



The Long Surrender: The Collapse of the Confederacy & the Flight of Jefferson Davis

Burke Davis

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A panoramic history of the collapse of the Confederacy.

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Joshua says

Enjoyable history of end of the Confederate government and the return to civilian life of Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee, and various members of the Confederate cabinet. The more I read about the War Between the States, the more I appreciate its immense tragedy. I can also understand the long standing appreciation felt towards these individuals long after their death---a far more nuanced portrait than was depicted in my (Northern) childhood education.

Cateline says

Burke Davis is one of the historians that is able to make history interesting, and tell it in a sometimes non-linear fashion that satisfies. This is the story of Confederate President Jefferson Davis's long journey to surrender, and his final acceptance of that fate. General Lee had already surrendered at Appomattox, it was obvious to all that the War was lost to the South. But Davis still had hopes of running a war from Texas or Mexico, and finally winning. This book is the story of his long journey, both physical and emotional to capture and acceptance. We learn of his cabinet members fates, his family and supporters as well.

The book talks about how the War was actually fought over States Rights, not slavery as purported by many. I can't put my finger on it atm, but there is a quote to the effect that with good Congressional debate the War could have been avoided all together. I've heard that before, and I believe it. Most of the men "in charge" really didn't want a war, they wanted peaceful resolution, but the hotheads took over. That's hotheads in both the North and the South.

Recommended.

John Burnham says

I like the last 100 pages but had a hard time getting there.

Brian Manville says

The end of the Civil War is generally portrayed as wrapping up in a nice, tidy fashion with the surrender of Robert E. Lee at Appomattox. However, there is, as the late Paul Harvey used to say, "the rest of the story." Burke Davis tells that long, sad, and sordid trail.

The battle outside Richmond focuses the Confederate government to flee with its important papers, officials, and its hard money. The resulting train ride, and later horseback ride, is retold in detail. At times (with over 150 years of hindsight), it becomes a very pitiable exodus. At its heart, Jefferson Davis refuses to surrender to the Union Army and firmly believes that there are still 40,000 southerns out there who will rise up at this

late hour to support him. His delusion is perhaps the saddest part of this story. You can literally see him going through the stages of grief until he finally decides - albeit too late - to just run for his life.

His imprisonment at Fort Monroe in Virginia slowly begins the process of redemption as he is almost immediately chained up despite being completely emaciated due to the vengeful hearts of radical Republicans. Over the years, Davis comes to be seen as a source of southern pride and not revolt in the eyes of people on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line. Although technically unreconstructed (he never sought to regain his citizenship), he continued to exhibit a gentlemanly grace as well as undying love for his wife Varina.

This book serves well to fill in that part of post-Civil War history usually dominated by the carpetbaggers and Reconstruction. It is a book that deserves to be given its place in that history.

BOTTOM LINE: Essential reading for Civil War historians.

Barb says

Well written, exciting, and interesting--a part of civil war history that most authors ignore. This book examines the enigma of Jefferson Davis but leaves the reader to make conclusions about his personality and ability. Lots of history and challenging ideas.

Ronald says

This is a thoroughly researched and arresting tale of what happened to Confederate President Jeff Davis and his Cabinet following President Lincoln's assassination and General Lee's surrender to General Grant at Appomattox.

It was a good book to follow up "The Team of Rivals," to fill in the contemporaneous goings-on in the secessionist states.

I would give it four stars, but I found some of the author's phraseology a bit distracting in places, forcing me to reread sections from time to time.... although to be fair, my new progressive lenses might have played a role in that.

Fredrick Danysh says

During the last days of the Civil War, Lee was fighting a losing battle with lack of equipment and a starving army. The only thing holding the army was the loyalty of his men to Marse Lee. When he did surrender, Confederate President Jefferson Davis fled Richmond seeking safety leading Union troops on a prolonged chase.

Bill FromPA says

When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.

– *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*

Given the many virtues of this book, I can't justify giving it less than three stars, but I have serious problems with its historical interpretation.

The main thread of this book is the story of Jefferson Davis from the fall of Richmond in 1865 through his death in 1889. Interspersed with the story of the Confederate president's flight, capture, imprisonment, parole, pardon, and subsequent career, Burke Davis also tells the stories of the post-war lives of other leaders of the Confederate States of America, along with vignettes relating to the collapse of the Southern government. The author handles his large cast of characters skillfully, delineating both major and minor characters with the skill of a novelist.

Underlying the events being narrated is a shadow story: how the military defeat of the Confederacy and the failure of succession became the story of The Lost Cause, a narrative depicting the South as fighting for the worthiest cause in the conflict and fielding the better army, from the top generals down to the enlisted men, suffering defeat only through a series of chances which went against them, on which the North with its advantage in numbers and industrial might was able to capitalize. The problem with this 1985 book is that Burke Davis does not just chronicle the rise of this myth and its eventual acceptance by both north and south as the actual history of the conflict, he also accepts the truth of the Lost Cause narrative. This leads him to repeat the canard about "states' rights" rather than the perpetuation of slavery as the primary cause of Southern succession, and to accept a discredited view of Reconstruction as "a subjugated South ruled by carpetbaggers and ex-slaves" (pg. 110).

Perhaps because of this embrace of the Lost Cause story, Davis has written a white people's history of the collapse of the Confederacy, with only a few mentions of slavery and little mention of the experiences of suddenly liberated ex-slaves. The only named African-American characters are servants, slaves, and dependents of the Jefferson Davis household; unlike the sharply etched portraits of the many white characters, the characterization of these barely rises above stereotypes of dedicated servitude.

If you want to read an engaging true-life narrative of a fall from power and its aftermath, populated with a score of memorable characters, *The Long Surrender* gets my qualified recommendation. But for the history, go to James McPherson for the Civil War and its causes and John Hope Franklin or Eric Foner for Reconstruction.

Erik Graff says

Having read Davis' biography of Robert E. Lee previously and liking it, I snapped this one up upon finding it at a book sale. It wasn't disappointing.

This is the story of the end of the Confederate States of America and the beginning of reconciliation. It starts with the fall of Richmond, Lee's surrender and the flight of the Confederate cabinet. It continues to detail the fates of the leadership and their families, focusing primarily on President Jefferson Davis. Then, with his capture in Georgia, it details his two years in prison and his life after release, contrasting his views of post-war America with those of General Lee.

Eric says

Ever wonder what happened to various Confederate leaders after the Civil War? Maybe, maybe not. But if so, this is the book to read. Author Burke Davis tells an interesting story about the fates of Jefferson Davis, Judah Benjamin, and other officials. There are even cameo appearances by Teddy Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and O. Henry (really!).

The Confederate cabinet fled Richmond by train the night it fell, and continued to run from Federal pursuers through the Carolinas and Georgia. Davis and some others were caught in Georgia; some like Breckenridge and Benjamin made it to Florida and eventually Cuba, after some Hollywood-like adventures. Benjamin ended up in England and enjoyed a prosperous career as a lawyer.

Davis ended up in chains (quite needlessly) in Fort Monroe, his jailer being General Nelson Miles, more well-known for fighting Indians in the West. Miles does not come across very well. He inflicted what Davis called "petty tortures," such as the chains, and it's hard to disagree with that.

Davis was eventually released, of course, as were other arrested officials. Only Henry Wirz, the commander of the notorious Confederate prison Andersonville, was convicted and executed - for war crimes, not treason. The Confederates' post-Civil War careers were all, to varying degrees, interesting and successful. Some went into business, some wrote books, some fled to Mexico to start anew.

An interesting and well-written account that Civil War buffs should enjoy.

Lenny Herman says

"the old man" for 25 years this author referred to Davis as "the old man. Was this to make the reader feel sorry or sympathetic to the fool.

Sekhar N Banerjee says

A good read

An excellent account of the later years of the key characters of Confederacy. Though little bit tiring with details, I enjoyed reading the book.

Jeffrey says

Very interesting story on the end of the Confederacy but the tale of Jefferson Davis and his escape party only takes up the first half of the book. The second part, about Davis's captivity and the ultimate fates of the Confederacy's leading lights, is interesting but doesn't have the same fast-paced readability and just feels like padding.

Bill says

Wow! Burke Davis is (was) an incredible writer, researcher, and historian. I sprained my wrist turning pages and did not even notice until Jefferson Davis was captured 100 pages later. I highly recommend this book for anyone who has an interest in the Civil War.

Scott Pierce says

Interesting history tracking how the South lost, and why, and, based on the DeVoto poem below, how close many in the South think that war was:

The whisper of a great Perhaps
Almost...four hours in
Hampton Roads
a shot in the spring dusk at
Chancellorsville..
Spindthrift blown back from
where the high tide broke
on Cemetery Ridge.
A passionate if! sleeps
uneasily in the grandson's blood.
