’s lack of wealth. What they did not have in money or property, they made up for with their illustrious family lineage filled with two governors, Virginia elites, and war heroes. The Davises, on the other hand, possessed wealth, but not the illustrious family lineage. Carol Berkin has seen the Davis’s loyalty to the Democratic Party as “telling proof of their ordinary background.”⁴⁰ During their lengthy engagement, Varina waffled between pride in her fiancé because of his status as an emerging politician and fear and nervousness because of her change in marital status. Her nervousness even drove her to a nervous breakdown on one occasion.⁴¹ Their marriage ceremony on 26 February 1845 was quickly planned and executed; none of Jefferson’s family were there. For their honeymoon, the newlyweds traveled to Bayou Sara, Louisiana where one of Jefferson’s sisters lived. This was also where Jefferson’s first wife, Sarah Knox Taylor, had died. They visited Sarah’s grave and Varina watched as Jefferson put flowers on her grave.”⁴²

Sarah Taylor’s death radically changed Jefferson Davis and would haunt his marriage to Varina. His grief was so overbearing that he could not hold it inside. He “did not see how someone could hide unhappiness behind a smile,” but simultaneously, he was “too proud to wear his heart on his sleeve and let his anguish show.” He created a

³⁹ Quoted in Berkin, *Civil War Wives*, 105.

⁴⁰ Berkin, 113.

⁴¹ Berkin, 114.

⁴² Berkin, 115.

stoic and rigid character that he used to close his grief inside. The “walls he erected to contain his grief in the first months and years after Sarah’s death soon imprisoned other emotions as well.”⁴³ After her husband died, Varina Davis wrote to a friend whose daughter was getting married. Belle, the daughter, was planning to marry a widower. Varina warned Belle strongly.

I am not pleased with the widower prospect. It is as you know but a burnt out vessel offered to a fresh young creature like Belle after a successful love has been identified with one’s soul life, and removed by death. I gave the best & all of my life to a girdled tree, it was live oak, & was good for any purpose except for blossom & fruit, and I am not willing for Belle to be content with anything less than the whole of a man’s heart.⁴⁴

As in her public life, Varina’s private life was riddled with conflicting loyalties. The Varina-Jefferson marriage began in difficulty. Only two years into their marriage, it was obvious that “neither Jeff nor his family considered Varina an ideal wife. Jeff made it abundantly clear that he disapproved of her willfulness, her stubbornness, and what he considered her unfeminine insistence on independent judgment.”⁴⁵ Varina found that being a slaveowner’s wife was difficult. “Having never lived on a plantation before,” she “was naive about her duties as the plantation mistress. She expressed surprise that the

⁴³ William C. Davis, *Jefferson Davis*, 85.

⁴⁴ Berkin, *Civil War Wives*, 113.

⁴⁵ Berkin, 129.

slaves required so much of her time.”⁴⁶ Though surprised by the work involved as a slaveowner’s wife, Varina never seemed to question the morality of slavery.⁴⁷

Jefferson Davis believed that wives had “duties” and not “rights.”⁴⁸ His views were typical of men of the era, and women internalized these sentiments. During the Civil War, as the Confederacy fought for the “rights” of white men, southern women would more frequently use the language of “duty” to get what they needed and wanted from the wartime government. Stephanie McCurry writes, “[W]omen so rarely deployed the identity of citizens or the language of rights.”⁴⁹ Instead, in large part due to the paternalistic ethos that gave women duties (rather than rights), the sacrifices and suffering of Confederate women were seen as worthy of attention and intervention by Confederate leaders.⁵⁰ “Women came to regard their sacrifice and subordination as no longer inevitable but contingent on men’s fulfillment of certain expectations.”⁵¹ Just as men before the war could not understand women to have rights, women during the war could not understand why men would not uphold their duty to women, family, and home.

Jefferson Davis may not have viewed Varina as his equal, but he would soon discover that she was a valuable political asset. As a senator’s wife, Varina seems to have been a “consensus builder” or at least more politically moderate than Jefferson who

⁴⁶ Cashin, *First Lady of the Confederacy*, 38.

⁴⁷ Berkin, *Civil War Wives*, 137.

⁴⁸ Cashin, *First Lady of the Confederacy*, 50.

⁴⁹ McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*, 215.

⁵⁰ Faust, “Altars of Sacrifice,” 1222.

⁵¹ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 242.

“never liked what he called ‘political’ women, that is, women who brought up political topics and tried to discuss them with him in a straightforward manner.”⁵² Like Thomas Jefferson before him, Senator Davis did not want women obviously about the business of politics. Still, men were not totally oblivious to the need for women in the political process. Instead, they assigned them “a distinct role to play.” Women were an “influencing and mobilizing” agent on “male voters” and gave “an aura of moral sanctity to political causes.”⁵³ They were distinctly partisan, with men directed women to embrace their particular region’s goals and ambitions, but, at the same time, they were given the conflicting task to be mediators amongst the warring political sections.⁵⁴

As a senator in Washington, DC, Jefferson entered a highly social atmosphere where people lived and worked together in an intimate community. The Capitol building was incredibly public, so many politicians instead made policy and political deals “away from the Capitol, in a more private setting. As a result, these men blurred the line between Washington’s social and political spaces, creating what one might call the unofficial political arena.”⁵⁵ Jefferson, perhaps because of the emotional walls that he built to control his grief was never comfortable in these social circumstances to help the political machine move.⁵⁶ As senator, Davis never used the political power of his wife to

⁵² Cashin, *First Lady of the Confederacy*, 57.

⁵³ Varon, “Southern Women and Politics,” 7.

⁵⁴ Varon, “Southern Women and Politics,” 7.

⁵⁵ Rachel A. Sheldon, *Washington Brotherhood: Politics, Social Life, and the Coming of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 2.

⁵⁶ Berkin, *Civil War Wives*, 123. Berkin claims that Jefferson could have learned a lesson from the Democracy’s founder, Thomas Jefferson, who “was a master solidifying loyalties, winning support for legislation, and mounting campaigns against his political enemies over intimate private dinners.” Ironically, this governing style of Thomas Jefferson was understood to be highly feminine. Catherine Allgor observes: “Like the female politicians of the home, Jefferson ruled in subtle, domestic, feminine ways, combining a

her full potential. Instead, she served primarily as his secretary. Not until Jefferson Davis became Franklin Pierce's Secretary of War did Varina come into her own as a female political actor. She had demanding social obligations as a cabinet officer's wife and "was expected to entertain frequently and on a large scale." She was remembered as a "renowned hostess."⁵⁷ These social functions were "overwhelming cross-sectional, and sometimes even cross-party."⁵⁸ The result was that "Washington politicians had a strong personal connection both to the federal government itself and to many of their colleagues from the other section."⁵⁹ These social gatherings created a strong bond amongst the governing class and helped to solidify the standing and esteem of the nation.

Varina influenced her husband in another way: political patronage. Simply defined, patronage is the shoring of political support by rewarding supporters with power, money, land, or employment.⁶⁰ Catherine Allgor has written extensively about the unique role women played in Washington politics through patronage.

[P]atronage was integral to the development of the federal government, forming the connections among governmental officials and between the government and its citizens needed by all ruling systems. However, in the United States, patronage manifested itself in an anomalous way: as the province of well-connected women.

The women of political families were the chief patronage players in the new

spare and nonhierarchical ruling structure with a modern deployment of political power, one dependent on the appearance of consensus and eschewing outward shows of force" (Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 29).

⁵⁷ Cashin, *First Lady of the Confederacy*, 64-66.

⁵⁸ Sheldon, *Washington Brotherhood*, 86.

⁵⁹ Sheldon, 4.

⁶⁰ Allgor, "Believing the Ladies," 41.

nation, since political men, hampered by a commitment to republican purity, pretended that the personal and the political could not intersect.⁶¹

Those appealing for patronage used feminine language techniques, appealing to recently-constructed “female” spheres of family, home, and happiness.⁶² As the wife of the United States Secretary of War, Varina “tried to aid relatives and friends by lobbying her husband or government officials for favors, such as helping a Howell kinsman gain an appointment to the U.S. Military Academy.”⁶³ The practice of patronage functioned to prop up and strengthen government authority.⁶⁴ Despite her experiences as a senator’s wife and cabinet officer’s wife, Varina would find herself ill prepared to serve as First Lady of the new Confederate nation.

At the start of the provisional Confederate government, Mary Boykin Chesnut had high hopes and expectations for the new Confederacy and its leaders. “This Southern Confederacy must be supported now,” she wrote on 18 February 1861, “by calm determination and cool brains. We have risked all, and we must play our best, for the stake is life or death.”⁶⁵ By the end of the month, however, it was clear that her expectations may have been too high. Faith in Jefferson Davis was at an all-time high, and there was a general consensus that defeat of the Northern foe should be Confederates’ priority. On 27 February 1861, Mary Chesnut recorded that her uncle,

⁶¹ Allgor, “Believing the Ladies,” 41.

⁶² Allgor, “Believing the Ladies,” 42.

⁶³ Cashin, *First Lady of the Confederacy*, 67.

⁶⁴ Allgor, “Believing the Ladies,” 45.

⁶⁵ Mary Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, edited by C. Vann Woodward (New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1995), 3.

Thomas Jefferson Withers, whom she affectionately called “The Judge,” was in favor of a military “despotism” under President Davis’s leadership. “All right,” Mary wrote in her diary, “but every man objects to any despot but himself.”⁶⁶

Indeed, squabbles among Confederate leaders were growing more intense. “What a pity to bring the spites of the old Union into this new one,” Chesnut wrote. When crafting their Constitution, George Rable notes, the new Confederates in Montgomery “deliberately sought to purge their politics of the degrading and dangerous influences of partisanship.”⁶⁷ To create a pure republic represented Confederates’ paradoxical attempt at a conservative counter-revolution against the old political order of the Union. This counter-revolution necessitated required an “organic sense of community” and “public faith in Confederate leadership” that would create national unity and purpose.⁶⁸ Already at this early stage of the nation’s life, Mary—despite her faith in President Davis—was concerned about the prospects of the nation based on the rest of the country’s leadership: “It seems to me already men are willing to risk an injury to our cause if they may in so doing hurt Jeff Davis.”⁶⁹

The last day of February 1861, Stephen Mallory, then nominee for Secretary of the Navy, called on Mary Chesnut. She noted that he was well-liked by Montgomery society and that he was “pleasant and witty.” His joviality sparked some concern, though. Mr. Mallory, Chesnut wrote, seemed “to have so high an opinion of me,” but she had

⁶⁶ Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, 10.

⁶⁷ George C. Rable, *The Confederate Republic: A Revolution Against Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 4.

⁶⁸ Rable, *The Confederate Republic*, 4.

⁶⁹ Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, 28.

been told that Mallory was “so notoriously dissolute that a woman was compromised to be much seen with him.”⁷⁰ As she was staying away from Mallory, Mary went to visit her good friend, Varina Davis. Their friendship had begun when their husbands were both in the United States Senate. On 1 March 1861, Mary called on Varina and they had a “chat” of two hours. Mary and Varina avoided Confederate politics and their new positions within the Confederacy, but Varina did update Mary on all the Washington, DC drama.⁷¹ In the Provisional Congress, The Judge was being pressured to support Mallory as Navy Secretary. Finally, Mary understood Mallory’s “frequent presence with us—a desire to propitiate the Judge.” This likely explained Mallory’s flirtation with her, Mary thought, but since she had been informed of his character she would be on guard.⁷²

On 5 March, Mary Chesnut and other Confederate dignitaries stood out on a balcony to see the flag of the new nation raised. As the band began to play, Stephen Mallory spoke with Mary. They were interrupted by Mary’s husband, James Chesnut who was an aide to President Davis. He informed Mallory that the Floridian had been confirmed as Secretary of Navy. “Mr. Mallory did not interrupt what he was saying to me but continued in the same placid voice.” Mary was shocked and appalled at his incivility.

She asked him: “Had you heard that important fact before?” Mallory replied that he had not.

“And yet,” Mary responded, “you took no notice of Mr. C[hесnut]’s making himself the bearer of good news to you?”

⁷⁰ Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, 12.

⁷¹ Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, 13.

⁷² Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, 14.

Perhaps feeling an awkward tension, James interjected: Mr. Mallory's acknowledgement of my bearing good news "was a thing to see, not hear. The secretary of the navy smiled and thanked me with a profound bow." Mary was not impressed and continued her distrust of Mallory. After the gathering on the balcony had dispersed, James informed his wife that Florida had gone against its own native son in the confirmation.⁷³

As Cabinet officers settled in Montgomery, Alabama, the Confederacy's capital, their social functions recreated the extra official political scaffolding that had characterized the Early Republic. In early May, Mary attended a reception held by Varina Davis. At the gathering, "dismal news" was shared; armed military conflict began to seem more likely. That same day, there was a reception held by Julia Toombs, wife of Secretary of State Robert Toombs. Alexander Stephens, Confederate Vice President, approached Mary at this gathering and the two of them "had it out on the subject of this Confederacy." This was not an unusual occurrence, as Mary noted she and Stephens had "had it out" twice before. During their encounter at Mrs. Toombs's, Stephens was "not cheerful" in his outlook toward the Confederacy. Mary called him "halfhearted" and "accused him of looking back" at what had been left behind in the union with the North. Mary and Stephens were interrupted several times, but they continued their discussion. She acknowledged that Stephens was "deeply interesting, and he gave me some new ideas as to our dangerous situation." Stephens's speech was filled with "[f]ears for the future, and not exultation at our success."⁷⁴ That evening, Mary dined with the President

⁷³ Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 15-16.

⁷⁴ Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, 56.

and Varina. “She was as witty as he is wise,” Mary noted. Jefferson Davis “was very agreeable.” During the dinner, they spoke only of their time in Washington, DC and nothing of the Confederacy’s present troubles.⁷⁵

Mary recorded an experience at another reception where she was confronted by Mr. Mallory. The Secretary complained of Mary’s uncle, The Judge, who had approached Mallory about a political issue at the gathering. Mallory told Mary that he thought it “ill-bred, to say the least, to come to one of Mr. Davis’s cabinet and abuse him.” Mary dismissed Mallory’s concern—“as if I am responsible for what he [the Judge] says.” Eliza Walker, Secretary of War Leroy Pope Walker’s wife, approached Mary and told her that she had mistaken James Morrow, a Charleston-native physician, as Mary’s husband. To mistake James Chesnut for Morrow, Mary told Eliza “was an insult to the Palmetto flag....Do I look like a woman to marry *old* Morrow?” she asked incredulously.⁷⁶

Receptions, politics by another name, filled Mary Chesnut’s time in Montgomery. Shortly before the move to Richmond, Varina Davis told her that “playing Mrs. President of this small Confederacy” was “slow work” after leaving such a vibrant social life in Washington, filled with her friends.⁷⁷ After Virginia’s secession in mid-April 1861, the Confederate government officially accepted Richmond’s offer to move the capital to Virginia on 20 May 1861. That day, Mary had lunch with Mrs. Davis. “When she is in the mood,” Mary noted, “I do not know so pleasant a person. She is

⁷⁵ Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, 56.

⁷⁶ Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, 56-57. *Emphasis in original.*

⁷⁷ Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, 60.

awfully clever—always.” The two women spoke of the upcoming move to Richmond, and Mary reported that her husband was opposed because of the close proximity it would put them to the Union capital. The uncomfortable accommodations of Montgomery’s hotels and the extreme heat of the city, Mary thought, contributed to the decision to move the capital more than any other. “Our statesmen love their ease,” she wrote.⁷⁸

Arriving in Richmond, Varina discovered she would have difficulty integrating into the city’s social scene. She was “impressed by a certain offishness in” the women of Richmond’s “manner toward strangers; they seemed to feel an inundation of people of perhaps doubtful standards, and at best, [had] different methods, had power over their city, and they reserved their judgement and confidence while they proffered a large hospitality.”⁷⁹ Mary Chesnut recalled a particular woman who “slandered Mrs. Davis’s republican court...by saying they, well, were not young, that they wore gaudy colors and dressed badly.”⁸⁰ The new first lady noted that the city “was one great camp—men hurried to and fro with and without uniforms and arms, with that fixed look upon their faces they acquire when confronted with danger.”⁸¹

With the arrival of the Confederate government in Richmond, the city hosted *three* governments—local, state, and national. The city’s experience, one recent historian

⁷⁸ Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, 62.

⁷⁹ Mary A. DeCredico, *Confederate Citadel: Richmond and Its People at War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2020), 27.

⁸⁰ Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, 95. Mary “took inventory” of the woman, and noticed a bit of hypocrisy: “She is darkly, deeply, beautifully freckled. She wears a wig which is kept in place by a tiara of mock jewels. She has the fattest of arms and wears black bead bracelets.”

⁸¹ Quoted in DeCredico, *Confederate Citadel*, 26.

has claimed, is unparalleled in American history.⁸² The arrival of the national government brought about an increase in employees hired by the expanding bureaucracy. Further, new government military contracts spurred existing industries to incredible growth. Soon, Richmond was flooded with a civilian population that it could hardly accommodate.⁸³ Many visitors to the city began to notice and comment on the changing socio-economic status of the city's inhabitants. "That locals and visitors would comment on such changes to the social order is significant," another city historian has written. "They witnessed the mobilization effort transforming the social order and its conventions. As the war progressed, these changes became even more prominent and reflected the decay of what had been a bastion of First Families of Virginia."⁸⁴ These First Families were quick to look down on the newly arrived First Lady. Coming from the western reaches of the South, she was already dismissed as less than refined, similar to the reception that Mary Todd Lincoln received in the Union. The "city had an intricate network of families related by blood and marriage," Varina's biographer explains. "In Richmond, family status mattered more than education, wit, accomplishment, or wealth, and the clannish 'three hundred' gave a wary welcome to the new people flooding into the city."⁸⁵ Even had she had the correct family status, Varina "was neither rich enough nor feminine enough" to meet the standards of Richmond's women.⁸⁶

⁸² Stephen V. Ash, *Rebel Richmond: Life and Death in the Confederate Capital* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 3.

⁸³ Ash, 13.

⁸⁴ DeCredico, *Confederate Citadel*, 28.

⁸⁵ Cashin, *First Lady of the Confederacy*, 111.

⁸⁶ Berkin, *Civil War Wives*, 143.

Secretary Mallory had no trouble finding social functions in Richmond. A gossipy and flirtatious man, he thrived on the drama that surrounded social levees and meals. At a dinner on Wednesday 12 June 1861, Mallory was at a table with President Davis, Varina, and the Cabinet. Mr. and Mrs. [Charlotte] Wigfall joined the table. Mallory wrote: “Mrs. Wigfall evidently has determined to *snub* Mrs. Davis....[Mrs. Wigfall’s] manner is a perpetual rebuke, & her air [is] one of toleration & suffrance [*sic*].” Mrs. Davis would not take Charlotte’s rudeness quietly. Mallory noted, perhaps giddily, “there was a perpetual cross fire of sharpshooting in an amicable way. Cutting things were said blandly; and quiet smiles or decided laughter convey & cover rifle balls.”⁸⁷ The squabble between the two women continued two days later. “Mrs. Wigfall evidently thinks that Mrs. Davis regrets her presence at [the] table,” Mallory reported on 14 June. Charlotte “affects great indifference if not contempt from all Mrs. Davis says.”⁸⁸ The social feud lasted until 23 June when Mallory reported that the two women had come to a truce.⁸⁹

For all his time at social gatherings flirting and gossiping with other women, Mallory was deeply devoted to his wife, Angela. Mary Chesnut remembered “one can see she has been a beauty. Now she is a grandmother pure and simple.” Stephen was “very proud” of his wife, and Mary was impressed that he was able to give the Spanish pronunciation of Angela’s name perfectly.⁹⁰ Mallory’s correspondence with his wife

⁸⁷ Stephen Mallory, *Diary*, 12 June 1861 entry, I:3.

⁸⁸ Mallory, *Diary*, I:3-4.

⁸⁹ Mallory, *Diary*, I:6.

⁹⁰ Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, 68.

when they were apart greatly affected him and his work. “Her letters,” he confided in his diary, “bring me joy or sorrow always. She write[s] & feels very unequally, & makes me so wretched by her murmurs & complaints against me that I am unfit for business long after reading one of her bitter epistles.” Still, he tried not to complain too much: “She is [a] noble, generous, truthful & lovable woman, & God knows [she] has my whole heart & soul.”⁹¹

Mallory received a letter from his wife on 25 July 1861 that “distressed me greatly, & has rendered me wretched.” The stress her letters caused him were making it more and more difficult for him to control his feelings. “When I open them I do it with misgiving & fear that I am to be reproached; and my mental strength & clearness is impaired by the sadness they cause me.”⁹² James M. McPherson has noted that the nineteenth century was a sentimental, romantic age “when strong men were not afraid to cry.” To modern readers, what may seem like dramatic, un-genuine platitudes were, to nineteenth century men, “pathos and convictions.”⁹³ Modern historians must take seriously the strong emotions of men of this period and guard against the temptation to dismiss as insincere the expression of intense feeling. Despite his trepidation toward opening his wife’s letters, Mallory “love[d] her to adoration, & always shall, in spite of her inconsiderate course toward me.” If his wife kept reproaching him so strongly, however, he would no longer be able to open her mail at all.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Mallory, *Diary*, 21 June 1861 entry, I:6.

⁹² Mallory, *Diary*, 26 July 1861 entry, I:9-10.

⁹³ James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 86. Accessed 27 February 2021 at <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/shsu/reader.action?docID=472325#>.

⁹⁴ Mallory, *Diary*, 26 July 1861 entry, I:9-10.

Attorney General Thomas Bragg also recorded correspondence with his wife and the affects her letters had on him and his work. Isabelle Bragg wrote her husband frequently requesting his presence at home with her and the children. Bragg knew that he “ought” to go be with her and the family, but sometimes he was unable to go. After receiving one such letter in December 1861, Bragg wrote that he did “not like to ask for leave, as there would be no majority of the Cabinet present in case of a meeting” because Secretary Mallory was ill and R.M.T. Hunter was mourning the death of his son.⁹⁵ Early in 1862, he was preparing to go to Petersburg, Virginia (where his family was) when President Davis called for him a little before two o’clock. He was in a Cabinet meeting until after dark. As if he was personally apologizing to his wife, he wrote in his diary: “Sorry that I could not go to Petersburg.”⁹⁶ Isabella also shared the defeatism of her husband. She wrote him in early 1862 and had “concluded that all was lost.” She “fears that I will be taken and carried away from her,” Bragg wrote in his diary. She begged to come visit Bragg in Richmond, but he feared her health and safety.⁹⁷

The remembrances of Mallory and Bragg are evidence of the differing ways that the wives of Confederate Cabinet officers influenced their husbands and indirectly affected their work. These men sacrificed family relations out of a sense of honor and duty to a section—now nation—that they valued above their own health and happiness. The correspondence they shared with their wives influenced them emotionally, and prevented them from being fully devoted to their work. Their devotion to their family

⁹⁵ Bragg, *Diary*, Friday 6 December 1861 entry, I:77.

⁹⁶ Bragg, *Diary*, Saturday 15 February 1862, I:147-148.

⁹⁷ Bragg, *Diary*, 20 February 1862, I:156.

was genuine, and these men desired to be physically present with their wives and families and to provide for them and protect them from harm that they constantly feared. The personal lives of these men evidence the fragmented and conflicting loyalties that all Confederates balanced.

Southerners were multilayered in their allegiances. Paul Quigley has noted that nationalism was not a box in which particular Southerners—especially cabinet officers—could be placed inside or outside. Instead, differing contexts altered the nature of Southerners’ nationalism.⁹⁸ Additionally, local allegiances frequently determined Southerners’ loyalty to their new nation.⁹⁹ The success or failure of Confederate nationalism depended on the ability of the CSA “to convince southerners that it embodied and protected their values, including home, hearth, community, white supremacy, and slavery.”¹⁰⁰ Cabinet officers were no different. The safety and well-being of their families were a major factor in their continued loyalty. With the walls closing in on his new nation in May 1862, Thomas Bragg despaired of the possibility of being separated from his family. “It is hard to abandon my family, though they would be among friends,” he wrote on 4 May.¹⁰¹ Eleven days later, he was torn between fleeing or staying with his family. To “leave my wife and little ones is dreadful—what is to become of them[?]

—I have made every provision I can for their comfort, have purchased several months’ supply of

⁹⁸ Paul Quigley, *Shifting Grounds: Nationalism and the American South, 1848-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 5.

⁹⁹ Orville Vernon Burton & Ian Binnington, ““And Bid Him Bear a Patriot’s Part’: National and Local Perspectives on Confederate Nationalism,” in *Storytelling, History, and the Postmodern South*, edited by Jason Phillips (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 128.

¹⁰⁰ Burton & Binnington, “And Bid Him Bear a Patriot’s Part,” 129.

¹⁰¹ Bragg, *Diary*, 4 May 1862 entry, I:226.

provisions and have other means provided.”¹⁰² In such an early context, Bragg’s nationalism was subordinated to thoughts and concerns surrounding the safety of his family.

Once in Richmond, Jefferson and Varina Davis tried to maneuver their way into Confederate society by hosting “levees and receptions, as had been” their custom when they were in Washington. “They met with mixed success. Although they continued this tradition throughout the war and although these gatherings were well attended, Richmond society never really accepted the Davises.”¹⁰³ A major part of the problem was that Varina did not enjoy her role as First Lady. “She was a conscript, not a volunteer, and her ambivalence was clear from the beginning.”¹⁰⁴ Varina wrote to her mom “that she found the constant attention exhausting.”¹⁰⁵ The social calendar in Richmond was drastically different than that of Washington. In DC, the social calendar revolved around the Congressional sessions. In Richmond, however, the Confederate First Lady was expected to host social gatherings year-round.¹⁰⁶

Not only was the social responsibility exhausting, but it was also obvious that Varina was not sold-out to the Confederate Cause. Early writings about the role of Confederate women in the new nation praised her sacrificial nature. Women were praised for the “spiritual role” as defenders of the “moral order” which was becoming

¹⁰² Bragg, *Diary*, Thursday 15 May 1862 entry, I:232-233.

¹⁰³ DeCredico, *Confederate Citadel*, 27.

¹⁰⁴ Cashin, *First Lady of the Confederacy*, 104.

¹⁰⁵ Cashin, 108.

¹⁰⁶ Cashin, 110.

increasingly disrupted by war and hardships.¹⁰⁷ Varina, however, struggled to live up to this new ideal.¹⁰⁸ She confessed to her mother “doubts about the South’s ability to wage war. The region was not ready to fight, she said, and the North’s advantage in population and manufacturing power was immense.”¹⁰⁹ Criticism of Varina also encompassed the racial fears of the city’s—and nation’s—residents. Only half of Richmond’s residents before the war were native-born whites, and the rest of the population was surprisingly diverse.¹¹⁰ This diversity, however, resulted in “tight-knit social, ethnic, and racial communities, which reinforced camaraderie, if not solidarity.”¹¹¹ Varina’s dark, olive skin raised questions about her racial purity and fitness as First Lady. Whites “commented on” Varina’s skin and hair color “more during the war than at any other time in her life.”¹¹²

That Varina was from Mississippi, one of the more Western states in the new Confederacy, also earned her criticism as she tried to endear herself to the clannish society of Richmond’s elite women. Even Secretary Mallory criticized Varina, claiming she lacked “refinement & judgement.” Further, her humor sometimes fell flat at Richmond social gatherings and made her appear “undignified and unalienable.” Mallory believed she should keep her humor “for intimates alone.”¹¹³ Nearly a month after these

¹⁰⁷ Faust, “Altars of Sacrifice,” 1204.

¹⁰⁸ Cashin, *First Lady of the Confederacy*, 111.

¹⁰⁹ Cashin, 108.

¹¹⁰ Ash, *Rebel Richmond*, 8; DeCredico, *Confederate Citadel*, 14-15.

¹¹¹ DeCredico, *Confederate Citadel*, 14-15.

¹¹² Cashin, *First Lady of the Confederacy*, 112.

¹¹³ Mallory, *Diary*, 23 June 1861 entry, I:6.

observations, Mallory was even more harsh in his assessment of the First Lady: “Mrs. Davis is ill-bred, & underbred.”¹¹⁴ Josiah Gorgas, Confederate Chief of the Ordnance Bureau echoed Mallory’s observations, writing that Varina “lacks refinement or manner, perhaps.” However, Gorgas was also favorably impressed whenever he met with the First Lady.¹¹⁵

Varina’s efforts at creating a positive social atmosphere were also hampered by criticisms of her husband from wives of Cabinet officers. Mary Chesnut found herself at Mrs. Toombs’s who was “raging. She is so anti-Davis,” Mary wrote, “she will not even admit that the president is ill.” President Davis was sick toward the end of August 1861, but Julia Toombs called his illness “[a]ll humbug.” Mary asked incredulously: “But what good could pretending to be ill do him?” Julia did not give her a good answer. Instead, she moved on to a different topic. “That reception, now—was not *that* a humbug? Such a failure. Mrs. Reagan could have done better than that,” Julia spewed. Edwina Reagan was the second wife of John Henninger Reagan, Postmaster General in Davis’s Cabinet. Coming from Texas, the Western frontier of the Confederacy, the Reagans experienced a lot of the social isolation and dismissiveness that Varina received. Julia continued her rant, claiming that Edwina Reagan was one of “the lowest women she ever saw” because her (white) children and “little negroes” slept together.¹¹⁶

Though her husband was growing in unpopularity in the War Department, Eliza Walker was a “beauty...as handsome and well dressed as ever.” Mary Chesnut

¹¹⁴ Mallory, *Diary*, 10 July 1861, I:8.

¹¹⁵ Gorgas, *Journals*, 17 October 1862 entry, 54.

¹¹⁶ Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, 164. *Emphasis added.*

found “her pretty, silly, and, I really believe, half-crazy.” Mrs. Walker was an heiress, meaning that she was legally entitled to acquire property, likely upon the death of her husband. She was dissatisfied with Richmond society because (Mary suspected) she was “accustomed to be a belle, but under different conditions.”¹¹⁷

The social efforts of the Davises were met with mixed results. Varina always saw her social events as ways to “divert her neighbors’ attention from the war, if only for a moment.”¹¹⁸ After the war, Varina opined that “opposition to the administration might have been weakened by daily social intercourse.” President Davis, however, claimed that “he could do either one duty or the other—give entertainments or administer the Government—and he fancied he was expected to perform the latter in preference; and so we ceased to entertain except at formal receptions or informal breakfasts given to as many as Mr. Davis’s health permitted us to invite.”¹¹⁹ Thomas Bragg, as Attorney General, wrote that it was *Varina’s* health that prevented the Davises from having company and other social events.¹²⁰

As the war progressively became unbearable for Confederate citizens, the social life of the Davises, the Cabinet, and other elites became unpopular. Lower classes of Richmonders, especially women, came to see the social gatherings of their leaders as insensitive to their extreme want and poverty. Breaking the barrier that separated men and women’s political spheres, a group of Richmond women planned a political rally in Richmond to demand food and clothing of President Davis and the government. On 2

¹¹⁷ Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, 164.

¹¹⁸ Berkin, *Civil War Wives*, 168.

¹¹⁹ Quoted in Bell Irvin Wiley, *Confederate Women* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975), 102.

¹²⁰ Bragg, *Diary*, Sunday 30 November 1861 entry, I:73.

April 1863, “a few hundred” women and young boys gathering in Capitol Square, “saying they were hungry and must have food.” They remained in the Square until the number of protestors reached close to a thousand, JB Jones thought. He invalidated the gathering by qualifying that many of the women gathered were “foreign residents, with exemptions in their pockets.” The gathering began to march further into town, right by the War Department offices. Clerk Jones stuck his head out a window and inquired of “a pale boy” where the mob was going. The boy was actually a “young woman, seemingly emaciated, but yet with a smile” on her face. She informed Jones that they were on their way to find food and he expressed his hope that they would be successful.

The mob continued into town where they began to loot and plunder stores of not only food but also other valuables. As the riot became more uncontrollable, President Davis “appeared, and ascended a dray” to speak to the rioters. “He urged them to return to their homes, so that the bayonets there menacing them might be sent against the common enemy.” Davis emphasized social homogeneity as he so frequently did in his speeches and official writings. He told the mob that “he trusted we would all bear our privations with fortitude, and continue united against the Northern invaders, who were the authors of all our sufferings.” A couple of generals came to the War Department and asked Secretary Seddon to call out troops against the rioters. Seddon denied their request, claiming that the riot was “a municipal or State duty, and therefore he would not take the responsibility of interfering in the matter.” By three o’clock that afternoon, Jones wrote that all “is quiet now...and I understand the government is issuing rice to the people.”¹²¹

¹²¹ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 2 April 1863 entry, I:253-254.

The next day, Josiah Gorgas dismissed the riot claiming that the real motive of the rioters “was license. Few of them have really felt want.” He acknowledged that there was “scarcity, but little want.” That evening, Gorgas was with Mr. Jones and his wife Mary who expressed his belief that the women “ought to have been fired on.”¹²² The shock of the bread riots, as George C. Rable explains, is that “women seemingly leaped out of the domestic sphere...and [took] a powerful economic protest to the streets and [gave] it strong political overtones.” The riot “exposed the fragility of public order in the beleaguered Confederacy.”¹²³

By 1863, the mere possession of food had become an indicator of class. The combination of the swelling Richmond civilian population and the War Department’s demands for provisions for the military created an insurmountable food shortage.¹²⁴ In mid-1864, War Department Clerk, J. B. Jones wrote that “the Secretaries of State, Navy, and the Postmaster-General are getting to be as fat as bears, while some of the subordinates...are becoming mere shadows from scarcity of food.”¹²⁵ Only a few weeks later, during one of President Davis’s trips West, he observed:

When the cat’s away, the mice will play,” is an old saying, and a true one. I saw a note of invitation to-day from Secretary Mallory to Secretary Seddon, inviting

¹²² Gorgas, *The Journals*, 3 April 1863, 59-60.

¹²³ George C. Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 110.

¹²⁴ Ash, *Rebel Richmond*, 60, 70-72. For the connection between food and women’s opposition to the Confederacy, see Anne Sarah Rubin, “‘I can’t buy one mouth full of nothing to eat’: Women and the Struggle for Sustenance in the Civil War South,” November 9, 2019, Southern Historical Association Annual Meeting, Louisville, Kentucky.

¹²⁵ Jones, *War Clerk’s Diary*, 30 August 1864, II:249.

him to his house at 5 P.M. To partake of ‘pea-soup’ with Secretary [of Treasury] Trenholm. His ‘pea-soup’ will be oysters and champagne, and every other delicacy relished by epicures. Mr. Mallory’s red face, and his plethoric body, indicate the highest living; and his party will enjoy the dinner while so many of our brave men are languishing with wounds, or pining in a cruel captivity. Nay, they may feast, possibly, while the very pillars of the government are crumbling under the blows of the enemy.¹²⁶

Catherine Allgor and others have emphasized the ways politics encompasses all aspects of human life. The unofficial sphere “can build bonds of loyalty and trust between politicians and bind citizens more closely to the national mission.”¹²⁷ In the Confederacy, instead, unofficial politics seems to have exacerbated class tensions and national loyalties.

Varina did not try to interject herself into Confederate policy. “She never had a secretary, and she did not try to cultivate the press, as other First Ladies, such as Julia Tyler, did.”¹²⁸ Even if she had the help of a secretary or if she had tried to have better

¹²⁶ Jones, *War Clerk’s Diary*, 22 September 1864 entry, II:263. Recent Civil War historiography is turning to studies of the environment: Judkin Browning and Timothy Silver, *An Environmental History of the Civil War* (University of North Carolina Press, 2020) and Kenneth W. Noe, *The Howling Storm: Weather, Climate, and the American Civil War* (Louisiana State University Press, 2020). It is hoped that this recent emphasis will soon give way to scholars who will research “culinary politics” especially as it connects with the ability of the government to wage war. Monographs on Civil War food are almost nonexistent. The two most recent publications are William C. Davis, *A Taste for War: A Culinary History of the Blue and the Gray* (Stackpole Books, 2003), and R. Douglas Hurt, *Food and Agriculture During the Civil War* (Praeger, 2016). Food is a powerful substance that holds societal, religious, relational, and socio-economic symbolism. That the Richmond Bread Riot speaks to class division in the Confederacy has been observed, but the things it reveals to us about food and the political power of food have been little explored. In a nation struggling with obesity, and First Lady Michelle Obama’s recent efforts to use her office as a bully pulpit to combat the crisis, the relationship between food and Allgor’s “Parlor Politics” desperately needs exploration.

¹²⁷ Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 245-246.

¹²⁸ Cashin, *First Lady of the Confederacy*, 120.

relations with the Confederate press, Varina could not sell the public on her commitment to the Confederacy. “She was a First Lady of doubtful loyalty surrounded by [authentic] Confederates, a reminder, perhaps, of the political divisions within the white Southern population.”¹²⁹ Gone were the fairly simple responsibilities of being a US Senator’s wife. Varina was now a national symbol, “a different kind of political figure,” and she could not disguise her political views.¹³⁰ Where her husband was the leading symbol of Confederate nationalism, Varina was the national symbol of ambivalence. Elizabeth Varon describes her as a “sophisticated thinker who chafed under the prevailing assumptions of women’s inferiority and dependence.” First Lady Davis would never become a symbol of national unity. Instead, she “never fully accepted the central tenets of the Confederate faith.”¹³¹ After the war, in her old age, Varina “made a significant breakthrough” when “she declared in print that the right side won the Civil War.”¹³² The national uncertainty of Varina reflected the great mass of Confederate women who soon found their loyalty to the Confederate Cause failing.

Early histories of the Confederacy emphasized women’s undivided commitment to “The Cause.” Recently, historians have emphasized the ways women opposed the Confederacy and exerted their rights in non-traditional ways. During the war,

¹²⁹ Cashin, 121.

¹³⁰ Cashin, 120-121.

¹³¹ Varon, “Southern Women and Politics,” 13.

¹³² Cashin, *First Lady of the Confederacy*, 2. Why was Varina so unorthodox for her time? Cashin identifies Varina’s childhood as the source of her difference. “The key seems to lie in her childhood—in her excellent education and her father’s bankruptcy, both of which unfitted her for the conventional role of a Southern ‘lady.’ She became detached from some, but not all, of the values of antebellum white society, and she could never resign herself completely to the status quo, as many white Southern women did” (3).

women “did not make predictable claims about” their rights or the rights of citizens. In fact, they “did not much speak a language of rights at all.” Neither did they speak a “language of nationalism.” Their work in communities and their public actions “constituted the assertion of a historically new political identity.”¹³³ One action that Civil War women took up more frequently than their antebellum foremothers was writing to government officials. Women across all social spectrums wrote to government and military officials, and by doing so, they “crafted a new political identity as ‘soldiers’ wives,’ and they demanded a hearing.”¹³⁴

Elite women, however, did not frequently wear the label *soldier’s wife*, and Cabinet officers’ wives did not have the label available to them. The communication that these men recorded having with their wives and families show that those outside of traditional political representation turned to the pen and letters to gain a hearing. Confederate Cabinet officers, like all male Cabinet officers before them, had to balance the demands of their home and public life. In the Confederacy, this tension was more defined and threatening. As their wives rebuked them (Mallory) or expressed their beliefs in the CSA’s ultimate failure (Bragg), men were distracted from their work and influenced by the “practical,” familial, domestic concerns of their wives and families. Perhaps when the surrender at Appomattox came, these men were less likely to continue on as Confederates, partially at least, because their wives and families demanded a safer and more stable life.

¹³³ McCurry, “Women Numerous and Armed,” 2.

¹³⁴ Varon, “Southern Women and Politics,” 11.

For all the social life within both Confederate capitals, it does not appear that anything like the eighteenth-century domestic nation-building took place. The Confederate nation seems to have thought of itself as existing in the public/political sphere of men. The domestic work of women in social gatherings and functions served to undermine the Confederacy's national existence as the cost of war grew too high. The role of First Lady, Edith Mayo has argued, must always be understood as a type of hostess.¹³⁵ In the Early Republic period, the President's House was the "national stage for the conduct of politics and diplomacy." Early Americans sought to "establish an appropriate social style in civic and public life that reflected" the values of independence, individuality, and the people's control of the government.¹³⁶ During the Civil War, this social life came under intense attack. Varina Davis faced similar challenges as did her Union counterpart, Mary Todd Lincoln. Mrs. Lincoln had well-meaning intentions and believed that she was following the example set by previous First Ladies. Through her social life, she sought to uphold the power and dignity of the presidency. "Despite her intentions...Mary's efforts were often perceived as self-aggrandizing; many felt that she displayed a callous disregard for the fighting and dying on the battlefield."¹³⁷ Mrs. Davis faced a similar difficulty. The social life of the Confederate Capital additionally exacerbated class differences and tensions. An entrenched elite that was leery of outsiders made Varina Davis's job as First Lady increasingly difficult. The Confederate government came to be seen as increasingly against the interests of the nation's women.

¹³⁵ Edith P. Mayo, "Party Politics: The Political Impact of the First Ladies' Social Roles," *The Social Science Journal* 47, no. 4 (2000): 577.

¹³⁶ Mayo, "Party Politics," 577-578.

¹³⁷ Mayo, "Party Politics," 581.

“The way in which their interests in the war were publicly defined—in a very real sense denied,” Drew Gilpin Faust writes, “gave women little reason to sustain the commitment modern war required.”¹³⁸ So, the failure of Richmond social life to solidify or support the national structure reflected what was happening all over the Confederacy: women (and men, too) began to oppose a new government that seemed to dismiss their interests and concerns. This, Stephanie McCurry has argued, was the Confederacy’s “reckoning.”¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Faust, “Altars of Sacrifice,” 1228. See also Paul D. Escott, *After Secession: Jefferson Davis and the Failure of Confederate Nationalism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1978).

¹³⁹ See McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

CHAPTER VIII

The Flight from Richmond and Conclusion

Sunday 2 April 1865 was “[b]right and beautiful.”¹ Secretary of Navy, Stephen Mallory remembered that the weather was so nice, that people were drawn outside. A “pleasant air swept the foliage & flowers of the Capitol grounds,” he wrote almost romantically. The “sun beamed upon” the people gathered in the square, gossiping, idling, and lounging. The day was rung in by church bells, “cheerily” inviting “the piously inclined” to “their places of worship.” There had never been a day as “serene & quiet,” Mallory wrote. Yet, “at that very moment the hours of the Confederacy...were being numbered.”² In contrast to the glorious spring morning, Mary Chesnut wrote, “Blue-black is our horizon.”³

There were rumors circulating around the streets of Richmond that there had been “bloody fighting yesterday a little beyond Petersburg.” This had not been confirmed at the Confederate War Department, “but the absence of dispatches there is now interpreted as bad news!”⁴ Robert Kean had arrived in the War Department that morning at eight AM. An hour and a half into his morning, at 9:30, a messenger arrived from General Robert E. Lee’s headquarters. Lee sent word that his telegraph lines had been cut in three places and that Richmond should be evacuated. The message was sent to President Davis, Secretary of War John C. Breckinridge and the rest of the Cabinet.⁵ Anna Trenholm, wife

¹ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 2 April 1865 entry, II:240.

² Mallory, *Diary*, II:43.

³ Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, 782.

⁴ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, II:240.

⁵ Kean, *Inside*, 1 June 1865 entry, 205.

of George Trenholm, Secretary of Treasury, received the family's notice "to have everything ready to leave Richmond that evening."⁶

As had been his custom, President Davis had walked from the Confederate White House that morning to St. Paul's Episcopal Church.⁷ Dr. Charles Minnigerode was conducting services when a messenger entered the sanctuary. The messenger was bringing the President news of Richmond's impending fall.⁸ Likely, Davis anticipated the news. Postmaster General Reagan had been at the War Department and as soon as Lee's notice came, he found the President and a member of his staff "on their way to church, and informed him of the dispatches from General Lee to the Secretary of War."⁹ Davis recalled in *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government* that he first received the news in his pew at St. Paul's. This was, Reagan claims, the first *official* notice the President received of Lee's news; Reagan's previous communication had been "unofficial."¹⁰ Either because he was prepared or because of "that cold, stern sadness which four years of harassing mental labour had stamped upon it, Davis's face did not show panic when he received the telegram and left the church calmly and quietly before Dr. Minnigerode dismissed the congregation to do the work of evacuation."¹¹

⁶ Extract, Anna Holmes Trenholm diary, 1865, #1402-z, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1.

⁷ James L. Swanson, *Bloody Crimes: The Funeral of Abraham Lincoln and the Chase for Jefferson Davis* (HarperCollins, 2010), 4.

⁸ Swanson, 5.

⁹ Reagan, *Memoirs*, 196.

¹⁰ Reagan, *Memoirs*, 197.

¹¹ Mallory, *Diary*, II:43 (quote); Swanson, *Bloody Crimes*, 6-7.

Having received her notice, Varina Davis had “sold nearly all her movables” to different stores and was packing to leave Richmond. Later in the day, the news from Petersburg was confirmed. Back at the War Department, Jones discovered that Secretary of War Breckinridge planned to leave the city that evening at eight o’clock. “The President and the rest of the functionaries, I suppose, will leave at the same time.”¹² By six that evening, Robert Kean had gotten all the records of the War Department out of Richmond and to the Danville, Virginia train station.¹³

The rest of the Cabinet, except for Judah Benjamin, were “similarly called out of church.” Their reactions were similarly scrutinized, but “though all were fully impressed with the momentous crisis, familiarity with adversity had given to each it’s inevitable immobility of expression, & they betrayed no evidence of the emotions which filled their hearts.”¹⁴ Davis called a meeting of his Cabinet. “There were naturally,” Postmaster Reagan remembered, “many and serious questions to be discussed, and among them the disposition that was to be made of the public archives. A considerable portion of them, mainly from the Executive Department, were destroyed.”¹⁵ That evening, the Cabinet gathered at the train depot. Anna Trenholm was the only lady amongst the almost thirty men that gathered at the site.¹⁶ The special train, originally supposed to leave at eight, did

¹² Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 2 April 1865 entry, II:421.

¹³ Kean, *Inside the Confederate Government*, 205.

¹⁴ Mallory, *Diary*, II:44.

¹⁵ Reagan, *Memoirs*, 197.

¹⁶ Extract, Anna Holmes Trenholm diary, 1865, 1.

not pull out of the station until eleven.¹⁷ The government of the Confederacy was all gathered on the train traveling out of Richmond, its “functions, to be sure, were considerably curtailed.” The Cabinet train arrived in Danville, Virginia around 4:00 or 5:00 the evening of 3 April 1865.¹⁸

As if Davis’s 7 November 1864 message to the Confederate Congress had been a prophecy, Confederate national legitimacy did seem to be loosed from sovereignty over land. “The flight of Jefferson Davis to Danville...gave evidence that at least some Confederate would continue to fight even without Lee’s army.”¹⁹ By fleeing, Davis and his Cabinet physically embodied the spirit of Confederate nationalism which would survive the war. “The Confederacy might have been defeated on the field of battle,” one historian notes, but “it would take more than a surrender to quell white southerners’ deep attachment to their failed nation.”²⁰ Indeed, in Danville, Davis gave his last effort to redefine the Confederate national project to those remaining under the classification “People of the Confederate States of America.” In a circular dated 4 April, Davis recognized the “great moral” and “material injury to our cause that must result from the occupation of Richmond by the enemy.” The cause of the Confederacy, however, was “sacred,” and true patriots would not “allow our energies to falter, our spirits to grow

¹⁷ Extract, Anna Trenholm diary, 1865, 1. Kean, *Inside*, 205. John H. Reagan remembers that the train left at “nearly midnight” (*Memoirs*, 198).

¹⁸ Kean reports that the train arrived in Danville, Virginia at 4:00 PM (*Inside the Confederate Government*, 205). Anna Trenholm remembers that they arrived at 5 PM (extract, 1).

¹⁹ Caroline E. Janney, *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 55.

²⁰ Janney, 55.

faint, or our efforts to become relaxed, under reverses however calamitous.”²¹ The time had come, unlike at any previous point in the Confederacy’s short history, for Davis’s “countrymen” “to show by our bearing under reverses, how wretched has been the self-deception of those who have believed us less able to endure misfortune with fortitude, than to encounter danger with courage.”²²

Davis believed that the fall of Richmond ushered in “a new phase” of the Confederate struggle by relieving Confederates “from the necessity of guarding cities and particular points, important but not vital to our defence with our army free to move from point to point” within the interior of the “country.” In hindsight, Davis’s call to Confederates seems absurd: “Let us but will it, and we are free!”²³ By the sheer force of their numbers, Southerners would “again and again” assault the occupying enemy until they “shall abandon in despair his endless and impossible task of making slaves of a people resolved to be free.”²⁴ Emory Thomas observes, “...while dying, the Southern nation persisted in trying to define its national life.”²⁵ Davis, at least, was trying his hardest to define a new national existence for the South. Whether the Cabinet advised Davis on this last proclamation is unknown. No written record seems to survive as to their thoughts about the document.²⁶ In a vague recollection, Mallory said of the days

²¹ Jefferson Davis to the People of the Confederate States of America, 4 April 1865, *JDC*, 6:529-530.

²² *JDC*, 6:530.

²³ *JDC*, 6:530.

²⁴ *JDC*, 6:531.

²⁵ Emory M. Thomas, *The Confederate Nation, 1861-1865* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 291.

²⁶ Rembert Patrick, the only serious scholar of the Cabinet does not mention Davis’s 4 April proclamation in his description of the Cabinet’s flight from Richmond (*Jefferson Davis and His Cabinet*,

spent at Danville: “To a few, *very few*, they were days of hope; to the many they were days of despondency, if not of despair; & to all, days of intense anxiety.”²⁷

The flight south continued. The Cabinet left Danville around midnight on 10 April and headed toward Greensboro, North Carolina.²⁸ They were met with a cool reception from Greensboro citizens, but they were nevertheless better able to relax. There were even a series of Cabinet meetings held in Greensboro.²⁹ Davis called Generals Johnston and Beauregard to the city for a conference. After getting their report, he gathered the Cabinet together with General Johnston “for the purpose of considering what should be done in view of the conditions reported by these generals.”³⁰ The meeting was long and solemn, as everyone was forced to “consider the probably loss of our cause.”³¹ Reagan, as the youngest, suggested negotiations with the enemy. John Breckinridge, Secretary of War, Stephen Mallory, Secretary of Navy, and George Davis, Attorney General, all agreed with Reagan’s assessment; “but the Secretary of State, Benjamin, announced himself in favor of continuing the struggle. The Cabinet realized the hopelessness of such a course and decided against him.”³² General Johnston was to meet with Union General Sherman with the following proposal:

347). Patrick devotes only one, brief paragraph to the Cabinet’s stay in Danville, primarily to say that they set up government there and left by midnight on 10 April.

²⁷ Mallory, *Diary*, II:55. *Emphasis added*.

²⁸ Patrick, 347.

²⁹ Patrick, 348.

³⁰ Reagan, *Memoirs*, 199.

³¹ Reagan, *Memoirs*, 199.

³² Reagan, *Memoirs*, 199-200.

The Confederacy would disband its military force and would recognize the authority of the United States, on condition that existing state governments be preserved, that all political property rights of the people of the Confederacy be respected, and that there be no persecutions or penalties inflicted on them for their participation in the war.³³

On 14 April, the Cabinet continued southward to Charlotte, North Carolina, where they were more kindly received.³⁴ Their time in Charlotte was filled with monumental news and decisions. They learned the “melancholy” news of the assassination of President Lincoln. President Davis “and members of the Cabinet, with one accord, greatly regretted the occurrence. We felt that his death was most unfortunate for the people of the Confederacy because we believed that it would intensify the feeling of hostility in the Northern States against us, and because we believed we could expect better terms [of peace] from Lincoln than from [Andrew] Johnson.”³⁵ Mallory was not with Davis when he got the news, but when he was notified, he “expressed my utter disbelief of the assassination.” Davis replied that in times of revolution “events no less startling were constantly occurring.”³⁶ Even at this late date, there was some hope that the Confederate cause could be salvaged. To Mallory, it was obvious that Jefferson Davis “was extremely reluctant to quit the Country at all, & that he would make no effort to leave it, so long as he could find an organized body of troops, however small, in the field.” Davis was not

³³ Patrick, *Jefferson Davis and His Cabinet*, 349.

³⁴ Patrick, 349.

³⁵ Reagan, *Memoirs*, 208.

³⁶ Mallory, *Diary*, II:74.

willing to “abandon any body of men who might still be found willing to strike for the Cause, & gave little attention to the question of his personal safety.”³⁷

In Charlotte, Davis and the Cabinet were dissatisfied when they heard news of the Johnston-Sherman “convention.” General Sherman rejected all of the Confederates’ proposals.³⁸ As was his custom, Davis opened the meeting with “some little time in general conversation before entering upon the business of the occasion.” Mallory was astonished and described Davis’s demeanor in detail:

Upon this occasion, at a time when the cause of the Confederacy was hopeless, when its soldiers were throwing away their arms and returning to their homes, when its Government stript [*sic*] of nearly all power could not hope to exist beyond a few days more, and when the enemy, more powerful & exultant than ever, was advancing upon all sides, true to his habit, [Davis] introduced several subjects of conversation unconnected with the condition of the Country, and discussed them as if at some pleasant ordinary meeting.³⁹

Eventually, Davis called on Generals Johnston and Beauregard to describe the convention with Sherman and to share their views. Before allowing them to speak, Davis made sure everyone was aware where he stood: “Of course, we all feel the magnitude of the moment. Our late disasters are terrible; but I do not think we should regard them as fatal.”⁴⁰ As the military generals spoke, Davis kept his eyes fixed on a piece of paper that

³⁷ Mallory, *Diary*, II:73.

³⁸ Patrick, *Jefferson Davis and His Cabinet*, 350.

³⁹ Mallory, *Diary*, II:69.

⁴⁰ Mallory, *Diary*, II:70.

was in his lap, which he folded, unfolded, then folded again.⁴¹ Johnston opined that he thought the struggle should be given up. Davis asked for the written responses from his Cabinet advisors.

Judah Benjamin, in a reply dated 22 April 1865, reviewed the current state of Confederate affairs to determine if the Confederacy could expect any better terms than reunion with the United States with state governments “unimpaired, with all their constitutional rights recognized, with protection for the persons and property of the people.”⁴² After reviewing the resources at the Confederacy’s disposal, Benjamin came to his conclusion: “The Confederacy is...unable to continue the war by armies in the field, and the struggle can no longer be maintained in any other manner than by a guerrilla or partisan warfare.”⁴³ This was the course of action suggested by Davis on 4 April 1865 when he radically and fundamentally altered the internationally-accepted definition of a nation. Benjamin was adamant that Sherman’s terms should be accepted. The issue was that Davis could not accept surrender. “The states alone,” Benjamin wrote, “can act in dissolving the Confederacy and returning to the Union.”⁴⁴ Therefore, Benjamin suggested that Davis send the terms of surrender to the various states and let them decide the fate of the Confederacy.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Mallory, *Diary*, II:72.

⁴² J. P. Benjamin to Jefferson Davis, 22 April 1865, *JDC*, 6:569.

⁴³ *JDC*, 6:571.

⁴⁴ *JDC*, 6:571.

⁴⁵ *JDC*, 6:572.

To be having this discussion at all, Mallory wrote in his reply two days later, “is to admit that in appearance, the great object of our struggle is hopeless. I believe and admit this to be the case...and my conviction is that nine tenths of the people of every state of the Confederacy would so advise if opportunity were presented them.”⁴⁶ Mallory admitted what Benjamin had not: it was not only that the armies of the Confederacy had been defeated, but the will of the people had been depleted as well. Mallory also believed that Davis had no constitutional right to agree to surrender; only the sovereign States could do that. “If time were allowed for the observance of constitutional forms,” he would advise that the terms of surrender be sent to the Governors of each state for a referendum. “But in the present condition of the country such delay as this course” was unadvisable.⁴⁷

The only other member of the Cabinet who had been with Davis throughout the entirety of Confederate project, Postmaster General John H. Reagan agreed with Mallory’s assessment of the people. “There is danger—and I think that I might say certainty...that a portion, and, probably, all of the states, will make separate terms with the enemy as they are overrun.”⁴⁸ The Confederate people had been the nation’s greatest resource; but their commitment had run out.

It is right also for me to say, that, much as we have been exhausted in men and resources, I am of [the] opinion that, if our people could be induced to continue the contest with the spirit which animated them during the first years of the war,

⁴⁶ S. R. Mallory to Jefferson Davis, 24 April 1865, *JDC*, 6:574.

⁴⁷ *JDC*, 6:576.

⁴⁸ John H. Reagan to Jefferson Davis, 22 April 1865, *JDC*, 6:581.

our independence might yet be within our reach: But I see reason to hope for that now.⁴⁹

Attorney General George Davis and Secretary of War John Breckinridge also submitted opinions that agreed with Benjamin, Mallory, and Reagan. With the entire Cabinet in agreement, Davis telegraphed Johnston the Confederacy's agreement to surrender. Time had apparently expired, however, and General Sherman refused the surrender and notified General Johnston that hostilities would begin again in forty-eight hours.⁵⁰

Receiving notice of this treachery, the Cabinet continued South. The first week of May, Secretary Mallory became the last member of the Cabinet to formally resign. Due to the "misfortunes" that had befallen the Confederacy, Mallory was no longer able to serve his country. He would follow Davis further South "could I hope" as a result "in any degree to contribute to your safety or happiness." Instead, "a helpless family" prevented Mallory from leaving the country, and he asked for Davis to accept his resignation so that he could return to them to await his fate. "May God watch over and protect you," Mallory wrote, "and may the smiles of Heaven be upon the pathway of yourself and your loved ones."⁵¹

Davis did accept Mallory's resignation, and he continued South. If Davis "really desired to escape," writes Rembert Patrick, "there can be little doubt that he would have succeeded. Three members of his Cabinet and a former Secretary were able to escape."⁵² Instead, Davis was captured on 22 May 1865 outside Irwinsville, Georgia. His captors

⁴⁹ *JDC*, 6:582.

⁵⁰ Patrick, *Jefferson Davis and His Cabinet*, 350-351.

⁵¹ S. R. Mallory to Jefferson Davis, 2 May 1865, *JDC*, 6:586.

⁵² Patrick, *Jefferson Davis and His Cabinet*, 356.

found a copy of his Cabinet's replies regarding the constitutionality of surrender.⁵³

Perhaps he reflected on the meaning of their advice. If, as President and Commander-in-Chief, he had no constitutional right to authorize surrender, then perhaps the Confederacy still lived, even in some capacity, though he was captured. After the war, Jefferson Davis remained the staunchest of unreconstructed Confederates, as he fought the new battle over the Civil War's memory.

Conclusion

Throughout his entire time as Confederate President, Davis identified Confederate nationality as resting on the noble and honorable ideals of self-determination and self-government. Independence became, for him, the highest ideal for his beloved South. Slavery and white supremacy were foundational to the Confederacy's understanding of nationhood. The Mississippi Secession Convention's "Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of Mississippi" proclaimed, "Our position is thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery—the greatest material interest of the world."⁵⁴ The threat that the North posed to slavery "tramples the original equality of the South underfoot."⁵⁵ The political and social equality of "negroes" was unacceptable to a region that defined whites as united in an equal standing above inferior races.

⁵³ *JDC*, 6:585.

⁵⁴ "A Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of Mississippi from the Federal Union and the Ordinance of Secession. 26 January 1861, in Hettle, *Confederate Homefront*, 3.

⁵⁵ Hettle, 4.

Alexander Stephens, Vice-President of the Confederacy, summed up Confederate national identity succinctly. The foundations of the Confederate Government were founded on the opposite ideals of the Union. Its “foundations are laid, its cornerstone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery—subordination to the superior race—is her natural and moral condition.”⁵⁶ By explicitly claiming slavery as the basis for Southern society and nationhood, Confederates hoped to remove slavery “as a source of political division” in an effort to “lay the foundations for social harmony.”⁵⁷

The reality remained: Slavery as key to Confederate national identity placed the new nation directly at odds with the spirit of the age.⁵⁸ Therefore, Davis attempted to put the Confederacy on a more solid footing throughout his tenure as President. He emphasized and stressed “ideological” themes of self-government. In his projection, the Confederacy was a “search for republican purity and an effort to quarantine the Southern world from...Northern radicalism, infidelity, and abolitionism.”⁵⁹ The lofty ideals that the Confederacy espoused required a united, homogenous effort by all involved. “Davis’s

⁵⁶ “Cornerstone” Speech by Alexander H. Stephens, 22 March 1861, in Hettle, *Confederate Homefront*, 11. For a recent study of the Cornerstone Speech, see Keith Hebert, *Cornerstone of the Confederacy: Alexander Stephens and the Speech that Defined the Lost Cause* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2021).

⁵⁷ Rable, *Confederate Republic: A Revolution Against Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 63.

⁵⁸ See Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010) and Aaron Sheehan-Dean, *Reckoning with Rebellion: War and Sovereignty in the Nineteenth Century* (Tallahassee: University of Florida Press, 2020). “Confederates obstructed their own path to independence. By rejecting the reformist elements (as modest as those were) of other midcentury rebellions, they isolated themselves from the momentum of the era” (Sheehan-Dean, *Reckoning with Rebellion*, 77).

⁵⁹ Rable, *Confederate Republic*, 120-121.

nationalism was...an ongoing confrontation between his need for emotional bonding to create a true national community, the fact that antebellum Americans fell far short in fulfilling this need, and his insistence that the Confederacy did indeed constitute a true community of sentiment.”⁶⁰

Generally, Davis was successful, and throughout the war, soldiers and civilians understood the ideals for which they fought and sacrificed. James M. McPherson observes that a “large number of those men in blue and gray were intensely aware of the issues at stake and passionately concerned about them.”⁶¹ Themes of “liberty and republicanism formed the ideological core” of both the Union and Confederate causes.⁶² The trouble with Davis’s national identities was that they all came back to one, simple concept: Independence. Emory Thomas explains:

In stressing liberty and independence as war aims in the Confederate revolution, Davis never clearly answered the questions “Liberty for whom?” and “Independence for what?” The fact that neither he nor any other Confederate, for that matter, could or did define very precisely the nature of the Confederate revolution was some index of the fluidity which characterized the experience.⁶³

Additionally, Davis did not feel the need to elaborately or majestically define the Confederate cause as did Lincoln for the Union. Instead, the tenets for which the

⁶⁰ Brian R. Dirck, *Lincoln & Davis: Imagining America, 1809-1865* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 245.

⁶¹ James M. McPherson, *What They Fought For, 1861-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), 4.

⁶² McPherson, *What They Fought For*, 6.

⁶³ Thomas, *The Confederate Nation*, 223. See also, Atchison, *War of Words*, 92.

Confederacy fought were self-evident, pre-established truths from Americans' original independence struggle. Confederates, and especially Jefferson Davis, understood their revolution as a conservative one that was preserving, but also *improving* upon, the original American Revolution. "Confederates were not destroying the Union," Sarah Rubin writes, "they were restoring it to its earlier glory. They were not rebels but patriots."⁶⁴ By focusing on the American Revolution, Davis hoped to unite a vast majority of Confederates in a sentimental struggle of ideological preservation rather than material preservation of a minority's property in human slaves.⁶⁵ More negatively, however, the focus on the Revolutionary *past* did not give common Confederates a higher and nobler *future* for which to fight and die. Instead, as homes, land, families, and property continuously fell into Union hands, Confederates slowly peeled away from the Confederacy. Without a "vast future also" for which to fight, Confederates were content to return to a Union that they understood would preserve white supremacy even if slavery was eliminated.⁶⁶

The Cabinet has been at the center of this narrative of the Confederacy. Their role in determining Confederate national identity was limited and practically non-existent. Retrospective blame should not be too hastily laid at their feet. Americans—both then and now—have not frequently looked upon members of the Presidents' Cabinet to provide ideological, rhetorical, or inspirational leadership. The American Civil War was

⁶⁴ Anne Sarah Rubin, *A Shattered Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy, 1861-1868* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 14-15.

⁶⁵ Rubin, 15.

⁶⁶ "[M]ost pro-Davis Confederates laid down their arms trusting that Republicans would permit white supremacy sans slavery" (Zvengrowski, *Jefferson Davis, Napoleonic France, and the Nature of Confederate Ideology*, 13).

no different, and the Confederate public never seemed to complain that Davis's Cabinet did not make rousing speeches or publish public pronouncements of Confederate identity and purpose. Hindsight, however, does afford some observations that seem significant about Confederate leadership, especially as connected to the Cabinet.

The Cabinet of Abraham Lincoln was composed of men who had strong national presences *before* the Civil War. William Seward, Union Secretary of State, and Salmon P. Chase, Union Treasury Secretary, had long and storied national careers before their service in Lincoln's Cabinet in which they clearly articulated where they stood on national issues such as state sovereignty, the West, slavery, and international relations. Further, members of the Union Congress were frequently antebellum national leaders who had built up an arsenal of rhetorical and written conceptions of American national identity. Davis's Cabinet was fundamentally different. The reasons many Americans do not know the names of such prominent Civil War Southerners as Judah Benjamin, Stephen Mallory, Thomas Bragg, James A. Seddon, and Christopher Memminger is because these men did not have extensive antebellum national followings. They were not ideological or rhetorical leaders before the war, and neither would they be during the war. Most would return to obscurity after the war. In the first study of the Confederate Cabinet, Burton J. Hendrick claims that the Confederacy failed because it "produced no statesmen, such as the South had produced in the revolutionary crisis of 1776 and afterward."⁶⁷ Rembert Patrick, in his study, frequently seen as a type of "reply" to Hendrick, has argued that the Confederate Cabinet had "real merits" and ability.⁶⁸ While

⁶⁷ Burton J. Hendrick, *Statesmen of the Lost Cause: Jefferson Davis and His Cabinet* (New York: Literary Guild of America, 1939), 11.

⁶⁸ Rembert Patrick, *Jefferson Davis and His Cabinet*, 367.

Hendrick's initial conclusion may be somewhat simplistic, related to rhetorical and ideological leadership, his conclusion remains valid. Confederate Cabinet officers were not thought-leaders of Confederate/Southern national identity before, during, or after the Civil War.

Instead, the Confederate Cabinet frequently embodied Southern national divisions. George C. Rable has persuasively argued that Confederate politics was not bifurcated between those desiring "national power and those upholding states' rights." Instead, politics in the Confederacy was "a long contest between a politics of national unity and a politics of individual, community, and state liberty."⁶⁹ Throughout the war, Davis consistently filled his Cabinet with *state* leaders in an effort to help various states and the political factions within those states feel some connection to the nation at large. The ousting of Thomas Bragg from the Attorney General position and the constant need to find a Virginia native-son is evidence of Davis's struggles in this arena.

The behaviors and actions of the Cabinet officers in the extra-official arena exacerbated class division and reinforced the national/local liberty dichotomy. Lavish social gatherings and elaborate meals reinforced for hungry and destitute Confederates that there were class differences. Unintentionally, by participating in these events, Cabinet officers alienated those who might have otherwise supported the nation. In the eighteenth-century and in the United States' youth, the extra-official sphere of politics dominated by women had helped to reinforce the "state" apparatus that had been built.

⁶⁹ Rable, *Confederate Republic*, 138. Since Rable's study, historians have continuously complicated our understanding of Confederate politics, especially with the advent of a transnational perspective. Most recently, Jeffrey Zengrowski has emphasized pro-French and pro-English Confederate factions.

However, during the Civil War, and in the Confederate South especially, women's extra-official political sphere did not support but instead undermined Confederate legitimacy.⁷⁰

David Armitage has astutely observed that what is meant by *nationalism* "is the desire of nations (however defined) to possess states to create the peculiar hybrid we call the nation-state." He reminds historians that there is "also a beast we might call the state-nation, which arises when the state is formed before the development of any sense of national consciousness."⁷¹ Confederates successfully built the "state" apparatus of the nation-state. They copied the original structure of the US Constitutional system. The Cabinet was a part of the state apparatus. In this sense, the Confederacy mirrored the process of the original American Union, John Murrin has argued. The United States Constitution was a "more tentative answer to a broader cultural problem. It established...a 'new roof' over an American union of extremely diverse states."⁷² Similarly, the Confederacy's state apparatus formed the frame of new building, and it required filling with an emotional/sentimental nationalism. War helped in this endeavor and acted as a type of catalyst that solidified Southern national self-conceptualization. "By virtually all measurable standards," Murrin observes, "the Confederate sense of national identity appears to have been deeper, more profound, more passionate (no doubt

⁷⁰ See especially, Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*.

⁷¹ David Armitage, Thomas Bender, Leslie Butler, Don H. Doyle, Susan-Mary Grant, Charles S. Maier, Jorg Nagler, Paul Quigley, & Jay Sexton, "Interchange: Nationalism and Internationalism in the Era of the Civil War," *The Journal of American History* 98, no. 2 (2011): 478.

⁷² John M. Murrin, "A Roof without Walls: The Dilemma of American National Identity," in *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity*, edited by Richard Beeman, Stephen Botein, & Edward C. Carter (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 333.

more of a nationalism) than the ties that bound the Thirteen Colonies.”⁷³ A study of Jefferson Davis and his Cabinet reveals a nuance related to Confederate nationalism that is generally lost amongst the too simplistic debate regarding its supposed strength or weakness. Confederate nationalism existed, *but it was not well-directed or properly distinguished* from its predecessor.

As part of the state apparatus, Confederate Cabinet officers were responsible for filling their framed-building with a unique and forward-looking nationalism that would drive Confederates to greater service and sacrifice. Instead, studying the writings, musings, and reminiscences of Confederate leaders (Cabinet and non-Cabinet) reveals an intense and overwhelming fear of Confederate defeat and utter hopelessness of Confederate success. This appeared surprisingly early and had a longevity that historians frequently do not emphasize or examine in-depth. Emory Thomas has written that there was a “chicken-and-egg” relationship...between the fortunes of Confederate arms and the state of Southern manpower, materiel, money, politics, and national morale.”⁷⁴ There is a similar relationship between the morale of Cabinet officers and the Confederate public at large. Did Confederate leaders *reflect* or *direct* national waves of morale? This study does not pretend to provide an answer to such a complicated question, but it does reveal that Confederate Cabinet officers remained concerned over the fate of their country. And in response to that concern, they continued to plod away at the work of state-craft and spent little time on the work of nationhood (nationalism). Additionally, their letters and diaries

⁷³ John M. Murrin, “War, Revolution, and Nation-Making: The American Revolution versus the Civil War,” in *Rethinking America: From Empire to Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 348. Emphasis in original.

⁷⁴ Thomas, *Confederate Nation*, 133.

reveal that like most Confederates, they valued the safety of their homes and families over the ultimate success and failure of their nation.

“Most attempts to explain southern defeat or northern victory,” wrote James McPherson in 1988, “lack the dimension of *contingency*—the recognition that at numerous critical points during the war things might have gone altogether differently.”⁷⁵ By emphasizing the failure of Confederate Cabinet officers as ideological or rhetorical leaders, I do not pretend that a better performance by these men in this area could have won the war for the Confederacy. Instead, I am attempting to emphasize the contingency that McPherson calls historians to remember. The Civil War required civilian leaders to do more than the minimum associated with their positions. Too often, political, civilian leaders acted as if their hands were tied by superior, impersonal events. To some extent they were. But they rarely took initiative in areas that they could affect change. War Clerk J. B. Jones shrewdly observed: “Statesmen are the physicians of the public weal.”⁷⁶ Only Jefferson Davis seems to have adopted Jones’s understanding of the role of statesmen. Davis sought to create a nation-state; his Cabinet secretaries were content (maybe expected to some degree) to maintain their responsibilities as part of a state-nation. Some degree of the failure to direct and distinguish Confederate nationalism falls at their feet.

Increasingly, it became obvious to Confederates that military prospects was their only hope for national independence. “The war remained the all-absorbing question,” Rable writes, “many Southerners believed that the real statesmen were already in the

⁷⁵ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 857-858. *Emphasis in original.*

⁷⁶ Jones, *Clerk’s Diary*, 17 May 1861 entry, I:24.

Confederate army. Would-be congressmen too often seemed little more than amiable mediocrities or eloquent nonentities.”⁷⁷ Gary Gallagher has convincingly reminded historians of the need to incorporate military history into studies of Confederate nationalism. “As the war progressed, Confederate citizens increasingly relied on their armies rather than on their central government to boost morale, and Robert E. Lee and his Army of Northern Virginia eventually became the most important national institution.”⁷⁸ With military failures plaguing the Confederacy, especially after Gettysburg/Vicksburg in June 1863, President Davis did his best to redefine the Confederate project to encourage Confederate civilian and military persistence. His rhetoric went so far as to define Confederate national identity on white supremacist terms *alone*, without slavery and to suggest that true nationhood was not reliant on the ownership of land. Indeed, the successful establishment of a state apparatus, and the Cabinet’s ridiculous efforts on the run to maintain a sense of normalcy in governmental operations shows that Davis sought to project to Confederates that their nation could still exist without land and slavery. As long as a state apparatus remained, there was hope that an emotive nation could fill it. The military, however, crumbled and gave up the fight. First Lee surrendered on 9 April 1865 and then Johnston surrendered to Sherman in May.⁷⁹ Only one Cabinet member was captured with Davis: John Henninger Reagan. By the time of his capture, even the state apparatus of the Confederacy had abandoned President Davis.

⁷⁷ Rable, *Confederate Republic*, 99.

⁷⁸ Gary Gallagher, *The Confederate War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 8.

⁷⁹ For a helpful overview of the Confederate military surrenders after Lee’s at Appomattox, see Steven J. Ramfold, *Obstinate Heroism: The Confederate Surrenders after Appomattox* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2020).

Future research and study is needed to confirm these conclusions and expand on them in significant ways. First, Confederate Cabinet secretaries need extensive and renewed biographical treatment. Only a small minority of Cabinet Secretaries have received scholarly, biographical treatment. A review of existing biographies reveals two things.⁸⁰ First, there are several Cabinet officers who significantly impacted the Confederate war and nation that have never received a scholarly biography. Secretaries of War George W. Randolph and James A. Seddon have not been thoroughly studied. Neither has Secretary of Treasury Christopher Memminger, who served nearly the entirety of the war. Second, the primary biographies of these individuals emerged during the 1940s-1960s when scholarly attention was tuned to defending The Lost Cause or at least making it more respectable. Renewed scholarly attention to the biographies of these civilian Confederate leaders would add to our historical understanding of the South, primarily by emphasizing the different Southern experiences before and after the Civil War. New biographies of Confederate Cabinet secretaries, would emphasize what William Freehling calls “clashing Souths” and the differing local/regional ways in which a new generation of Southerners envisioned and imagined Southern/Confederate separateness and nationalism.⁸¹

A second way that a renewed interest in the Confederate Cabinet could expand on this work and our understanding of the Civil War South is to reveal the generational, local, and/or regional differences between civilian and military Confederate leaders.

⁸⁰ See discussion in the introduction of this thesis, pp. 5-6.

⁸¹ William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, Vol. 1, *Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), ix.

Burton J. Hendrick writes, “The new-rich Southwest contributed the political leaders, the old traditional South the military captains.”⁸² Renewed historical interest on the West and its role in the antebellum slavery debate would make an exploration of the Cabinet and Hendrick’s assertion worthwhile for modern historians.⁸³

Thirdly, I argue that a focus on the Confederate Cabinet could assist in creating a new, accessible, narrative history of the Confederacy. Freehling writes, “[T]he narrative literary form, sadly maligned among professional historians these days, remains invaluable to humanize how a collision of abstractions helped produce the crisis of a people.”⁸⁴ In a more recent historiographic review of the scholarship of the Confederacy, Gary Gallagher argues that Emory Thomas’s *The Confederate Nation* “has enjoyed a very long run, but the time has come for someone to undertake a new synthesis.”⁸⁵ The Cabinet could provide a convenient narrative skeleton for a historian to integrate the various thematic clashes within the Confederate South. The lives of these Southerners would allow for a discussion on local and regional Souths and Southern nationalisms. Each department allows for a skilled historian to narratively describe differing aspects of the Confederate experience: economic divisions and woes (Treasury); international and transnational debate (State); integrating military and civilian histories (War); legal, cultural, and intellectual emphases (Post-Office; Justice Departments); Confederate

⁸² Hendrick, *Statesmen of the Lost Cause*, 8.

⁸³ See, most recently, Michael E. Woods, *Arguing Until Doomsday: Stephen Douglas, Jefferson Davis, and the Struggle for American Democracy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020).

⁸⁴ Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, I:ix.

⁸⁵ Gary Gallagher, “Disaffection, Persistence, and Nation: Some Direction in Recent Scholarship on the Confederacy,” *Civil War History* 55, no. 3 (2009): 353.

leadership, rhetoric, and national identity (Presidency, Vice-Presidency). While there are certainly other ways to organize a new synthetic, narrative history of the Confederacy, I have aimed to show that a focus on the personalities within the Confederate Cabinet can help to humanize more abstract historical forces.

After the war, Jefferson Davis set about defending his Confederacy, producing a two volume defense of Southern secession and nationhood: *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*. Only one other member of his Cabinet assisted him significantly in creating The Lost Cause. Former Postmaster General John H. Reagan, the youngest Cabinet secretary, had a long post-war political career in the United States Congress where he advocated for railroads to be built through the South. Because Davis had defined Confederate national identity in ideological rather than pragmatic terms, it was easy for that ideology to continue under re-Union with new, updated language. The rest of the Cabinet sank into oblivion. They returned to their families and the locally-defined lives from which Davis had pulled them in 1861 to serve their new nation. “Around their efforts for a cause that was lost,” writes Rembert Patrick, “glistens halo-like a ‘glory of the vanquished,’ pale and less effulgent than the light of victory, but none the less glorious.”⁸⁶ The Confederate Cabinet was unable to accomplish Southern nationhood. Their glory of the vanquished accomplished something far more sinister and long-lasting. By their efforts, they solidified Southern sectionalism long into the post-war era.

⁸⁶ Patrick, *Jefferson Davis and His Cabinet*, 368.

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Publications & Presentations

Book Reviews for *The Civil War Monitor*

Ryan Starrett, *Mississippi Bishop William Henry Elder and the Civil War* (The History Press, 2019), 4/1/2020. <https://www.civilwarmonitor.com/book-shelf/starrett-mississippi-bishop-william-henry-elder-2019>.

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