



Journal Divided – “Why Lincoln Won in 1860”

Excerpt from Chapter 16 of Michael Burlingame’s *Abraham Lincoln: A Life* (pgs 1859-1862)

Link to full Chapter Sixteen

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

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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 303.¹ 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.²

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.”³ 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.⁴

¹ Breckinridge received 72 electoral votes and 848,019 popular votes (18.1% of the total), Bell 39 electoral votes and 590,901 popular votes (18.6% of the total), and Douglas 12 electoral votes and 1,380,202 popular votes (29.5% of the total). These figures are somewhat misleading, for in South Carolina, where Breckinridge’s candidacy was popular, presidential electors were chosen by the legislature, not citizens at the polls. Greeley estimated that Breckinridge probably would have received 50,000 votes in the Palmetto State. Horace Greeley, *Recollections of a Busy Life* (New York: J. B. Ford, 1869), 394n.

² William Gillette, *Jersey Blue: Civil War Politics in New Jersey, 1854-1865* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 102-3.

³ John Bigelow to William Hargreaves, New York, 10 November 1860, Bigelow Papers, New York Public Library. In New Jersey the fusion ticket received 62,801 votes to Lincoln’s 58,234.

⁴ J. P. Sanderson to William Penn Clarke, Philadelphia, 11 November 1860, Clarke Papers, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines; J. P. Sanderson to David Davis, Philadelphia, 12 November 1860, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; Gillette, *Jersey Blue*, 107.