



# Winnie Davis: Daughter of the Lost Cause

*Heath Hardage Lee*

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## **Winnie Davis: Daughter of the Lost Cause** Heath Hardage Lee

Varina Anne “Winnie” Davis was born into a war-torn South in June of 1864, the youngest daughter of Confederate president Jefferson Davis and his second wife, Varina Howell Davis. Born only a month after the death of beloved Confederate hero general J.E.B. Stuart during a string of Confederate victories, Winnie’s birth was hailed as a blessing by war-weary Southerners. They felt her arrival was a good omen signifying future victory. But after the Confederacy’s ultimate defeat in the Civil War, Winnie would spend her early life as a genteel refugee and an expatriate abroad.

After returning to the South from German boarding school, Winnie was christened the “Daughter of the Confederacy” in 1886. This role was bestowed upon her by a Southern culture trying to sublimate its war losses. Particularly idolized by Confederate veterans and the United Daughters of the Confederacy, Winnie became an icon of the Lost Cause, eclipsing even her father Jefferson in popularity.

*Winnie Davis: Daughter of the Lost Cause* is the first published biography of this little-known woman who unwittingly became the symbolic female figure of the defeated South. Her controversial engagement in 1890 to a Northerner lawyer whose grandfather was a famous abolitionist, and her later move to work as a writer in New York City, shocked her friends, family, and the Southern groups who worshipped her. Faced with the pressures of a community who violently rejected the match, Winnie desperately attempted to reconcile her prominent Old South history with her personal desire for tolerance and acceptance of her personal choices.

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