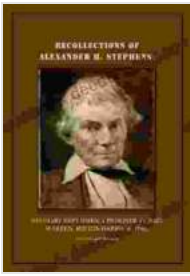


# Recollections of Alexander Stephens: A Window into the Mind of the Confederate Vice President

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## RECOLLECTIONS OF ALEXANDER H. STEPHENS:: His diary kept when a prisoner at Fort Warren, Boston Harbour, 1865, Annotated and Illustrated. by E.J. Fleming

★★★★☆ 4.1 out of 5

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Alexander Stephens, the Vice President of the Confederate States of America, was a complex and enigmatic figure. An ardent defender of slavery and states' rights, he nonetheless possessed a keen intellect and a deep understanding of the human condition. His Recollections, published posthumously in 1914, provide a unique glimpse into the mind of this enigmatic man. Through his own words, Stephens offers insights into the motivations and justifications for secession, the debates and conflicts within the Confederate government, and his personal experiences during the Civil War. This essay will explore the multifaceted nature of Alexander Stephens, as revealed in his Recollections, and consider the significance of his writings in understanding the complexities of the American Civil War.

### Stephens's Early Life and Political Career

Alexander Stephens was born in Crawfordsville, Georgia, in 1812. He attended the University of Georgia and began practicing law in 1834. Entering politics, he served in the Georgia legislature and the United States

House of Representatives. As a member of the House, Stephens emerged as a strong advocate for states' rights and slavery. He opposed the abolitionist movement and argued that slavery was a positive good for both blacks and whites.

## **The Secession Crisis and the Formation of the Confederacy**

With the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860 and his subsequent call for the abolition of slavery in the territories, Stephens believed that the South had no choice but to secede from the Union. He played a leading role in the secession convention of Georgia and was elected Vice President of the newly formed Confederate States of America. As Vice President, Stephens was a key advisor to President Jefferson Davis and helped shape the Confederacy's policies.

## **Stephens's Views on Slavery and States' Rights**

Stephens's Recollections provide a detailed account of his beliefs and justifications for secession. He argued that slavery was "a moral, social, and political blessing" and that the Southern states had the right to secede from the Union to protect their way of life. Stephens believed that the federal government had overstepped its constitutional authority and that the Southern states were justified in asserting their independence.

Stephens's views on slavery were deeply rooted in his understanding of race and social hierarchy. He believed that blacks were inferior to whites and that slavery was a necessary institution to maintain social order. While he acknowledged that slavery had its "evils," he argued that it was a far better system than the alternatives, such as emancipation or black self-government.

Stephens's Recollections also reveal his complex views on the nature of the Union. He argued that the Union was a "compact" between sovereign states and that any state had the right to withdraw if it felt its interests were threatened. Stephens believed that the federal government had no legitimate authority over the states and that the Southern states had a duty to resist any attempt by the North to coerce them into submission.

## **Stephens and the Confederate Government**

As Vice President, Stephens was a key figure in the Confederate government. He served as President Davis's closest advisor and played a leading role in shaping the Confederacy's policies. Stephens was a strong advocate for states' rights and opposed any attempts to centralize power in the hands of the Confederate government. He also worked to build support for the Confederacy among foreign powers and to secure diplomatic recognition for the new nation.

Stephens's relationship with President Davis was often strained. Davis, a strong believer in centralized authority, clashed with Stephens over the scope of the Confederate government's power. Stephens also criticized Davis's leadership style and his handling of the war effort. Despite these differences, Stephens remained loyal to Davis throughout the war and continued to serve as his Vice President until the Confederacy's collapse.

Stephens played a significant role in the debates and conflicts within the Confederate government. He opposed the suspension of habeas corpus and the conscription of soldiers, arguing that such measures were unconstitutional and would alienate the Southern people. Stephens also criticized the Confederate Congress for its inefficiency and lack of vision.

## **Stephens's Personal Experiences during the Civil War**

Stephens's Recollections provide a vivid account of his personal experiences during the Civil War. He witnessed the battles of Manassas and Gettysburg and described the horrors of war firsthand. Stephens was deeply affected by the loss of life and the destruction of the South. He became disillusioned with the war effort and began to question the Confederacy's chances of success.

In 1864, Stephens met with Abraham Lincoln at the Hampton Roads Conference to discuss the possibility of ending the war. The conference failed to achieve its objectives, but Stephens's account of the meeting provides valuable insights into the different perspectives on the war and the challenges of reconciliation.

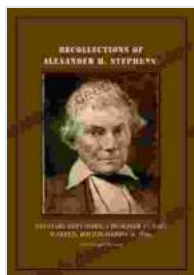
## **Stephens's Postwar Years and the Legacy of the Confederacy**

After the Confederate surrender, Stephens was arrested and imprisoned for treason. He was released in 1865 and returned to Georgia, where he resumed his law practice and political career. Stephens opposed the Reconstruction policies of the Radical Republicans and argued for a more lenient approach to the defeated South. He was elected to the United States Senate in 1873 but was denied his seat due to his role in the Confederacy.

Stephens remained active in politics until his death in 1883. He advocated for reconciliation between the North and South and for the preservation of the Confederacy's legacy. Stephens's Recollections, published posthumously in 1914, are a valuable historical document that provides

insights into the mind of one of the most important figures in American history.

Alexander Stephens was a complex and enigmatic figure who played a key role in the American Civil War. His Recollections provide a unique glimpse into the mind of this man and offer insights into the motivations and justifications for secession, the debates and conflicts within the Confederate government, and his personal experiences during the war. Stephens's writings are essential reading for anyone interested in understanding the complexities of the American Civil War and the legacy of the Confederacy.



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