BY ANDREW VANACORE

A newspaper article on the ceremony in 1911 when the Jefferson Davis monument was put up says, the crowd numbered several thousand. The country's most basic contradiction in this way. For better or worse, it is apparent its contradiction that residents of New Orleans will not have to live with any more, at least in the form of a bronze Davis staring out over Canal Street.

The monument to Jefferson Davis, before the city took it down Thursday morning, was also a monument to glaring contradictions. Davis, the only man to serve as president of the Confederacy, was a slave owner, an avowed believer in the superiority of the white race and an opponent of black rights ever since the Civil War ended. Yet among the odd collection of disbands standing vigil around the statue recently was a black man with a Confederate flag stitched to his leather vest.

Then there was the statue's inscription, describing Davis as a “Soldier-State-man-Patriot.”

“Patrick! It seems like a strange thing to say about a man who ‘came to lead the great struggle to destroy the United States,'” Davis biographer William J. Cooper Jr. puts it.

But Davis really did identify with the Union he fought to defend.

“He cherished the knowledge that his own father had been a Revolutionary soldier,” Cooper writes, and he considered the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution his political testament.

He took an oath of loyalty as a student at West Point, fought in the Mexican War and prided more than any other office his role as a U.S. senator. After his home state of Mississippi voted to secede from the Union in 1861, Davis called the day of his farewell address in the Senate chamber “the saddest day of my life.”

The city of New Orleans seems to have felt the same contradictory pull when the Davis monument was unveiled on a chilly day in 1911: loyalty to an undivided union and a sentimental attachment to the heroes of a rebellion.

Contemporary records describe a scene that is easily recognizable and also strikingly alien.

There was a parade — typical enough for New Orleans — to the site of the new statue from the already-standing monument to Robert E. Lee. The mayor and governor marched along with the Boy Scouts and other dignitaries. The archbishop was supposed to give the invocation, but missed his train. Girls from the city's public schools sang songs for the statue, as Mrs. A.V. Roberts, Davis' niece, remarked.

Remarks that day from Gov. Jared Y. Sanders captured the paradox.

“We can be loyal to the Stars and Stripes, but let no one seek to tear away the tender sentiment we hold for the Stars and Bars.

We can love the United States of America, but down deep in our hearts there is a sweet love and reverence for the dead and gone Confederacy.

We can love our country and fight for it, but let none try to destroy in our hearts and breasts the feelings which we have when we think of the days that used to be.”

If there was any controversy at the time about putting up a monument to Davis, it is hard to discover. New Orleans may have been willing to grapple with the contradiction of a patron who led a rebellion, but not with the central contradiction involved in the Civil War: that a country devoted to the idea that “all men are created equal” would also hold millions of men and women in bondage.

Davis, as Cooper explains, never saw these things as opposites. He had grown up among his father's slaves on a modest farm in Mississippi. His own slaves, some of them purchased in New Orleans, had cleared the plantation where he grew cotton along a bend in the Mississippi River. He saw the arrangement as completely natural and as beneficial to both owner and slave.

In his last address to the Senate, he insisted that the promise of equality enshrined by the Declaration of Independence