

Journal Divided – “Honest Abe”

Excerpt from Chapter 16 of Michael Burlingame’s *Abraham Lincoln: A Life* (pgs 1717-1720)

Link to full Chapter Sixteen

<http://www.knox.edu/documents/pdfs/LincolnStudies/Burlingame,%20Vol%201,%20Chap%2016.pdf>

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Shortly after the Chicago Convention, Joshua Giddings assured Lincoln with “certain knowledge” that “your selection was made upon two grounds,” first that “you are an honest man,” and second that “you are not in the hands of corrupt or dishonest men.”¹ Seward suffered by contrast, and some of the senator’s backers acknowledged that they “must not blame the people of the United States for being afraid that the election of a leading New York politician to the Presidency would only displace the existing corruption at Washington by a new importation of venality and political knavery from Albany.”² A New York delegate, former Lieutenant-Governor Henry R. Selden, acknowledged that all the forces working against Seward would have been insufficient to defeat him “had not his opponents strengthened their arguments by allusion to the corruptions practiced at Albany during the past winter. No man entertained the idea that Mr Seward was connected with them, but it was charged that his friends were, and it was pretended that if elected the same practices would be transmitted to Washington.”³

Hostility to corruption not only led to Lincoln’s nomination, it also helped assure his victory in one of the most crucial elections in American history. The public was fed up with steamship lobbies, land-grant bribery, hireling journalists, the spoils system, rigged political conventions, and cost overruns on government projects.

¹ Giddings to Lincoln, Chicago, 19 May 1860, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. Giddings also argued that “Lincoln was selected on account of his location, not from objections to Seward or to Chase, but because of being a Western man located in Illinois he was supposed able to carry that State and Indiana and was acceptable to Pennsylvania. It is also true that some of the dough-faces seemed to think him more popular, because his antislavery sentiments had been less prominent.” Giddings to George W. Julian, Jefferson, [Ohio], 25 May 1860, Giddings-Julian Papers, Library of Congress.

² “Candidates for the Presidency,” *The Independent* (New York), 24 May 1860.

³ Speech at Rochester, n.d., quoted in the Springfield (Massachusetts) *Republican*, 5 June 1860. See also William Cullen Bryant. “Mr. Seward and the Chicago Convention,” New York *Evening Post*, 23 May 1860, and Frank W. Ballard to Charles Sumner, New York, 14 November 1860, Sumner Papers, Harvard University.