



## "Why Lincoln Won in 1860"

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<http://housedivided.dickinson.edu/sites/journal/2010/10/18/why-lincoln-won-1860/>

Although Lincoln won only 39.9% of the popular vote (far more than the 29% which the runner-up, Douglas, received), he took a solid majority of the electoral votes, 180 out of 303. He carried all the Free States except New Jersey, where the Bell, Breckinridge, and Douglas forces created a fusion ticket at the last moment and took 52.1% of the ballots cast. But because some anti-Lincoln voters refused to go for the fusion slate, the Republicans received four of the state's seven electoral votes. According to John Bigelow, "That little State, the property of a railroad company [the Camden and Amboy] which runs through it and twirls it around like a Skewer[,] voted against him because it has the misfortune to be inhabited by two men, each of whom wished to be Secretary of the Navy and hoped by making the State look insecure, to get an offer of terms." Those men were William L. Dayton and William Pennington, former speaker of the U.S. House. Their lackluster support of the ticket was widely criticized.



Lincoln's Election, *Punch Magazine*, Cartoon, 1860

Lincoln's Election, *Punch Magazine*, Cartoon, 1860

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The Republicans triumphed because of their party's unity and the bitter split within the Democracy; because of the rapidly growing antislavery feeling in the North, where the Lecompton Constitution and the Dred Scott decision outraged many who had not voted Republican in 1856; because of the North's ever-intensifying resentment of what it perceived as Southern arrogance, high-handedness, and bullying; because Germans defected from the Democratic ranks; because the Republican economic program appealed both to farmers (with homestead legislation) and to manufacturers and workers (with tariffs) far more than the Democratic economic policies adopted in response to the Panic of 1857; because the rapidly improving economy blunted fears of businessmen as they contemplated a Republican victory; and because of public disgust at the corruption of Democrats, most notably those in the Buchanan administration. Lincoln did especially well among younger voters, newly eligible voters, former nonvoters, rural residents, skilled laborers, members of the middle class, German Protestants, evangelical Protestants, native-born Americans, and most especially former Know Nothings and Whig-Americans.



"King Buchanan Sees the Handwriting on the Wall" Cartoon, 1860

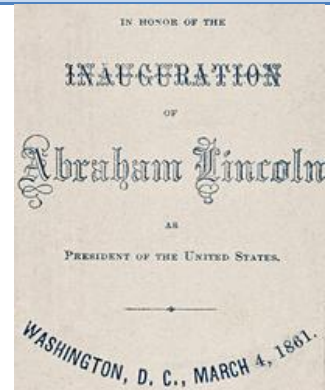


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In the absence of opinion surveys and exit polls, it is difficult to say with precision why these groups were more likely to vote Republican than Democratic or Constitutional Unionist.

Correspondence, newspaper commentary, and other anecdotal sources suggest that Lincoln's victory was in part due to his character, biography, and public record. In July, John A. Kasson reported from Iowa: "I never talk to an audience of farmers without noticing the intense interest as they listen to the story of his early life & trials in making himself what he is, – the ablest & most eminent man in the West." An Ohio farmer praised Lincoln as "a self-made man, who came up a-foot. We like his tact – we like his argumentative powers – we like his logic, and we like the whole man." A resident of Champaign, Illinois, wrote that "[e]very man who is struggling to improve his fortune by honest toil and patient endeavor, feels that in Abraham Lincoln he has a generous and confiding friend, and dignified representative. Instances are daily accumulating, here, of men who from early bias, and the force of party influence, have voted the Democratic ticket; but who now find themselves irresistibly impelled by their reverence for the public virtues of Mr. Lincoln."



Dance Card, Union Ball Inauguration of Abraham Lincoln

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Another Sucker denied that "honest Old Abe Lincoln" thought "a nig[g]er is as good as a poor man" and insisted that the candidate "is a working man" who "respects the poor man a good deal more than drunken old Stephen A Douglas or any of the democratic clique." On the stump, Henry S. Lane of Indiana called Lincoln "an apt illustration of our free institutions." This "obscure child of labor spent a large portion of his life in the humble vocation of farm laborer, and when I look over this vast assembly, composed in part of young men, my heart grows stronger and my hope grows brighter. There listens to me, perhaps, this day, some honest son of toil who will yet reach the . . . position of President." Frank Blair claimed that by choosing a candidate with such a humble background, Republicans demonstrated "that their hearts are with the people." Lincoln "is the representative of the great idea of the Republican party – labor – free labor," Richard Yates told a crowd at Springfield "The poor boy . . . can point to Abraham Lincoln, and straighten himself up and say, 'I have the same right and same opportunity to be President as any other boy.'"



Lincoln's Inauguration March 4, 1861



## Further Reading

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Luebke, Frederick C., ed. *Ethnic Voters and the Election of Lincoln*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971.



**Document 1– Chicago (IL) *Press and Tribune*, “Lincoln’s Hold on the Working-Men,” May 30, 1860**

<http://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/34551>

**Source Citation –**

“Lincoln’s Hold on the Working-Men,” *Chicago (IL) Press and Tribune*, May 30, 1860, p. 2: 3.

**Transcribed Text –**

[Correspondence of the *Press and Tribune*.]

CHAMPAIGN COUNTY, May 23, 1860.

The nomination of LINCOLN has kindled a blaze of glory in Old Champaign. He is preeminently, and without figure of speech, *the candidate of the people*! Every man who is struggling to improve his fortune by honest toil and patient endeavor, feels that in ABRAHAM LINCOLN he has a generous and confiding friend, and dignified representative. Instances are daily accumulating, here, of men who from early bias, and the force of party influence, have voted the Democratic ticket; but who now find themselves irresistibly impelled by their reverence for the public virtues of Mr. LINCOLN, and by the fame which he has won by his talents and industry, to give him their cordial and enthusiastic support. One of my neighbors – a Democrat – relates this incident: Years ago Mr. LINCOLN found him “stalled” in a slough with a heavy load. True to the sympathies of his noble nature, Mr. LINCOLN volunteered his aid – “put his shoulder to the wheel,” and sent the stranger on his way rejoicing. “And now,” continued by Democratic friend, “I have an opportunity to reward his kindness, and I intend to give Mr. LINCOLN the heartiest lift he ever had in his life; and there are four more of my Democratic neighbors who are going to join me.” That’s the way things are working in Champaign county.

Mr. LINCOLN is not a candidate of the politicians. He has not been *groomed* and fitted for the race by a set of jockeys who wished to run him for the stakes they could win; but he is the candidate of *the people*, uncorrupted by ambition or the lust of office. He is the true type of that hopeful industry and determined persevering application, which has achieved our progress in the past, and upon which we must rely for our future prosperity and greatness. More hearts have leaped for joy at the announcement of his nomination, than were ever before gladdened by a like event. The prairies are on fire [for?] Lincoln and Hamlin, and you may look to this county for a report in November next which will make the slave-worshipping Democracy howl.

SANGAMON.



## Document 2– John P. Sanderson to David Davis, November 12, 1860

<http://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/34537>

### Source Citation –

John P. Sanderson to David Davis, November 12, 1860, Philadelphia, PA, Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/alhtml/malhome.html>.

### Transcribed Text –

...In this great achievement all the free states have done nobly, except Jersey, where the result is still in doubt, though I have very little doubt in my mind, it is lost. I am not surprised at it, though I had hoped the moral effect of our October election would save that state. [The?] truth is there was no leadership in that state. Had Mr Dayton been [less sour?] in his disappointment, and exhibited the same magnanimity which [Sen?] Cameron did in our State and followed his example by leading off in an active and efficient [canvas?] of the state, there would now be no doubt about the result; but he failed to do this, and the result is the probable loss of the state. It is true, he [wakened?] up at the heels of [this?] contest, and made some effort to save the state, but it was too late, the favorable moment had [illegible].

What the exact result will be in this state, I am yet unable to say, but I think Lincoln's plurality over the Reading electors will reach, if not exceed, 100,000, and his majority over all cannot fall short, I think of 60 and may exceed 70,000. In our own City, where Foster had about 1800 majority over Curtin, Mr Lincoln now has between 800 and 1000 over all.

Having now performed our part as the sovereigns of the land, Mr Lincoln's labors and troubles only commence, and they will be of the gravest character and responsibilities. That he will meet [them?] in the truest spirit of patriotism, and with the most devoted integrity of purpose, I have not a simple doubt. His whole life and character afford ample [aperance?] of that; and there rests a solemn responsibility upon those of his friends around him to uphold and sustain him in that purpose, and to guard and protect him against the insidious wiles of demagogues and selfish peace hunters....

Very Truly Yours  
J P Sanderson