

# Revolution and War in the Hemisphere

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**C O N N E X I O N S**

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# Chapter 1

## U.S. Civil War

### 1.1 History and Memory: A Case Study of the Confederacy<sup>1</sup>

#### 1.1.1 History and Memory: A Case Study of the Confederacy

Although the U.S. Civil War officially ended with Confederate General Robert E. Lee's surrender to Union General Ulysses S. Grant on April 9, 1865, an unofficial war began at that moment that would continue to divide the North from the South. Defeated southerners were determined to prevent a true Reconstruction of society along the lines of racial equality and instead continued their racial battles via the construction of a "Lost Cause" mythology. Building monuments and memorials to fallen soldiers, Confederate society molded history to demonstrate an ideal southern society, with a blind eye to any faults. Southern women, in particular the United Daughters of the Confederacy, joined together to garner support for this reimagined ideal of southern history. Within the work *Handbook of Song & Rhymes: For Annual Reunions of Texas Camps of the United Confederate Veterans*<sup>2</sup> available online as part of the 'Our Americas' Archive Partnership<sup>3</sup> (a digital collaboration on the hemispheric Americas), the "Lost Cause" mythology takes center stage. This module explores how educators can help their students move towards a real understanding of these supporters of the South. Even though the opinions of these personages are odious to many people, they are important historically and their lives and actions convey vital messages about the relationship between history and memory.

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<sup>1</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m34111/1.3/>>.

<sup>2</sup>See the file at <<http://cnx.org/content/m34111/latest/http://hdl.handle.net/1911/22024>>

<sup>3</sup>See the file at <<http://cnx.org/content/m34111/latest/http://oaap.rice.edu/>>

**General Robert E. Lee**

**Figure 1.1:** General Robert E. Lee, depicted within this engraving by A. Robin (ca. 1860-1870) was seen as a hero of the Confederacy. Numerous Confederate and Lost Cause ballads focused on Lee's exploits in battle.

The *Handbook* would be most useful if presented as part of the transition between the Civil War (1861-1865) and Reconstruction (1865-1877) periods. The lectures and activities could then continue into the discussion of the racial conflicts and violence within the South (lynching, Jim Crow) of the 1890s and beyond. Intended for Confederate reunions, the work is also dedicated to a local Texas leader of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC). The UDC was established in 1894 and quickly grew in number across the South. For more information on the UDC see Karen Cox's *Dixie's Daughters* (2003). After one year there were 20 chapters, by the second year there were 89, and the third year witnessed 138 chapters (Cox, 28). Through songs and poems such as "Old Kentucky Home" and "Bonnie Blue Flag" the UDC and other memorial associations celebrated a 'perfect' South that had been disrupted by what they viewed as the improper and selfish actions of northern aggressors.

### Confederate Women



**Figure 1.2:** This photo (ca. 1912) depicts two women who belonged to the United Daughters of the Confederacy. In particular, note their conservative attire and memorial pins and ribbons.

The role of women is one entrypoint into an analysis of the *Handbook*. Following the defeat of white southern manhood in the South, historians have posited that the region experienced a gender crisis in which men felt emasculated (see works by LeeAnn Whites and Laura Edwards). This argument is plausible considering the efforts that southern women took to reestablish traditional gender roles in the years following the war. As historian W. Scott Poole states, “they rejected modernity outright” (17). In this exercise, ask students to look through the *Handbook* searching for songs and poems that highlight southern womanhood. Then, create a diagram that lists the various traits of womanhood during this period. Writings such as “The Southern Girl” would be particularly useful for this activity. Students could also explore how the southern white masculine ideal, as represented via Robert E. Lee, was similar to and different from feminine ideals. How is “The Sword of Robert Lee” a masculine ballad?

When dealing with historical figures it is sometimes difficult to recognize the fact that these individuals were possessed of true emotions and feelings. The works within the *Handbook* convey these intangibles in a way that more traditional sources fail to do. For example, the songs and rhymes convey, in a general sense, the emotions surrounding death in the Civil War period. Almost every individual in this period in the South was impacted by the death of a loved one, especially as the conflict resulted in approximately 620,000 casualties in the North and South (Johnson, 2009). Works such as “Sweet Bye & Bye” and “Centing on the Old Camp Ground” express the possibility of arriving at an idyllic Old South after death. In this case, it would be useful to pair an individual poem/song with a chapter from Drew Gilpin Faust’s recent work *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (2008). After this exercise, students will begin to understand the challenges of living in a society where an entire generation had essentially disappeared.

### Confederate Monument



**Figure 1.3:** This image (ca. 1914) shows the grandson of Confederate General Robert E. Lee speaking at the dedication of a Confederate Monument at Arlington National Cemetery.

Finally, the *Handbook* represents only one part of the larger process of “Lost Cause” memory production. As Karen Cox contends, “UDC members aspired to transform military defeat into a political and cultural victory, where states’ rights and white supremacy remained intact” (1). To that end, Confederate sympathizers manipulated history to serve their purposes. In particular, they would focus on educating children in this ‘new history’ of the South. The question can be posed to students: how does memory impact history? Furthermore, if educators would like to make a broader point about memory they can consult the work *Lone Star Pasts* (2007) edited by Gregg Cantrell and Elizabeth Hayes Turner. This text contains multiple essays, all of which focus on memory and the production of history. The questioning of history and memory provides a unique opportunity to analyze the constructed nature of historical inquiry.

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## 1.2 The Civil War Through Contemporary Accounts: The Diary of Alexander Hobbs<sup>4</sup>

The American Civil War generated countless writings from contemporary participants both in the North and South. The conflict witnessed an unprecedented outpouring of private diaries and letters written by soldiers in the field and families and friends on the home front. And, hundreds of post-war memoirs captured the contested recollections and memories of the nation's central crisis. Historians have long utilized these collective accounts as essential elements to craft an historical narrative of the "late unpleasantness." Scholars, thus, have chronicled the course and conduct of the war through the actual voices spoken between 1861 and 1865. These contemporary writings, however, transcend substantive context and underscore the emotion and comprehension of peoples as they endured the chaos, upheaval, and stress of modern war. This module explores the uses and utility of one of these primary accounts: the diary of Alexander Hobbs<sup>5</sup>, which is housed at Rice University's Woodson Research Center in Houston, Texas. Scholars and teachers alike can find much value in this revealing, yet relatively brief journal. Hobbs, a private in the 42nd Massachusetts Infantry Regiment, reflected on his role as a northern soldier, his first and only journey to the Deep South, the distinct wartime culture of the Texas and Louisiana Gulf Coasts, the immorality of slavery, death, the battle of Galveston in January 1863, and life as a prisoner of war.

### Page One of the Hobbs Diary

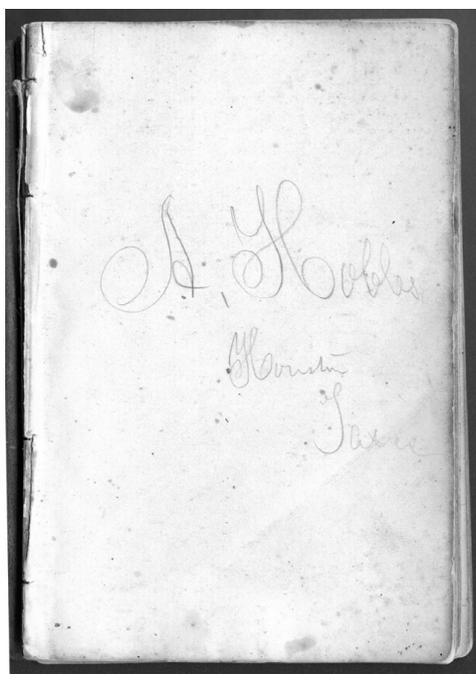


Figure 1.4

At first glance, the Hobbs diary appears somewhat different from "traditional" first-hand accounts of the Civil War. The reader will not find any reference to Robert E. Lee, Ulysses S. Grant, Gettysburg, or the grand military campaigns in Virginia. Hobbs was assigned far from these famous figures, and he instead

<sup>4</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m38587/1.3/>>.

<sup>5</sup>See the file at <<http://cnx.org/content/m38587/latest/http://hdl.handle.net/1911/26591>>

chronicled lesser-known Civil War-era names: William Renshaw, the *U. S. S. Harriet Lane*, and Carrollton, Louisiana. Thus, the diary, which covers Hobbs's military service between November 1862 and August 1863, offers an unusually candid window into wartime life along the Gulf Coast, the primary locale in which Hobbs served. His unit was raised in 1862 near Boston, stopped briefly in New York City on its southern journey, and skirted the coast at Key West, Florida, and Ship Island, Mississippi. Hobbs and the 42<sup>nd</sup> Massachusetts then spent several days in New Orleans, a substantial prize of war captured by the Union several months prior to Hobbs's arrival. In late December 1862, half of Hobbs's unit was assigned to Texas, where, on January 1, 1863, they fought in the battle of Galveston. Hobbs and his comrades were captured and transferred to Houston where they spent the next two months as prisoners of war. In February 1863, Hobbs was paroled and embarked on a journey from Texas to Louisiana over land and water to rejoin the other half of his regiment at New Orleans. Finally, in the summer of 1863, those in the 42<sup>nd</sup> Massachusetts (including Hobbs) who had survived the diseases garnered by the swampy marsh lands of the Texas and Louisiana coasts were sent back to Boston where their unit was officially disbanded.

### Hobbs's Hand-Drawn Picture of the Battle of Galveston

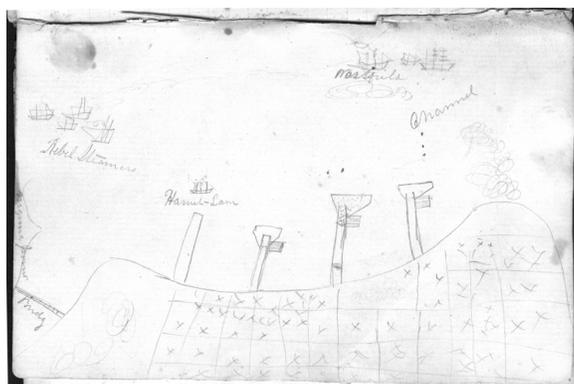


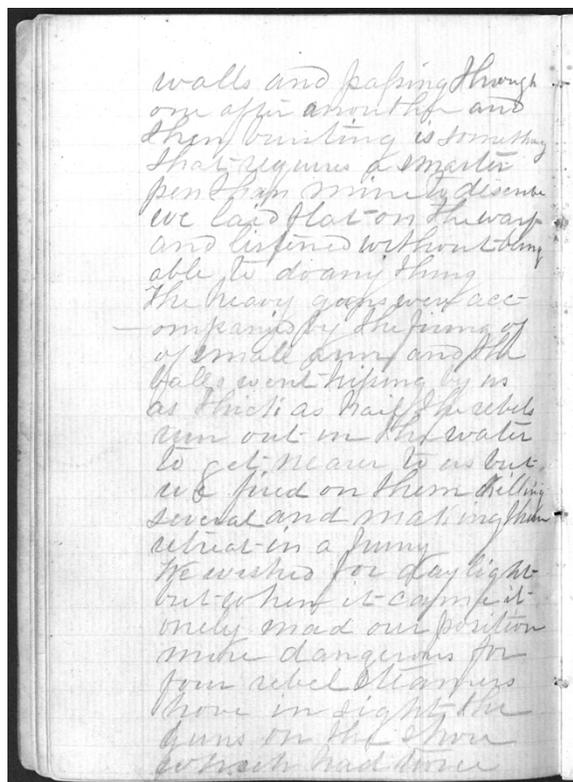
Figure 1.5

Alexander Hobbs's experiences clearly were atypical of many Civil War soldiers. He did not undergo the constant campaigning reflective of military life in Virginia, Tennessee, or Georgia, nor did his unit engage in multiple large-scale battles. Instead, the very nature and day-to-day accounts of his service allowed Hobbs to ruminate on traditionally under-valued aspects of the wartime experience: perceptions of civilian culture in the Gulf South, the nebulous question of Confederate loyalty as perceived through northern eyes, and interactions with civilians in Texas as a prisoner of war. Readers will quickly glean from his writings rich and varied depictions of wartime life in the regions far removed from the "principal" war in Virginia. For example, when his unit sojourned at Key West Hobbs wrote, "to us who had never been at the south the trees and fruit looked really pleasant." And, while he was stationed briefly outside New Orleans, Hobbs commented, "The scenery on the banks of the river for the most part has been delightful. [B]eautiful groves of orange trees which hung full of the golden fruit looked to us very [*sic*] inviting."

Although these perceptions certainly reveal how a young man from Massachusetts witnessed his first trip to the Deep South, Civil War teachers would benefit more from Hobbs's detailed treatment of the war along the Gulf Coast and his explicit criticisms of slavery. Teachers can use Hobbs's entries on the battle of Galveston to compare to more famous Civil War battles such as Shiloh, Antietam, or Gettysburg. Hobbs demonstrates how battles on the Texas coast, such as Galveston, were relatively small, involved joint army, navy, and marine operations, and were sometimes conducted by uninspiring commanders. Based on Hobbs's characterization of the fight at Galveston, teachers can ask students to consider the similarities and differences between battles in the East fought by the enormous Armies of the Potomac and Northern

Virginia and those in the lower Trans-Mississippi Valley waged by small coastal and garrison units.

**Diary Excerpt, January 1, 1863**



**Figure 1.6**

Hobbs's comments on slavery add further texture to the diary and offer a unique perspective to existing historiographical debates. Teachers as well as historians immersed in the current literature on Civil War soldiers' outlooks on slavery will undoubtedly find Hobbs's writings useful and penetrating. Several days after being captured as a prisoner of war, Hobbs commented, "Our negroes have gone to Galveston to build fortifications. The[y] held a prayer meeting last night in our yard and . . . I believe they had the presence of the blessed master. I honestly believe [there] will be more slaves found in heaven than southerners." A few weeks later, Hobbs witnessed and critiqued the following episode: "Six coloured men have been taken away to prison four of them belonging to the *Harriet Lane* and two our Col. & Surgeons's boys. [A]ll but one or two were free born but all are now to be sold together. [S]uch acts only stir up a hatred to the institution of slavery . . . [W]e were never born to be held captive." These comments reflect the central theme in Chandra Manning's recent work, *What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War* (2007). Manning argues that slavery was the most important category to soldiers on both sides of the war. Union soldiers particularly, according to Manning, discovered that emancipation made the Union stronger and worth saving, and came to supported equality for blacks.

Finally, Hobbs's writings raise the murky issue of Confederate loyalty. Scholars have traditionally fallen into two schools of thought on this subject. On the one hand are those who posit that the Confederacy crumbled from within on account of internal fissures combined with a lack of national identity and purpose (Beringer et al., 1986). Other scholars suggest that many white southerners, in spite of hardship and low

morale, remained dedicated Confederate nationalists continually in search of an independent southern nation (Gallagher, 1997). As a prisoner of war in Houston, Hobbs continually commented on his comrades trading goods with Confederate Texans. Although he also suggested that these civilians continued to praise the Confederacy, the existence of trade networks with the enemy for the sake of basic survival raises new questions on the soundness of Confederate loyalty. Teachers can use these selections to ask students to determine the relationships between dedication to country, family, or daily sustenance. Hobbs's writings underscore what Gary W. Gallagher has recently called for in future studies on the Confederate experience. He suggests that historians move beyond the existing binary between "internal defeatist" and "diehard nationalist," and instead define the neutral middle-ground of those white southerners who did their best merely to survive the war (Gallagher, 2009).

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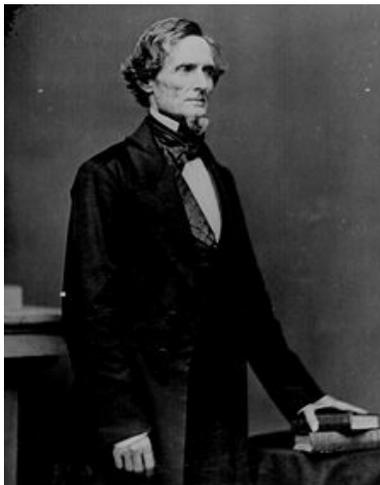
## 1.3 Rare Letters of Jefferson Davis<sup>6</sup>

### 1.3.1 Rare Letters of Jefferson Davis

Jefferson Davis (1808-1889) led a varied career, indicative of the controversial place he occupies within United States history. He spent his early adulthood in the U.S. military, then years later drummed up a volunteer force to fight in the Mexican-American War. After the war, he settled on a life in politics. In his first attempt, he was elected to the U.S. congress as a senator from Mississippi. He served for a brief period as the Secretary of War under Franklin Pierce; when his term ended in 1857, he returned to his seat in the Senate. In the years leading up to the Civil War, he actually opposed secession and fought hard for a compromise to ensure the integrity of the Union. When he learned of Mississippi's decision to secede, however, Davis returned home and was promptly elected to a six-year term as the first (and only) President of the Confederate States of America. After the Confederacy's defeat, he was banned from ever holding political office, yet he was lionized in the South for the remainder of his life. While the nation at large officially branded him a traitor, an entire region continued to deem him a hero. Today, many schools throughout the South are named in his honor. The ambiguity surrounding Davis's legacy ties into the social and political fissures within the U.S. that have formed historically along the lines of race and region.

<sup>6</sup>This content is available online at <<http://cnx.org/content/m38438/1.2/>>.

### Jefferson Davis



**Figure 1.7:** A photograph of Davis during his time as President of the Confederate States of America.

The ‘Our Americas’ Archive Partnership<sup>7</sup> – a collection of primary documents dedicated to the study of inter-American cultural and historical relations – possesses a set of rare and unpublished letters authored by Davis. Held at Rice University’s Woodson Research Center, which also contains other materials by and about Davis (including a clothing order<sup>8</sup> on his behalf), these letters can be broken down into three chronological periods: a pre-Civil War era that sees Davis as a functionary of the U.S. government (four letters), Davis’s presidency during the Civil War (two letters), and a brief period at the very end of Davis’s life (two letters). These documents form a remarkable, if microscopic, arch to his life and career and will be of great value to the scholar and student alike interested in Davis’s biography. This module will offer a brief overview of each timeframe as well as some of the letters contained therein. For a more detailed examination of Davis and his historical context, see William Davis’s *Jefferson Davis: The Man and His Hour* and George Rable’s *The Confederate Republic: A Revolution against Politics*. One can find the majority of his published writings in *The Papers of Jefferson Davis*, edited by Haskell Monroe, James McIntosh, and Lynda Crist.

The earliest letter in the archive dates from December 10, 1846<sup>9</sup>. It is written from Davis to his wife, Varina “Winnie” Davis, during his time spent fighting in the Mexican-American War. This document offers dual insights into both his early military career and his personal/family life. He describes for his wife the movements of Santa Anna and the Mexican Army, then tells her about another military wife in New Orleans to whom he would like to introduce her. The remaining letters in the pre-Civil War timeframe come from the 1850s, while Davis was serving as an elected official in the federal government. All of them find Davis either recommending or agreeing to recommend someone for a post in the U.S. military. Here we are left to conclude that his opinion was a valued one, especially on military matters, an assumption which is borne out, of course, by his aforementioned position within the War Department under President Pierce.

One of the Civil War-era letters is part of a correspondence between Davis and General Joseph Johnston, and the other contains a set of updates from Davis to Thomas Moore, then governor of Louisiana. Written in response to Johnston’s March 3, 1862 letter,<sup>10</sup> Davis’s brief note<sup>11</sup> addressed the general’s concerns over the inadequacy of the South’s roadways and resources for the logistics of warfare. Davis cannot offer much

<sup>7</sup>See the file at <<http://cnx.org/content/m38438/latest/http://oaap.rice.edu/>>

<sup>8</sup>See the file at <<http://cnx.org/content/m38438/latest/http://dspacetest.rice.edu/handle/1911/7581>>

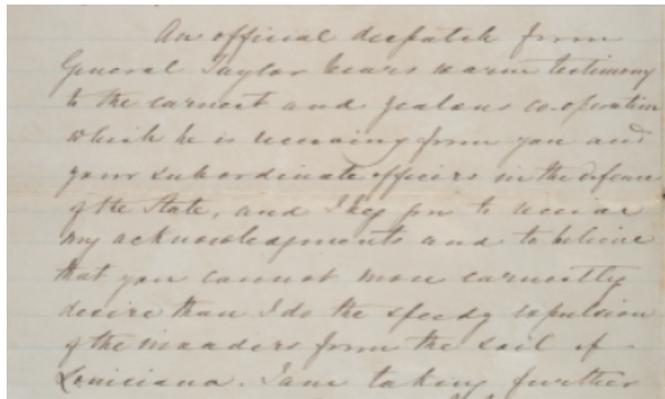
<sup>9</sup>See the file at <<http://cnx.org/content/m38438/latest/http://hdl.handle.net/1911/27218>>

<sup>10</sup>See the file at <<http://cnx.org/content/m38438/latest/http://hdl.handle.net/1911/27262>>

<sup>11</sup>See the file at <<http://cnx.org/content/m38438/latest/http://hdl.handle.net/1911/27262>>

reassurance, and one can sense in this exchange the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of the Confederacy's ambitions. In his letter to Moore dated September 29, 1862<sup>12</sup>, Davis is clearly trying to assuage the governor's anxieties about the vulnerabilities of his state, in particular, to the invading Union forces. Davis writes, "An official dispatch from General Taylor bears warm testimony to the earnest and zealous co-operation which he is receiving from you and your subordinate officers in the defence of the State, and I beg your to receive my acknowledgments and to believe that you cannot more earnestly desire than I do the speedy repulsion of the invaders from the soil of Louisiana" (see Figure 2). The pressure upon Davis is palpable in this document, as he struggles to strengthen the resolve and maintain the loyalty of those under his leadership.

**Letter from Jefferson Davis to Gov. Thomas O. Moore, Sept. 29, 1862**



**Figure 1.8:** A portion of the letter from Davis to Governor Moore<sup>13</sup>.

The final two letters, one from 1887<sup>14</sup> and the other from 1888<sup>15</sup>, were both written at Davis's Beauvoir estate in Biloxi, Mississippi, where he spent his final years. Addressed to Dr. W. H. Sanders, the first letter is a short one simply declining an invitation due to illness. The second letter, to Martin W. Phillips, is a much longer one that finds Davis in a reflective mood. He states early in the text, "Many sad changes have occurred within that time but the saddest of all to me is the tendency in our own people to "harmonize" away the principles for which they gave property + life hoping thereby to preserve what was to them of greater value" (1). Here Davis is lamenting what many supporters of the South after the Civil War termed "The Lost Cause." It is difficult from this brief snippet to determine if at the end of his life Davis remained invested in the specific principles for which the Confederacy fought, or if he was attached in a more romanticized fashion to the idea of the Confederacy itself. Regardless, this relatively lengthy letter (four pages) provides a fascinating peek into the private thoughts of such a major historical figure during his waning days.

These unpublished letters, accessible physically and digitally through the Americas Archive, offer exciting pedagogical opportunities for a variety of classroom settings. They would of course be valuable within any course on nineteenth-century U.S. history, or one more specifically focused on the U.S. South. Biographical approaches to Davis either individually or in concordance with other major U.S. political figures would likewise benefit from these documents. Yet another use for these letters – perhaps a less obvious one – would be in relation to the field of U.S. literary studies. The writings of other political figures, such as Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, have found their way into the literature classroom (and, in fact, Davis authored two books during his later years, *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government* and *A Short*

<sup>12</sup>See the file at <<http://cnx.org/content/m38438/latest/http://hdl.handle.net/1911/26582>>

<sup>13</sup>See the file at <<http://cnx.org/content/m38438/latest/http://hdl.handle.net/1911/26582>>

<sup>14</sup>See the file at <<http://cnx.org/content/m38438/latest/http://hdl.handle.net/1911/27220>>

<sup>15</sup>See the file at <<http://cnx.org/content/m38438/latest/http://hdl.handle.net/1911/27276>>

*History of the Confederate States of America*). As the category of literature continues to shift to include different figure and various types of texts (letters, diaries, journals, etc.), archives become invaluable tools in providing new material to process, study, and interpret. Archives such as the Americas Archive and letters such as these by Jefferson Davis demand that we question what precisely constitutes “literature” and who exactly counts as the producers of “literature.”

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