

## REVIEWS

*Jefferson Davis in Blue*  
*The Life of Sherman's Relentless Warrior*

By Nathaniel Cheairs Hughes, Jr., and Gordon D. Whitney

(Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002. Pp. xviii, 475.  
Notes, maps, illustrations, bibliography, index. \$49.95.)

On his deathbed in 1879, Brigadier General Jefferson C. Davis journeyed back in memory to his service under fire at Fort Sumter in April 1861. Although an undeniably dramatic episode, it was only one among many in an unusually eventful life. As a teenage volunteer from Indiana in the Mexican War, Davis distinguished himself on the field at Buena Vista (although another Jefferson Davis was propelled further by his actions there). After Sumter, he saw action on such far-flung battlefields as Pea Ridge and Chickamauga, Atlanta and Bentonville, in most cases commanding a division. The immediate postwar period found him ensconced in the Alaskan town of Sitka's vast Baranoff Castle, as military governor of the newly purchased ter-

ritory. Later, Davis zealously prosecuted the Modoc War of 1872–1873 near the California-Oregon border, and saw his opponent, the Modoc chieftain Kintpuash (known to whites as Captain Jack), shackled and sent to the gallows.

Two events, however, overshadowed all the others: Davis's killing of a fellow Union general in 1862, and his abandonment to a dubious fate of a large number of contraband slaves during 1864's March to the Sea. Although, due to a series of flukes, he was not court-martialled for the former incident, it doomed any hope of advancement, which he would have otherwise abundantly merited. The latter incident, in "providing convincing evidence of his prejudice against an innocent people and his deeply ingrained

inhumanity" (p. 314), made it certain that Congress would never approve a future promotion.

These actions apparently sullied Davis's reputation to the extent that no full-scale biography of this obviously significant figure has appeared until now. Happily, Davis's biographers—esteemed historian Nathaniel Cheairs Hughes, Jr., and Davis expert Gordon D. Whitney—have proven themselves perfectly suited for the task. They have produced a definitive study, one that is exhaustively researched, carefully interpreted, and engagingly written.

In the preface the authors telegraph their intent to avoid whitewashing their subject. Readers expecting an indulgent explanation for the killing of Major General William Nelson, for example, are warned that Davis was guilty as charged. Although Hughes and Whitney show appreciation for Davis's commendable qualities, from the honesty of his post-action reports to his talents as a "no-nonsense military administrator" (p. 361), they emphasize the gravity of his choices and actions in the Nelson shooting. Note for instance their terse summary of Davis's involvement in the execution of Captain Jack for killing Brigadier General Edward R. S. Canby: "A murderer executed by another murderer" (p. 413).

Nevertheless, Davis is not an unsympathetic or unattractive figure, and is certainly a colorful one (his language no less blue than his uniform). Despite his distinguished record in the Mexican War, he was denied the West Point appointment that even President James

Knox Polk thought he deserved. He was nevertheless commissioned in the regular Army, and rose to become one of Indiana's notorious, rather than famous, Civil War generals. Although small, frail, and sickly, he performed spectacularly on many fields of battle. Major General William T. Sherman recognized his worth: "Here was a man who could handle a block of infantry with the effectiveness of cavalry, with no excuses or cries for reinforcement. He could make an independent decision without detailed instructions and without having been provided a full ration of intelligence, the mark of a strong, decisive commander" (p. 248). Of Davis's many military successes, the authors focus on two from the Atlanta campaign: his capture of Rome, Georgia, probably the apex of his wartime service, and his "imaginative and energetic use of artillery" at the crucial Battle of Jonesboro, followed by a "bold thrust in heavy double lines" (p. 287).

Undeniably definitive, *Jefferson Davis in Blue* only barely misses being fully exemplary as well. Its major fault lies in its index—there is no entry for the book's subject. What goes before, however, is extraordinarily good. The narrative, superbly documented and mercifully free of hackneyed phrases and stale allusions, flows briskly and clearly. Balanced and judicious, the book gives a fair hearing, and justice, to one of the Civil War's most controversial figures.

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Milledgeville, Georgia. He has published widely on Civil War topics and is the author, with William R. Scaife, of *Joe Brown's Pets: The Georgia Militia, 1861–1865*, forthcoming in 2004 from Mercer University Press.



*For Gold and Glory*  
*Charlie Wiggins and the African-American Racing Car Circuit*  
 By Todd Gould

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002. Pp. xx, 212.  
 Illustrations, appendix, notes, index. \$27.95.)

In *For Gold and Glory*, Todd Gould tells the story of race-car driver Charlie Wiggins and the African-American racing car circuit that he invigorated between 1924 and 1936. Although the auto-racing establishment barred African Americans from its events, including the Indianapolis 500, Wiggins's skills as a mechanic and driver were critical in forging the Gold and Glory Sweepstakes—the premiere event of the African-American racing circuit, held in Indianapolis. Wiggins's perseverance and talents reflected the broader values that African Americans used to fight against discrimination and the Ku Klux Klan that was coming to dominate statewide politics even as Wiggins and his fellow black drivers built a successful racing circuit. As black racers crisscrossed the Midwest, they demonstrated that neither the revitalized KKK nor most racing organizations (such as the American Automobile Association) could prevent African Americans from creating a vibrant and influential racing culture.

Gould pulls together a variety of sources and tells his story primarily by quoting at great length (frequently for

entire paragraphs) interviews with professional and amateur historians, the recollections of Wiggins's protégés, or the accounts of newspaper reporters. Although this mode of storytelling works exceptionally well in the world of filmmaking, an area where Gould has won many awards, it does not work quite as well as the primary storytelling device in a written biography.

As Gould asserts the influence of Wiggins's driving and mechanical skills on the racing world, he touches upon important questions about the role of African Americans in the history of sport and automobile culture. Gould suggests that Wiggins's tremendous impact on racing was due to the multi-racial fraternity he created in his garage—"Charlie's Gang," as they were known—which included black and white drivers, mechanics, and automobile aficionados. Indeed, during the 1930s Wiggins mentored five of the top ten Indy 500 drivers. Although Wiggins's impact seems to have been considerable, the outlines and broader significance of his accomplishments remain fuzzy. A number of questions are never fully answered: What were