



## Journal Divided – “Lincoln and Know Nothings”

Excerpt from Chapter 16 of Michael Burlingame’s *Abraham Lincoln: A Life* (pgs 1784-1789)

### Link to full Chapter Sixteen

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

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The election hinged on the Fillmore voters of 1856, especially in Indiana and Pennsylvania, where gubernatorial contests were to be held in October, and also in New York. Lincoln realized that he must win over men like “the great high priest of Knownothinigism,” James O. Putnam, the postmaster at Buffalo and a close friend of Millard Fillmore.<sup>1</sup> Putnam, said Lincoln, resembled Weed: “these men ask for just, the same thing – fairness, and fairness only.”<sup>2</sup> In time Putnam came to admire Lincoln vastly, calling him “one of the most remarkable speakers of English, living.” For “logical eloquence, straight-forwardness, clearness of statement, sincerity that commands your admiration and assent, and a compact stren[g]th of argument,” Lincoln was “infinitely superior to Douglas,” he thought.<sup>3</sup> As for Bell, Putnam acknowledged that the Tennessean “has the respect and confidence of every man of American antecedents, but of what earthly service can 20,000 or 30,000 votes be to him in New York?” Putnam deserted the Bell forces because “he saw no chance for them to carry the Northern States, and his only hope in defeating the Democratic party, and thereby promoting the interests of the country, was in a union with the Republicans upon the Chicago platform and nominees.”<sup>4</sup> (As president, Lincoln was to name Putnam consul at Le Havre.)

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<sup>1</sup> Albany Argus, 15 September 1860, in Richard J. Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 430n90.

<sup>2</sup> Lincoln to Leonard Swett, Springfield, 30 May 1860, Basler, ed., *Collected Works of Lincoln*, 4:57.

<sup>3</sup> Putnam to Leonard Swett, n.p., n.d., copied in Swett to Lincoln, n.p., [July 1860], Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>4</sup> Letter by Putnam to the Republicans of Wyoming, New York, n.d., *Albany Evening Journal*, 12 July 1860; speech by Putnam at Fredonia, N.Y., *New York Tribune*, 5 June 1860. See also Putnam’s public letter, Fredonia, 13 July 1860, *New York Tribune*, 17 July 1860.