



Picture Books

Jim Limber Davis: A Black Orphan in the Confederate White House

Rickey Pittman

Judith Hierstein, illustrator

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It's easy to dismiss Jefferson Davis as simply the President of the Confederacy, which fought to uphold slavery. Children and adults alike may be surprised, therefore, to learn that Jefferson Davis and his compassionate family adopted a young African American orphan, Jim Limber Davis. Based on actual events, this picture book portrays how the First Lady of the Confederacy, Varina Davis, rescued the boy after witnessing a brutal beating by his owner. Jim quickly became an endearing and legitimate member of the Confederate White House when the Davises registered him as a free black child and became his guardians. With Davis's eventual capture, however, came house arrest for the rest of the family and the kidnapping of Jim by Yankee soldiers.

An active member of the Sons of Confederate Veterans and Civil War reenactor, the author is well-suited for this subject. Pittman has written plays, nonfiction, poetry, and short stories, and was a grand prize winner of the Ernest Hemingway Short Story Competition. Illustrator Hierstein teaches digital and video arts and has illustrated the *Toby Belfer Series* and *The Pilgrims' Thanksgiving from A to Z*. Her muted watercolors, some based on existing photographs, convey the range of emotions throughout the narration. They also depict many contrasts, from the grand interior and exterior of the Confederate White House, to a forced life in a Confederate camp when the Yankees seized Richmond; from a very young, simply clothed Jim and his parents on the title page, to the Davis's fine fashion featured in the rest of the book.

An epilogue for adults explains that Jim's disappearance remains one of the great remaining unsolved mysteries of the Civil War. The author's engaging story format never deviates from historical facts, yet handles the issue of slavery in a manner that is appropriate for upper elementary-aged children. This little-known, eye-opening account of Jim Limber Davis raises many intriguing questions. Pittman knows how to keep history alive.