



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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Thompson, whose influence with the Midwestern Know Nothings was considerable, assured them that Lincoln could not “be led into ultraism by radical men” and that his administration “will be national.” In choosing the Illinoisan over Seward, the delegates at Chicago “demonstrated to the country that the great body of the Republicans are conservative.” Lincoln’s “strength consists in his conservatism. His own principles are conservative.” Thompson asked Lincoln if it would be advisable to cite his 1849 vote against the Gott resolution in order to allay the fears of conservatives; the candidate hesitated to give permission, lest he alienate antislavery radicals.¹ Lincoln replied: “If my record would hurt any, there is no hope that it will be over-looked; so that if friends can help any with it, they may as well do so. Of course, due caution and circumspection, will be used.”² A week later, Horace Greeley pointed to Lincoln’s vote on the Gott resolution as proof of his conservatism.³

¹ Schuyler Colfax to Lincoln, Washington, 30 May 1860, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; John G. Nicolay, “Lincoln in the Campaign of 1860,” in Burlingame, ed., *Oral History of Lincoln*, 93; speech by Thompson at Terre Haute, 22 August, *New York Times*, 31 August 1860; speech by Thompson at Vigo, Indiana, *The Liberator* (Boston), 24 August 1860; Richard W. Thompson to Lincoln, Washington, 12 June 1860 and Terre Haute, Indiana, 6 July 1860, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

² Lincoln to Richard W. Thompson, Springfield, 10 July 1860, Basler, ed., *Collected Works of Lincoln*, 4:82-83.

³ Greeley’s speech in New York, 16 July, *New York Times*, 17 July 1860.