

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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New Englanders stressed the corruption issue heavily. The Concord *New Hampshire Statesman* argued that Lincoln’s lack of national political experience was “an element of strength,” for it meant that he had not succumbed “to the gross corruptions so prevalent in Washington.” The nation “is suffering for want of an incorruptible Chief Magistrate; a man who will indignantly crush out . . . and drive into perpetual exile the inexorable army of blood-suckers that hang around the democratic camp at Washington This troop is Legion, and hover over the Treasury like Cossacks in the rear of the French army on its retreat from Moscow. . . . A change cannot be for the worse, and may be for the better; then let us have a change. Abraham Lincoln is ‘honest, capable and friendly to the constitution.’ Let us put him in [as] president, and drive all the treasury rats away.”¹

In Connecticut, the *Hartford Courant* declared that “[o]ne of the strongest arguments in favor of the election of Lincoln to the Presidency is his HONESTY” and “old-fashioned integrity and firmness.” The people “all want the government administrated with integrity and economy. We have tried two dishonest Administrations of the Democratic party. Let us try them no longer, but place the government in the hands of uncorrupted and incorruptible men.”²

After winning the presidency, Lincoln told a visitor: “All through the campaign my friends have been calling me ‘Honest Old Abe,’ and I have been elected mainly on that cry.”³ His reputation as an honest man was as important as his reputation as a foe of slavery.

¹ Concord *New Hampshire Statesman*, 26 May, 14 July 1860, in Lex Renda, *Running on the Record: Civil War-Era Politics in New Hampshire* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 91-92.

² *Hartford Courant*, 24 May 1860.

³ J. K. Morehead, interview with John G. Nicolay, Washington, 12 and 13 May 1880, Michael Burlingame, ed., *An Oral History of Abraham Lincoln: John G. Nicolay’s Interviews and Essays* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 41. Cf. Ward Hill Lamon, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln: From His Birth to His Inauguration as President* (Boston: Osgood, 1872), 460.