

Abstract

Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee are the most well-known members of the leadership of the Confederacy during the American Civil War. In the years following the war, both men became mythologized, transformed into something beyond humanity that we cannot reach. Lee becomes the “Reluctant Confederate,” who fought for the South out of duty rather than belief in rhetoric. Davis becomes an enigma, the “Sphinx of the Confederacy,” whose motivations are unknown to us mere mortals. In truth, both men are much simpler and much more human. They both believed in the Southern cause, with all the white supremacist and pro-slavery attitudes this represented, and the conflict they faced in 1861 was not lack of faith in the Southern system but a moderate stance on secession. After the war, both men made no secret of their desire to justify the actions of the South, and therefore themselves. Neither believed that they had done wrong in seceding, claiming it as a constitutional right. Davis and Lee are remembered not for their character but for their role in Confederate society. They are entirely human, and their enigmatic nature is in truth internal conflict, as they faced life-changing decisions as history was being made all around them.

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