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Beyond the Realignment Synthesis: The 1860 Election Reconsidered

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The Realignment Synthesis

The claim that elections have not yet been fully integrated into the literature on American Political Development is a strong one. In searching for sources of continuity and discontinuity in American politics, scholars working in the APD tradition have examined the courts, the administrative state, organised labor, and pressure groups among other things, but rarely elections. In Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek's well-received manifesto outlining the scholarly project of understanding political development in the United States, elections do not even appear in the index.[1]

This has not always been the case. The realignment synthesis, most associated with the work of Walter Dean Burnham, was precisely such an effort to make elections central to our understanding of political change.[2] Burnham's story of electoral equilibrium punctuated by periodic, once-in-a-generation, sudden change was astonishingly influential in the writing of American political history in the last four decades of the twentieth century. The theory appeared to resolve an apparent paradox: if the defining feature of American history was a consensus over basic liberal values, as Louis Hartz had argued, how might that be reconciled with the evident reality of the

[1] Karen Orren, and Stephen Skowronek, *The Search for American Political Development* (Princeton, 2004). Similarly, in a collection of important essays by APD scholars examining "formative moments" in American political history, elections are not featured as examples. Stephen Skowronek and Matthew Glassman, eds, *Formative Acts: American Politics in the Making* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). Nevertheless, the intellectual purpose of Skowronek and Glassman's book, which is to explore the interactions between institutions and structures on the one hand, and contingency and the agency of political actors on the other, leads us naturally to a study of elections as exactly the kind of political event that exists at the interface between these two levels of analysis.

[2] Walter Dean Burnham, "The Changing Shape of the American Political Universe," *American Political Science Review* 59:1 (1965): 7-28; Burnham and William Nisbet Chambers, eds, *The American Party Systems: Stages of Political Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967); Burnham, *Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics* (New York: Norton, 1970). Burnham's work built on V. O. Key, Jr., "A Theory of Critical Elections," *Journal of Politics* 17:1 (1955): 3-18.

sometimes rapid and wrenching social change generated by a liberal capitalist system?[3] Burnham's answer was that the balance of socio-economic forces represented by the parties periodically adjusted to reflect new realities. Social tensions that originated outside the reigning party system gradually built up until they burst through the institutional dam in a "critical election," destroying one partisan regime, creating another, and reconnecting the political system to the underlying socio-economic reality. According to the theory, there were five (or perhaps six) of these party systems in total, each distinguished by different sets of issues and a different balance of forces.

To the "New Political Historians" of the 1960s and 70s, realignment theory seemed to describe the circumstances of the 1850s particularly well.[4] The election of 1860 (along with those of 1828, 1896 and 1932) became a paradigmatic "critical election" in this view, not so much, ironically, because it triggered the Civil War (which surely makes 1860 by far the most critical election in US history in a non-jargon-laden use of the term), but because it brought to power the Republican Party for the first time and supposedly locked in the new political order, defined by a different set of issues from the one that had preceded it and with a differently constituted alignment of social and ethno-cultural groups lined up on each side.[5] I suspect that the realignment synthesis entered historical discourse so seamlessly because it reinforced the working assumption of the New Political History that long-term party affiliation was the most critical factor in explaining voter behaviour. Stability was the defining feature of the political order in this view and the 1860 election was "critical" because of

[3] Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt, 1955).

[4] The "New Political History" defined itself against the "Presidential Synthesis" according to which the only measure of political time was the change in an administration. Prompted to study the electorate rather than political elites by the social history revolution, New Political Historians pioneered the use of statistical methods to understand long-term trends in voter behaviour. Examples of the "New Political History" that made extensive use of realignment theory include: Michael F. Holt, *Forging a Majority: The Formation of the Republican Party in Pittsburgh, 1848-1860* (New Haven: Yale, 1969); Mark L. Berger, *The Revolution in the New York Party Systems, 1840-1860* (Port Washington, NY: National University Publications, 1973); Dale Baum, *The Civil War Party System: The Case of Massachusetts, 1848-1876* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Joel H. Silbey, *The Partisan Imperative: The Dynamics of American Politics Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

[5] Some scholars working within the realignment synthesis argued that the realignment continued into the late 1860s, although usually still nevertheless seeing 1860 as a "critical" election. See, for example, Steven Hansen, *The Making of the Third Party System: Voters and Parties in Illinois 1850-1876*, (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1980). Most, however, saw voter loyalties as fixed into new patterns after 1860. See Joel Silbey, *A Respectable Minority: the Democratic Party in the Civil War Era, 1860-1868* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977).

the sudden stirring to life of voters' hitherto supposedly latent agency.[6] Since the 1990s, political history has been written in the shadow of the "cultural turn" rather than the social sciences, yet the language of party systems remains stubbornly embedded in historians' portrayal of the nineteenth-century political landscape. And consequently, the core problematic of antebellum history—explaining the origins of the Civil War—has been dominated for nearly half a century by the concept of the break up of the "Second Party System."

While realignment theory has shaped decisively the way in which scholars have understood the 1860 election, those who have criticised the theory have done so with good reason.[7] In reality, electoral change was more gradual and convoluted than the punctuated equilibrium model suggests. Rather than being an aggregation of ethno-cultural blocks, the electorate appears to have been more dynamic; and shifts in the fortunes of different political parties to do with contingency and strategy as least as much as structural changes in the economy. Rational choice theory prompted some political scientists to challenge the passive conception of voters implied by the realignment model. Morris Fiorina, for example, concluded that voters made rational decisions based on issue preferences and retrospective judgments, holding politicians and parties accountable for past conduct.[8] And David R. Mayhew, in a devastating critique of the "realignment genre," argued that American politics has been unpredictable due to contingency and short-term party strategies designed to recruit

[6] The pioneering work establishing the ethno-cultural approach to the analysis of antebellum politics was Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case* (Princeton, 1961).

[7] For critiques, see: Richard L. McCormick, "The Realignment Synthesis in American History," in *The Party Period and Public Policy: American Politics from the Age of Jackson to the Progressive Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 64-88; David R. Mayhew, *Electoral Realignments: A Critique of an American Genre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

[8] Morris Fiorina, *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections* (New Haven: Yale, 1981). Fiorina's data came from the twentieth century. To my knowledge the only systematic effort to apply retrospective voting theory to the nineteenth century is Lex Renda, *Running on the Record: Civil War Era Politics in New Hampshire* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997). Most of Michael F. Holt's work on mid-nineteenth century politics, however, has been influenced by the presumption that voters' loyalties were not fixed, and party identities fluid. See, Michael F. Holt, "An Elusive Synthesis," in James McPherson and William J. Cooper, Jr., eds, *Writing the Civil War: The Quest to Understand* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 112-134; Holt, "Change and Continuity in the Party Period" in Byron E. Shafer and Anthony J. Badger, eds, *Contesting Democracy: Substance and Structure in American Political History, 1775-2000* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2001), 93-115; Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: Wiley, 1980); Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party and the Onset of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Holt, *The Fate of their Country: Politicians, Slavery Extension and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005).

voters before elections.[9] In "the real world," Mayhew observes (correctly, in my view), voters must make judgments not just during a periodic realignment but "all the time."[10] From a different angle, Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin suggested provocatively that there was little more to voter engagement than the prospect of free beer and a hog roast: mobilisation strategies were all.[11]Although, in the realignment model, 1860 is the decisive watershed between two stable phases of fixed partisan loyalties, it would be more accurate to see it as one in a sequence of elections through the 1850s and 60s in which party identities and voter loyalties were malleable. Even Burnham acknowledged that the Second Party System's "dramatic collapse" after 1854 "disclosed its essential fragility."[12] This is an understatement; the competition between Whigs and Democrats was not only fragile, it was also fleeting. If the Second Party System only coalesced in 1840, by 1848 it was already fragmenting.[13]

All this means that the realignment synthesis—the only substantial theorised effort to integrate elections into American political development—appears to have major limitations even in this case, despite the 1860 election being the "critical" election *par excellence*. Other ways of conceptualising political time are good at describing continuities but are less good at explaining change. Scholars have delineated "eras" in American politics according to the nature of the political process or according to the ideological perspectives of the main parties.[14] Overlapping with these approaches is the concept of "political orders," or the identification of the underlying governing arrangements of the nation.[15] These are valid and fruitful frameworks for

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[9] Mayhew, *Electoral Realignments*, 147-152.

[10] Mayhew, *Electoral Realignments*, 153.

[11] Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin, *Rude Republic: Americans and their Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, 2000). They argue that voters were far more disengaged from politics than has been assumed by successive generations of political historians, and that (relatively) high turnout rates can be explained by the effectiveness of party organisers rather than by ideology or popular partisan commitment.

[12] Burnham, "Party Systems and the Political Process," in Burnham and Chambers, eds, *American Party Systems*, 294.

[13] Joel Silbey, *Party Over Section: The Rough and Ready Election of 1848* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2010) nevertheless makes the case that the 1848 election can be fitted into the "Second Party System" paradigm.

[14] The "party period paradigm" defines this political era on the basis of the nature of the political process. See: Richard L. McCormick, "The Party Period and Public Policy: An Exploratory Hypothesis," *Journal of American History The Journal of American History* 66:2 (1979): 279-298; Joel Silbey, *The American Political Nation, 1838-1893* (Stanford, 1991). An attempt to "code" party ideology over the longue durée is John Gerring, *Party Ideologies in America, 1828-1996* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[15] Robert Kelley, *The Cultural Pattern in American Politics: The First Century* (New York: Knopf, 1979); Morton Keller, *America's Three Regimes: A New Political History* (New York: Oxford

understanding the nature of politics, but even those like the "party period" model that are defined by the nature of the political process, leave open the question of how particular elections can be integrated.

Contingency

Elections are a challenging subject for scholars with a systematising bent because it is hard to explain outcomes without taking into account "contingent" factors that can only be explained in narrative form. At first glance, the 1860 election may appear an exception to that rule: Lincoln's victory in the Electoral College was comfortable [see Table 1], and was widely predicted several months in advance. "I hesitate to say it," wrote Abraham Lincoln in August, 1860, "but it really appears now, as if the success of the Republican ticket is inevitable."[16] This uncharacteristic sanguinity on Lincoln's part proved well founded, as it turned out, but it was the product of a series of events that in themselves need an explanation. Most important was the sectional split in the Democratic Party. The decision of the southern wing of the party not to support Stephen A. Douglas—the man who, back in the spring, was the favorite to win the election—meant that there was no plausible way he could have amassed an electoral majority. The 1860 contest was, in practice, two parallel elections: one between Lincoln and Douglas in the North, and one in the South between the candidate of the southern Democrats, John C. Breckinridge, and John Bell, who ran as a Constitutional Unionist [see Table 4a and 4b].[17] Neither of the "southern" candidates had a mathematical chance of winning the Presidency, so the only question was whether Lincoln would win enough additional Electoral College votes on top of the states Fremont had won in 1856, (plus Minnesota, which had recently been admitted and was, as Lincoln put it "as sure as such a thing can be."[18]) [See Table 2.] Given this electoral reality, the other campaigns seem to have been

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University Press, 2007).

[16] Lincoln to Simeon Francis, Springfield, 4 August 1860, Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 9 vols. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1952-1955) 4:90.

[17] There were a few exceptions to the sectionalisation of the election into a Lincoln/Douglas race in the free states and a Breckinridge/Bell race in the South. The Democratic machine, in part due to Buchanan's influence, was behind Breckinridge in Pennsylvania. In Connecticut the Democrats were split down the middle and Breckinridge came within a whisker of taking second place from Douglas [see Table 2]. In northern Alabama, Douglas polled well, winning four counties (Lauderdale, Lawrence, Madison and Marshall) in the Tennessee valley. Only in Missouri, California and Oregon did all four main candidates have a realistic chance.

[18] Lincoln to Simeon Francis, Springfield, 4 August 1860, Basler, ed., *Collected Works*, 4:90.

focused on preventing Lincoln getting a majority rather than on building one for their man. Even Douglas campaign newspapers devoted lots of space to electoral analysis purporting to prove that Lincoln could not amass enough votes to win, rather than to show that the "Little Giant" would do so.[19]

If Lincoln had lost in the far West (very possible), had failed to win any electoral votes in New Jersey (very possible), and narrowly lost, instead of narrowly won, Indiana and Illinois (entirely plausible), he would not have had the 152 votes needed to win in the Electoral College [see Table 2]. And had Lincoln failed to carry Pennsylvania (which he did handily in the end, but which was by no means certain), his chances of winning would have been very slim. There were self-described "conservatives" in the North as well as the South who had hoped that the candidacy of the Tennessee Whig Bell might catalyze a cross-sectional reaction against radicalism, but Bell proved to have no purchase in the North. Maybe a less appealing Republican candidate – one perceived as being more radical like William H. Seward – and a more northern-friendly Constitutional Unionist might have limited the very large number of northern voters who had supported Millard Fillmore in 1856 from moving into Lincoln's column.[20] In 1860, a different cast of characters may have influenced those crucial voters in Indiana, Illinois and Pennsylvania who, in effect, put Lincoln in the White House. Candidates matter – as politicos at the time were very aware – and this is why standard political histories of elections and politicians' memoirs alike always linger in the smoke-filled rooms at conventions.[21] Even given where things stood in August, Lincoln's confidence in his likely election might plausibly have been shaken if attempts to form anti-Republican "fusion" tickets had been more successful. Where there were fusion slates, voters often didn't co-operate, splitting their tickets and allowing Lincoln to win some of the electoral votes in New Jersey that may otherwise have gone to Douglas. Had Lincoln fallen short, and the election been thrown to the House, it seems likely the Republican would have been blocked. Democrats controlled 18 state delegations against the Republicans' 15 in the 36th Congress.

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[19] See, for example, *Campaign Plain Dealer and Popular Sovereignty Advocate* (Cincinatti), July 7, 1860, 2.

[20] All but 80,000 of the 395,000 Fillmore voters appear to have supported Lincoln in 1860. See William E. Gienapp, "Who Voted for Lincoln?" in *Abraham Lincoln and the American Political Tradition*, ed. John L. Thomas (Amherst, 1986), 50-77; and Gienapp, "Nativism and the Creation of a Republican Majority in the North before the Civil War," *Journal of American History* 72 (1985): 529-59.

[21] See, for example, Reinhard H. Luthin, *The First Lincoln Campaign,* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1944).

Unpredictable events can shape voters' perceptions in profound ways. In the run-up to the 1860 election, the most obvious of these was John Brown's raid, which was a constant reference point throughout the campaign. Democrats in the North rushed to associate Republicanism with Brown. The *Democratic Review* charged that William H. Seward's "Irrepressible Conflict" speech "anticipates the riot at Harper's Ferry as inevitably as night follows day." Lincoln too, with his "House Divided" speech, had launched a "war to the knife against Southern institutions."[22] Republicans responded that, on the contrary, Brown's violence was an outgrowth of the lawlessness, vigilantism and "filibustering" of proslavery forces in Kansas and therefore a direct result of Douglas' "popular sovereignty" doctrine.[23] Furthermore, some of them welcomed Brown's execution on the grounds that it was a warning to disunionists of the consequences of treason. For Southerners, both Bell and Breckinridge supporters alike, Brown's raid – and the tolling of bells in New England at the moment of his execution -- was the ultimate evidence of the threat they faced from northern abolitionists. Brown's raid cannot be disaggregated from sectional tensions more broadly, but the prominence of the issue in the campaign in both sections is a reminder of how the presentation and re-presentation of dramatic and essentially "random" news stories can be powerful elements in political discourse at a given moment. Elections are always faux war with their talk of campaigns, strategies, tactics, and, in the nineteenth century, the militaristic parades. Violence or the threat of violence was always present around polling stations, and often in the language of orators. But given the national crisis, this was truer of 1860 than at any other time.

Observers at the time typically gave great credit to the mobilisation strategies of the parties in explaining outcomes. Campaigns bid to outdo each other in the showiness of their parades and barbeques, in the size of their bonfires and pole-raisings, the magnificence of their transparencies and above all the size of the crowds. The 1860 Republican campaign was especially spectacular, echoing the fabled success of the 1840 "Log Cabin" campaign in its use of music, and with its imagery of cleansing and rebirth. One of William Lloyd Garrison's biographers has speculated that even the grand old man of abolitionism, bundled up against the cold and watching a grand Wide

[22] "Logical Results of Republicanism", *Democratic Review* 43 (October 1859): 201-17.
[23] Peter Knupfer, "A Crisis in Conservatism: Northern Unionism and the Harpers Ferry Raid," in Paul Finkelman, *His Soul Goes Marching On: Responses to John Brown and the Harpers Ferry Raid* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995), 119-48.

Awake parade in Boston, would have found it hard not to tap his feet to the rhythm of "Ain't You Glad you Joined the Republicans."[24] (Personally, I can't imagine Garrison tapping his feet to anything, but it's a nice image.) A Pennsylvania politico put Lincoln's victory in that state down to the organisational strength of the campaign and the comparative weakness of the divided Democratic machine.[25]

Musings about alternative possibilities are valid (and they could be expanded almost ad infinitum), but where do they leave us? Once we reject the clarity and coherence of grand structures such as those offered by realignment theory, we are all too easily left with a kind of nominalism, in which politics becomes no more than a series of contingent events, with the agency of political actors generating constant flux. It is fair to say, therefore, that the attempt to "bring elections back in" to American Political Development takes place against a backdrop of theoretic disarray. Given this, how might we integrate this election into an analytic narrative of political development in a way that does justice to the specificity of this event while also properly contextualising it? A first step might be to identify the characteristics of mid-nineteenth-century American politics as exemplified by the 1860 election. I would suggest that these are: (1) a *political culture* framed by republican ideological assumptions about the nature of power and liberty; (2) *electoral behavior* in which there were underlying continuities in the orientation of regions and social groups towards particular policies and political styles, yet in which voters were actively engaged in making choices, often *retrospective judgements* on perceived political performance; and (3) *campaign strategies* in which "valence" issues were more important than "positional" issues, in which political elites' responses to events were crucial, and which can be usefully imagined as a contest among competing *narratives*.

Political Culture

Politics in this era, despite (or perhaps because of) wrenching social transformations, was characterised by continuity in the underlying assumptions made about the nature of power and politics. A republican frame – fear of subversion and conspiracy; a concern with protecting liberty from monopoly and tyranny, with

[24] Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), 513.
[25] A. K. McClure, *Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania,* (2 vols., Philadelphia: John C. Winston Co., 1905), 1: 413-415

manhood and honor – underlay most political choices. And so too did preoccupations with the nation and with the threat from radical anti-capitalist ideologies that testify to the embededness of the mid-nineteenth century United States in a transatlantic political world. The continuing importance of republicanism in political culture ensured that Civil War Americans were quick to scent abuses of power, to worry about conspiracies to undermine the liberties of the people, to fear the corrupting effects of partisanship, and to condemn a love of luxury or pretentious airs as evidence of a lack of republican virtue in leaders.

There was a constant interplay between parties' attempts to normalise partisan politics on the one hand, and the contested nature of partisanship, the shifting nature of partisan identity, and widespread popular revulsion at self-serving "wire-pullers" in the political parties on the other. Office-holders always faced insurgency from those who could successfully pose as "outs," which was one of the principal reasons for Republican electoral advances 1858-1860. The Republicans, like the Know Nothing organisations that swept to dramatic victories in state elections in 1854 and 1855, constructed themselves as political outsiders, with candidates "fresh from the loins of the people," their justification for organisation being to defend grand principles – such as the preservation of the legacy of the Revolution. Republican campaign songs included the "Anti-party Glee" which contained the line "I vote no longer for a name/ pure principles are now my aim."[26] The Constitutional Union Party also defined itself as the antidote to politics as usual (despite being led by a cobwebbed coterie of elderly ex-Whigs), denouncing the "spirit of party [that] raised its serpent fangs above them all."[27]

In *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville, absorbing no doubt the presumptions of his informants, made a revealing distinction between "great" and "petty" parties. The former being "those which cling… to ideas, and not to men" and the latter being driven by a desire for power and pelf.[28] Like other nineteenth century elections, that of 1860 was, on one level, a battle over which party represented great principles—such as the "eternal struggle between liberty and tyranny", as one (Douglas

[26] "Anti-party Glee" in *The Lincoln and Hamlin Songster of the Continental Melodist* (Philadelphia: Fisher and Brother, 1860), 49.
[27] Quoted in Douglas R. Egerton, *Year of Meteors: Stephen Douglas, Abraham Lincoln and the Election That Brought on the Civil War* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2010), 188.
[28] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ch. 10, 155.

Democratic) newspaper put it—and which was merely the product of the "petty" schemes of "ambitious" or "fanatical" men. If politics was fundamentally about the struggle between liberty and tyranny, the party contest in 1860 was, in practice about defining those terms. The Republican conspiracy theory about a scheming Slave Power was not just rhetorical window-dressing, it was a powerful narrative, one that made sense of key events (the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, "bleeding Kansas", the Dred Scott decision, and so on). The Breckinridge campaign drew on similar tropes in its depiction of a Black Republican conspiracy to undermine Southern rights. In both cases, a conspiratorial mode of presenting the world drew on a common republican political culture in which politics was about binary choices, pluralism was poorly developed as a concept, and in which liberty always had to be protected from those with power.

This was also the political cultural context in which anxiety about corruption was framed. A report by Republican congressman John Covode on the corruption of the Buchanan administration was a widely circulated campaign document.[29] Corruption of the venal kind was bad enough, but in a republican political culture, the pilfering of office-holders, and the disreputable reputation of parties and "wire-pullers" threatened to undermine the republic by draining it of virtue, honesty and simplicity. In the Republican party imagination, corruption scandals were symptomatic of the existential threat posed by the Slave Power. There were two irrepressible conflicts, explained *New York Tribune* editor Horace Greeley during the campaign, one pitting freedom against "aggressive, all-grasping Slavery propagandism" and the other, "not less vital," between "frugal government and honest administration" on the one hand and "wholesale executive corruption, and speculative jobbery" on the other.[30]

Electoral Behavior

In this, as in every election in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the appearance of new parties, and new party labels, the salience of new issues, the impact

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[29] *The Ruin of the Democratic Party: Reports of the Covode and Other Committees* (Washington: Republican Congressional Committee, 1860). See also Young Men's Republican Union, *Lincoln and Liberty! Vol. 2* (June 26, 1860), 4. For a summary of the role of the corruption issue in the election, see Mark W. Summers, *The Plundering Generation: Corruption and the Crisis of the Union* (New York: Oxford, 1987), 270-280.

[30] David E. Meerse, "Buchanan, Corruption, and the Election of 1860," *Civil War History* 12 (1966):124.

of events, and the switching of voters could not obscure an underlying continuity in voting patterns. The Republican vote was strongest where evangelical reformism was strongest. It was regionally concentrated in New England (where Lincoln won every single county), and those parts of the North most influenced by Yankee settlement: upstate New York, parts of Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin and Iowa, plus northern counties of Illinois and Indiana. These had been the areas in which northern Whigs had most strength, although the Republicans had certainly intensified their support among Germans and some denominations of evangelical Protestants.[31] In 1860, Republicans did especially well in comparison with their predecessor parties in Illinois and Pennsylvania, states which had once been dominated by the Democracy. But the Democrats remained strong among their traditional supporters – Irish immigrants and working-class urbanites (the only major city Lincoln won was Chicago), and non Yankee-influenced rural voters in the Midwest.

In the South John Bell won his home state of Tennessee, plus Virginia and Kentucky and he also came a close second in Georgia and North Carolina. These were all areas of historic strength for the Whigs. Some people supported Bell in the explicit hope that they might be able to create a new, national "conservative Union party, somewhat resembling the old Whig party."[32] But this was, in the end, a purely regional, Upper South project. The Breckinridge vote, concentrated in the Deep South, correlated closely with the highest support for secession in the state convention elections that were held in the following months, and with the highest concentrations of slave ownership. The sectionalisation of 1860 is usually blamed solely on the break-up of the Democrats, but it was also visible in the relative failure of the Constitutional Unionists to attract the support of former Whig and Know Nothing voters in the free

[31] On ethnic voters in the election, see: Frederick C. Luebke, ed., *Ethnic Voters and the Election of Lincoln* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971); Glyndon G. Van Deusen, "Why the Republican Party Came to Power," in George Harmon Knoles, ed., *The Crisis of the Union, 1860-1861* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 3-20; Thomas W. Kremm, "Cleveland and the First Lincoln Election: The Ethnic Response to Nativism," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 8 (1977): 69-86. On evangelical voters in the election, see Richard J. Carwardine, "Methodists, Politics, and the Coming of the American Civil War," *Church History* 69 (2000): 578-609; Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 296-307.

[32] Quoted in Daniel W. Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 76-77. On expectations of the creation of a new Union party, see Michael F. Holt, "Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of Union", in John L. Thomas, ed., *Abraham Lincoln and the American Political* Tradition (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986). On Whiggery in the South in 1860, see Holt, *Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party,* 978-985; Thomas B. Alexander, "Persistent Whiggery in the Confederate South, 1860-1877", *Journal of Southern History* 27: 3 (1961): 305-329.

states. Outside the South, it was only really in Massachusetts and the Pacific West that the old Whig vote gravitated to John Bell rather than Lincoln.[33]

If this brief survey of voting patterns suggests some underlying continuities, it also suggests that, if only because of the fluidity of party identities, the electorate could never be taken for granted. Politicians, consequently, behaved as if defending and attacking the record of incumbents would swing votes. Corruption scandals, the fall-out of the Panic of 1857 and the general sense that the nation was on the brink of disunion undermined the incumbents, the Democratic Party that had dominated national politics for thirty years. Despite his reputation, James Buchanan was not a vacillating and feeble president, but, on the contrary, ideologically-driven and activist.[34] His most disastrous move was trying to drive the Lecompton pro-slavery Constitution for Kansas through Congress, at the cost of splitting his party, because he was convinced that only by acceding to Southern demands could the controversy over slavery in the Territories be "solved." The Democratic Party may well have split anyway, since, as numerous historians have shown, there was a powerful southern lobby that deliberately manoeuvred to this end. Even moderate southern Democrats were determined to settle for nothing less than a Federal Slave Code that was anathema to, and would have been electoral suicide for, the northern wing of the party. Nevertheless, at every stage of his administration, Buchanan took decisions that exacerbated the problem. And his loyalty to southerners in his cabinet meant that he overlooked the egregious corruption of men like Secretary of War John B. Floyd.

In the light of all this, many observers understandably saw the election as more a rejection of Buchanan and what he had come to represent rather than than an endorsement of the Republicans. The *New York World*, which was not yet a Democratic organ, claimed in October 1860 that most Republican voters did not care "a broken tobacco-pipe for the negro question." The cause of Lincoln's likely victory, the newspaper suggested, was the popular belief that "the democratic party has been so long in power that it has become corrupt; that it understands too well the crooked arts

[33] Only in California did the Bell vote (7.6%) exceed Lincoln's margin of victory. And only in Massachusetts among the free states did the Bell vote replicate the Fillmore total in 1856 (13.2% for Bell; 11.5% for Fillmore). Conservatives in Massachusetts were more inclined to stick with the party that resembled the Whigs partly because of the strong Whig tradition of that state (Bell's running mate was Edward Everett, a Massachusetts Whig) and partly because of the exceptional radicalism of the Massachusetts Republican Party.

[34] As shown most clearly in Jean H. Baker, *James Buchanan* (New York: Times Books, 2004).

by which partizan pockets are lined at the public expense; and that it is safer to try an experiment with new men and a young party, than to continue a set of old party hacks at the public crib."[35] Chairman of the Democratic National Committee August Belmont agreed. "The country at large had become disgusted with the misrule of Mr. Buchanan, and the corruption which disgraced his Administration," he wrote. "The Democratic party was made answerable for his misdeeds, and a change was ardently desired by thousands of conservative men out of politics."[36] The "great idea" settled by this election, declared the Philadelphia *North American*, was "the overthrow of corruption". It made no mention of slavery extension.[37]

Campaign Strategies

If politicians' responsiveness to voters intensified sectional polarisation, the same electoral pressure curtailed the room for manoeuvre of candidates within each section. Since each party system is imagined to be oriented around a different set of issues the realignment synthesis stresses the "positional" (i.e. distinctive, new) issues of insurgent parties. However, my reading of the evidence is that so-called "valence" issues (i.e. points on which the parties agree but compete to present themselves as best placed to deliver) were generally more important drivers of political debate in this period.[38] In 1860, the ideological divide (in Burnham's sense of "highly salient issue-clusters") *within* each section was *less than* in previous elections. On important matters of policy, and even in terms of political style and language, Republican and Democrats were not so far apart. Douglas did not just endorse a Homestead Act, a Pacific railroad and federal support for internal improvements, all policies that were championed by the Republicans, he claimed, not entirely implausibly, to have invented

[35] *New York World*, 23 October, 1860.
[36] August Belmont to John Forsyth, New York, 22 November 1860, in *Letters, Speeches and Addresses of August Belmont* (privately printed, 1890), 23-24.
[37] Reinhard H. Luthin, suggested that "the cohesive force" within the Republican Party was "not anti-southern sentiment, but opposition to the Democrats. It was this common antagonism to the dominant political organisation, the eagerness of the 'outs' to get 'in', that made possible co-operation between the diverse elements who joined forces under the Republican standard." Luthin, *First Lincoln Campaign*, 220. I think there is something in this, although in practice the two impulses overlapped, since anti-Democratic feeling was driven by the perception that the Democratic Party had become hopelessly corrupted by the South.
[38] The concept of valence issues was introduced by Donald E. Stokes, "Spatial Models of Party Competition," *American Political Science Review*, 57 (1963), 368-77. See also Donald E. Stokes, "Valence Politics," in Dennis Kavanagh, ed., *Electoral Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

them all (although, to be fair, large sections of his party remained wary of all three).[39]

Both parties claimed to be the defenders of free white labor. Democrats were much more overt in their use of racism to warn of competition from freed slaves. But Republicans in Indiana and Illinois, where this was a major campaign issue, used similar arguments to make the case against slavery extension, albeit usually without the crude racism of the Democrats. Republicans attacked Democrats for favouring Cuban annexation on the grounds that it would lead to racial amalgamation. One such article, in the *Illinois State Journal*, may, according to Lincoln biographer Michael Burlingame, have been penned by the candidate himself.[40] As the Republican *New York Times* asked, rhetorically: "how is the doctrine of negro equality to be 'forced upon the South' by the Republicans, when they scout and scorn it for the free negroes of the North?" Republicans do not "have any more love of the negro – any greater disposition to make sacrifices for his sake, or to waive their own rights and interests for the promotion of his welfare, than the rest of mankind, North and South."[41] Meanwhile, northern Democrats indignantly warned that if the consequence of southerners' "bolting" was Lincoln's election, they should no longer expect any support from northern Democrats in returning "a 'fugitive' which they have not a dollars interest in." Douglas newspapers used the terms "Slaveocracy" and "Slave Power", coinages associated with the Republicans, to describe Breckinridge, almost as much as they used the term "Black Republican" to smear Lincoln.[42]

Both parties battled for the mantle of conservatism, with Republicans vigorously countering Democrat claims to be the true Unionists. Lincoln's hometown Republican newspaper made this its consistent theme. The election, it stressed, was a battle between "conservative Republicanism [and] fire-eating, slave-extending Democracy."[43] One of Lincoln's supporters in 1860, a young ex-Whig, Manton Marble, later to become editor of the vocally anti-Lincoln *New York World*, was

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[39] For accounts of the 1860 campaign, see, Egerton, *Year of Meteors*; Michael S. Green, *Lincoln and the Election of 1860* (DeKalb: Southern Illinois University Press, 2011); Emerson D. Fite, *The Presidential Campaign of 1860* (New York, 1911); James A. Rawley, *Edwin D. Morgan, 1811-1883: A Merchant in Politics* (New York, 1955), 103-120 [Morgan was the chairman of the Republican National Committee].
[40] *Illinois State Journal* (Springfield), September 1, 1860; Michael Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln: A Life* (2 vols, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 1: 666.
[41] *New York Times*, 28 Aug, 1860.
[42] *Campaign Plain Dealer and Popular Sovereignty Advocate*, October 17, 1860.
[43] Quoted in Egerton, *Year of Meteors*, 187. See also Robert McKnight, *Mission of Republicans; Sectionalism of Modern Democratic Party. Speech of Robert McKnight of Penn., delivered in the House of Representatives, April 24, 186o* (New York: Republican National Committee, 1860).

convinced that support for the Republicans was the only true "conservative" course.[44] Even *New York Tribune* editor Horace Greeley, who by most measures was on the radical wing of the party, had initially supported Edward Bates of Missouri as the Republican standard bearer on the grounds that he had been a slave-owner and so would be hard to paint as an abolitionist. In his memoirs, Greeley recounted a conversation with a colleague who had supported a more radical alternative for the Republican nomination:

> "My friend," I inquired, "suppose each Republican voter in our State were to receive, to-morrow, a letter, advising him that he (the said voter) had just lost his brother, for some years settled in the South, who had left him a plantation and half a dozen slaves,--how many of the two hundred and fifty thousand would, in response, declare and set those slaves free?" "I don't think I could stand *that* test myself!" was his prompt rejoinder. "Then," I resumed, "it is not yet time to nominate as you propose.[45]

(Among other things, Greeley's anecdote helps to explain why Stephen A. Douglas' ownership of slaves in Mississippi, inherited through from his late wife's father, and held by him, formally, on behalf of his sons, never became a major campaign issue.)[46]

I do not mean to suggest that the differences between the parties were unimportant. In its New England heartland, the Republican Party was rooted in a very different demographic base from the Democrats and expressed itself in a political style coloured by evangelicalism and a long reform tradition that was at odds with the laissez-faire approach and tolerance of cultural diversity of most Democrats. Most obviously, Republicans opposed all slavery extension on principle, whereas northern Democrats made much of their candidate's championing of "popular sovereignty." These were positions with divergent legislative implications, but both were – overtly or implicitly -- antagonistic to the *Dred Scott* decision and both were expressed in terms of white men's opportunity in the West. The key to the Republican Party's appeal in 1860 was the party's claim to be the most effective bulwark against an aggressive and destabilising Slave Power. They presented themselves as the new broom that would

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[44] This point is made in correspondence between Manton Marble and his friend, the Lieutenant Governor of Rhode Island, Samuel G. Arnold. See, for example, Arnold to Marble, March 20, 1861, Marble Papers, Library of Congress.

[45] Horace Greeley, *Recollections of a Busy Life* (New York: J. B. Ford & Co., 1868), 389-90.

[46] On Douglas' Mississippi slaves, see Martin H. Quitt, *Stephen A. Douglas and Antebellum Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 186-194.

sweep away years, if not decades, of rule in Washington by a corrupted national Democratic party which had turned against the interests of ordinary free white men. The campaign made a conservative pitch to restore ancient liberties. There was a relentless focus in campaign speeches on the threat of the Slave Trade being reopened (this was mentioned by Lincoln in most of his 1859 speeches), and on the Breckinridge policy, backed by President Buchanan, of introducing a Congressional Slave Code for the territories.[47] During the campaign, Lincoln newspapers reported random lynchings of Northerners in the South, stories which fed their narrative about the barbarism of the Slave Power.[48]

Democrats had presented themselves as the embodiment of the common man for thirty years or more, but in 1860 Republicans worked hard to co-opt this Jacksonian language for themselves. Republican clubs held meetings to celebrate Jefferson's birthday, and Lincoln was hailed as a "Jeffersonian Republican" in campaign literature.[49] Republican campaigners argued that the "so-called Democratic party" was "false to its name" and were now the "aristocratic" party, their support for slavery extension being in effect support for land monopoly by slave-owners, securing "power to the few." Jefferson and Jackson were retrospectively enlisted as Republican spokesmen, since they had wanted to "give and preserve power to the people to enable them to become proprietors and secure them in their homes."[50] The candidate's carefully projected image as a "Rail Splitter" and as "Honest Abe", as an "obscure child of labor" who was "an apt illustration of our free institutions," was a core component in the project of presenting Republicanism as on the side of the workingman.[51]

The Douglas Democrats were left with a problem of differentiation. They too had the appeal of a popular candidate who had made his own way in the West (albeit not from quite such humble origins), and they had the heritage of a Jacksonian tradition with the common man, defined against monopolists and "aristocrats" at the heart. The Douglas campaign was at least as enthusiastic as the Lincoln campaign in trying to

[47] Abraham Lincoln, [September 16-17, 1859], Notes for Speech in Kansas and Ohio, Abraham Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.
[48] Ollinger Crenshaw, *The Slave States in the Presidential Election of 1860* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1945), 89-111.
[49] New York Young Men's Republican Union, *Lincoln and Liberty!* Vol. 3 (July 3, 1860), 3.
[50] Republican National Committee, *Homesteads: The Republicans and Settlers against Democrats and Monopoly*, (New York, Republican National Committee, 1860), 1.
[51] *New York Tribune*, 11 June, 1860.

profit from the anti-incumbent mood of the electorate through excoriating and often very personal attacks on Buchanan's administration. Douglas' political feud with the President allowed his campaign to try to outbid Lincoln as the candidate of change. In 1860, Douglas Democrats, freed of their southern wing, ran against the Slave Power too – a high proportion of Democrats' campaign speeches framed the issue in terms of southern disunionists versus Douglas. Historians have sometimes assumed that "popular sovereignty" was a rather shallow fig-leaf for a policy that benefitted the South, but that is to underestimate the passion with which the Douglas campaign advocated it, on moral, economic and nationalist grounds. So Douglas, like Lincoln, was presented as the defender of northern free labor values, with "popular sovereignty", an idea rooted in the American tradition, as the guarantor of that promise. What Douglas supporters tried to do was to tell a story about their candidate as the only true nationalist, the one man who could save the Union against "fanaticism" North as well as South. Douglas alone, the campaign asserted, would not only save the Union (in contrast to the "recklessness" of Lincoln and the "Disunionist bolter" Breckinridge), but would also transform the opportunities available to white northerners.

In 1856, the Buchanan campaign had some success in painting the Republicans as dangerous radicals, and Douglas tried the same approach in 1860. But circumstances had changed, the stakes now seemed higher, and the Republicans' warnings about southern aggression seemed, in the previous four years, to have been vindicated. Douglas supporters, meanwhile, tried to use Brown's raid as evidence of Republican extremism, but the charges didn't stick, even with natural conservatives like Manton Marble. All the Harpers' Ferry episode did, in the end, was to make it more difficult to Douglas to deny the severity of the sectional crisis. The case for the Republicans in 1860 was that if, as a northerner, one wanted to defend free institutions, why vote for Douglas who was compromised by his association with the national Democratic party, and who probably couldn't win anyway, when one could vote for Lincoln, whose anti-Slave Power credentials ran much deeper?

In the slave states, Bell and Breckinridge supporters each presented their candidate as the one most likely to defend southern rights, albeit through different mechanisms. Bell's story was that he was a wise statesman in the tradition of Henry Clay. Breckinridge's was that he offered a specific and supposedly final plan to secure Southern rights within the Union. A Federal Slave Code would provide legislative

backup to the Dred Scott decision; promises of Caribbean expansion offered a way of building the collective strength of the slave states within the Union. Explicit in this story was the idea that if the North rejected these demands, and Lincoln or Douglas became president, the South would have been finally vindicated in its assumption that Yankees were no longer prepared to respect their equal rights (by which they meant respect for slavery as legitimate property).

These campaign strategies were, in essence, aimed at creating "narratives" that connected an image of the candidate to a story about what was wrong, who the enemy was, and how it could be put right. The task of politicians – whether party managers, editors or other opinion-formers like ministers and popular speakers -- was to "make sense" of the world to voters, shaping, but by definition also being shaped by, voters' understanding of who their friends and enemies were, and where their interests lay. Politics, especially at election time, was about synthesising policy, political style, and underlying values into a plausible and compelling story. Whereas ideology is a way of describing longitudinal attitudes, it was the narratives constructed out of ideological components that mattered at election time. Such narratives were more or less compelling depending on context, events, candidates, and the effectiveness of mobilisation strategies. Politics, as Robert Kelley once observed, often revolves around the "dramatic imagination" of its protagonists.[52] The drama lies in the acute consciousness of the choice confronting the nation and were often constructed, in a republican frame, around fears of conspiracy and threats to liberty.

All four campaigns had a story about how their man was best placed to maintain order and stability, concepts that drew meaning in people's minds not only in the context of slavery but also in relation to the problems of class, urbanisation and industrialisation. The contested keywords of Civil War era politics -- freedom, nationhood, slavery, peace, order, revolution – were given layers of additional meaning in the light of the fall-out of the 1848 Revolutions in Europe. The prospect of disunion was equated in the northern imagination with civil disorder, anarchy and violence. Anti-slavery politics was associated by its opponents with dangerous ideas about the confiscation and redistribution of property. When the Democratic *New York Herald* attacked Lincoln as an "abolitionist of the reddest dye" the implicit reference to

[52] Robert Kelley, *The Transatlantic Persuasion: The Liberal-Democratic Mind in the Age of Gladstone* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), xix.

revolutionary socialism was not accidental.[53]

The historian Michael F. Holt has argued that party politicians often made "shortsighted calculations of partisan advantage" rather than considering the broader national interest, a problem that was especially pronounced in regards to slavery extension.[54] I think politicians behaved in this way because public opinion was shaping the limits of what was politically possible, of what stories could be told and believed.[55] An analysis of an election that places at its centre the various narratives offered to voters should not trivialise the practice of politics, nor underplay the power of political ideas, but should focus attention on the process of political persuasion. It draws attention to the critical importance of how those ideas were framed and expressed. It cannot "explain" the election result in the sense of making alternative outcomes impossible to conceive, but it can identify the underlying assumptions that constitute the sources of political authority, and therefore how changes to them have implications for political development.

Conclusion

The 1860 election did not mark a clear shift from one stable political order to another in the sense implied by the realignment synthesis, since such a view minimises the year-by-year agency of voters and of political actors, and over-estimates the coherence of institutions like parties and "party systems." The election can only be properly understood through an analysis that takes into account contingency and which weighs the underlying ideological and political cultural continuities against the short-term strategies of politicians and the "narratives" they developed.

Nevertheless, it is clearly true that the election was immensely consequential even aside from the obvious connection it had with the outbreak of war. On a national

[53] Studies of the impact of European political ideas on US politics in the 1850s include: Andre M. Fleche, *The Revolution of 1861: The American Civil War in an Age of Nationalist Conflict* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Timothy Mason Roberts, *Distant Revolutions: 1848 and the Challenge to American Exceptionalism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009); Mischa Honeck, *We Are the Revolutionists: German-Speaking Immigrants and American Abolitionists After 1848* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011); Yonatan Eyal, *The Young America Movement and the Transformation of the Democratic Party, 1828-1861* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[54] Holt, *The Fate of Their Country,* 9.

[55] I prefer the formulation offered by Roy F. Nichols: "politicos prospered or failed in the degree to which they consciously or unconsciously recognised, understood, and utilized the opportunities which these enthusiasms and prejudices afforded." *Disruption of American Democracy,* 7.

level it precipitated what turned out to be a long-term shift in party control with clear implications for public policy in some key areas such as banking, currency, tariffs and ultimately Federal-State relations. In rough correlation with Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.'s cyclical theory of American politics, the "outs" became the "ins".[56] Lincoln's victory, together with the withdrawal of Southern congressmen as their states seceded, marked the ascendency of a new group of men in Washington and the effective end of thirty years in which a distinctive Jacksonian variant of transatlantic liberalism had been the default setting in American politics. Since the Democratic ascendency of the antebellum years had also been, to a greater or lesser extent, a Southern ascendency at the Federal level, the shift in party control was more properly understood as a fundamental shift in the sectional balance of power.

But the relationship between this coming Republican ascendency and the election was complex. The South, as it turned out, was excluded from national power because of secession and war rather than as a direct result of the rise in the Republican vote in Pennsylvania and the Midwest. And although around seven per cent of the whole electorate shifted towards Lincoln in 1860, the party's hold on these conservative voters was conditional. Apart from in Pennsylvania (where Buchanan's 1856 victory was the last in the state by a Democrat until 1936), Republican gains in 1860 were not wholly secure in the medium term, with Democrats making big gains in the 1862 mid-term elections and beyond (although Lincoln held them all in the exceptional circumstances of the 1864 presidential election.) In 1860, the Republican Party was still a very loose coalition of state machines, not all sharing the same name, never mind political priorities.[57] Even in victory, there were constant expectations that the party would cease to exist in its current form and under its current name. In 1864, Lincoln ran for re-election not as a Republican but as a National Unionist, which reflected, in part, recognition of the continuing toxicity of the Republican brand in large swathes of the country outside New England.[58] Just as the War of 1812 had – in

[56] Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr, *The Cycles of American History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin), 1986). See also an artcle by the elder Schlesinger, Arthur M. Schlesinger, "Tides of American Politics", *Yale Review* 29: 220.

[57] The call for the Republican Party convention in 1860 had gone out, not just to "pure" Republicans, as the radicals had wanted, but also to "members of the People's Party of Pennsylvania and of the Opposition Party of New Jersey, and all others who are willing to co-operate." *Proceedings of the Republican National Convention, held at Chicago, May 16, 17 and 18, 1860* (Albany, NY: Weed, Parsons and Company, 1860), 1.

[58] See Adam I. P. Smith, *No Party Now: Politics in the Civil War North* (New York: Oxford University

popular memory – led to an "era of good feeling", the Civil War, argued *Harper's Weekly* in 1865, had taught Americans a valuable lesson: "Old party lines do not separate us. We are at the end of parties."[59] William H. Seward spoke enthusiastically of a "great coming together" of the parties once the divisive issue of slavery was dispensed with by the Thirteenth Amendment.[60] Expectations of continuing realignment, in other words, continued long after the late 1850s.

The Republican Party that was ascendant in the late nineteenth century was "made" during Reconstruction, building retrospectively on its wartime accomplishments to create a narrative about the "Grand Old Party" as the defender of the Union. A series of contingencies such as the assassination (and near sanctification) of Lincoln, the battle with President Johnson over early Reconstruction legislation, and the Panic of 1873, all helped to forge the institutional identity and characteristics of the party. We would understand the 1860 election very differently had matters turned out differently afterwards as, of course, they could have done. Two individuals exemplify different pathways from 1860. Benjamin F. Butler, a Breckinridge supporter from Massachusetts ended up as such a committed Republican that radicals boosted him as a possible alternative to Lincoln in the 1864 election. Lyman Trumbull also migrated into the Republicans from the Democrats, although at earlier stage than Butler, and by 1860 was Republican senator from Illinois. But by the 1870s he was back in the Democratic fold, treading a path that many others followed.

The realignment theory presented the 1860 election as the moment when the party system readjusted to the underlying social reality. An alternative formulation would be that, like other elections in this period, although with greater consequences in terms of war and a shift in party control, the 1860 election was a contest among parties to offer the most compelling narratives about how to save the Republic to voters whose political values had underlying consistency but whose partisan loyalties were more fluid. For a series of contingent reasons (to do with short-term party strategy and the impact of events like John Brown's raid), the parties that gained

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Press, 2006).

[59] *Harper's Weekly*, February 25, 1865.

[60] George E. Baker, *The Works of William H. Seward* (5 vols.: Boston; Houghton, Mifflin, 1884), 5: 513-14. On expectations of realignment in the aftermath of the war, see John and Lawanda Cox, *Politics, Principles and Prejudice, 1865-1866* (New York: Free Press, 1963).

support (the Republicans in the North and the Breckinridge Democrats in the South) were those that dramatized the national crisis and offered the clearest solution to it.

Given the underlying political culture, campaign strategies that relied on fears of corruption and conspiracy were especially effective. As many historians have demonstrated, Northerners did not vote for an antislavery party because they had all become abolitionists; they voted for the party that had the clearest solution to the threat posed by the Slave Power. Republicans drew on a reformist evangelical tradition, but they also went to great lengths to distance themselves from the elitist image of "Federalists" with which they and their predecessor parties had been tainted by opponents. The Douglas Democrats tried to offer their own solution to the national crisis by using Republican language about the Slave Power to show they knew who the real enemy was, and by presenting popular sovereignty as the most effective solution to the crisis. But they were also drawing, as were the Constitutional Unionists, on the "compromise" tradition, damning extremism on both sides. The balance was tipped against these compromisers in 1860. As is the way with most elections, the short-term losers did not regard themselves as having lost the argument, though, and, as events unfolded in the following years, both the Douglasite Democratic tradition and the Whiggish Southern tradition felt vindicated. They saw the 1860 election as just one battle in a bigger and on-going contest.

Our challenge is to place this election in the flow of political time, uncovering continuities as well as change. What the 1860 election illustrates particularly well is that political choices were driven at least as much by a sense of impending disaster, by antipathy to others, and by a desire to protect what had already been secured, as they were by the an embrace of new ideas. It also explains why, invested as they were in these narratives, Northerners and Southerners were willing, sometimes eager, to embrace war as an alternative to dishonour.

Appendix: 1860 Election Results

Table 1: Results of the Presidential Election

Candidate	Popular Vote Tally[a]	% of Popular Vote	Electoral College Votes
Abraham Lincoln	1,865,908	39.80%	180
John C. Breckinridge	848,019	18.10%	72
John Bell	590,901	12.60%	39
Stephen A. Douglas	1,380,202	29.50%	12

[a]Popular vote totals exclude South Carolina, which did not have direct elections for Presidential electors. Douglas' total includes votes for fusion tickets in NJ, where his electors topped the poll. Breckinridge is credited with the popular vote of the fusion slate of electors in PA, since the entire slate voted for him in the Electoral College (the PA fusion slate was pledged to support the candidate with the highest number of Electoral College votes). This is a methodology that over-states the vote that Breckinridge would have got in PA had no fusion ticket been formed, but there is no other reliable method I can think of for breaking the fusion vote down in that state. In spite of the fusion slate, Douglas electors received 16,765 popular votes in PA that were counted separately. In New York, the popular vote for the fusion ticket has been split in the proportion that the 35 electors were represented on the slate, with 18 for Douglas, 10 for Bell and 7 for Breckinridge.

Table 2: States Lincoln won in descending order

Lincoln needed at least 7 Electoral College votes from among his 5 most vulnerable states – at the bottom of the table in grey – in order to win a majority in the 303-vote Electoral College. The unshaded states are those Fremont won in 1856 plus MN, which was admitted to statehood in 1858, and PA.

TO WIN: 152 ELECTORAL COLLEGE VOTES											
State and electoral votes		**Abraham LINCOLN**		**Stephen A. DOUGLAS**		**John C. BRECKIN-RIDGE**		**John BELL**		**(Anti-Republican) FUSION**	
Vermont	5	33,808	75.7	8,649	19.4	218	0.5	1,969	4.4	-	
Massachusetts	13	106,684	62.9	34,370	20.3	6,163	3.6	22,331	13.2	-	
Maine	8	62,811	62.2	29,693	29.4	6,368	6.3	2,046	2.0	-	
Minnesota	4	22,069	63.4	11,920	34.3	748	2.2	50	0.1	-	
Rhode Island	4	12,244	61.4	7,707	38.6	-		-		-	
Connecticut	6	43,488	58.1	15,431	20.6	14,372	19.2	1,528	2.0	-	
Michigan	6	88,481	57.2	65,057	42.0	805	0.5	415	0.3	-	
N. Hampshire	5	37,519	56.9	25,887	39.3	2,125	3.2	412	0.6	-	
Wisconsin	5	86,110	56.6	65,021	42.7	887	0.6	161	0.1	-	
Pennsylvania	27	268,030	56.3	16,765	3.5	-		12,776	2.7	178,871	37.5
Iowa	4	70,302	54.6	55,639	43.2	1,035	0.8	1,763	1.4	-	
New York	35	362,646	53.7	-		-		-		312,510	46.3
Ohio	23	231,709	52.3	187,421	42.3	11,406	2.6	12,194	2.8	-	
TOTAL	145										
Indiana	13	139,033	51.1	115,509	42.4	12,295	4.5	5,306	1.9	-	
Illinois	11	172,171	50.7	160,215	47.2	2,331	0.7	4,914	1.4	-	
New Jersey	4[b]	58,346	48.1	-		-		-		62,869*	51.9
Oregon	3	5,329	36.1	4,136	28.0	5,075	34.4	218	1.5	-	
California	4	38,733	32.3	37,999	31.7	33,969	28.4	9,111	7.6	-	
TOTAL	**180**										

[b]Lincoln won 4 out of a total of 7 EC votes in NJ, since the Bell and Breckinridge 'fusion' electors polled fewer votes than the Douglas 'fusion' electors, and fewer than Lincoln. The popular vote total is the figure for the Douglas electors.

Table 3: Shift in the Republican percentage of the popular vote 1856 - 1860

	LINCOLN, 1860	FREMONT, 1856	Shift
Pennsylvania	56.3	32.0	24.3
New Jersey	48.1	28.5	19.6
California	32.3	18.8	13.5
Indiana	51.1	40.1	11.0
Illinois	50.7	40.2	10.5
Missouri	10.3	0	10.3
New York	53.7	46.2	7.5
Iowa	54.6	48.8	5.8
Connecticut	58.1	53.2	4.9
Ohio	52.3	48.5	3.8
Rhode Island	61.4	57.9	3.5
Wisconsin	56.6	53.3	3.3
New Hampshire	56.9	53.7	3.2
Virginia	1.1	0	1.1
Maine	62.2	61.3	0.9
Kentucky	0.9	0	0.9
Michigan	57.2	57.1	0.1
Massachusetts	62.9	63.6	-0.7
Vermont	75.7	78.0	-2.3
Minnesota	63.4	-	-
Oregon	36.1	-	-
NATION	**39.8**	**33.1**	**6.7**

Table 4a: Lincoln/Douglas and Breckinridge/Bell pop vote totals in Slave States[c]

State and electoral votes		Douglas / Lincoln Popular Vote	Breckinridge / Bell Popular Vote	Breckinridge / Bell % of the popular vote
Alabama	9	13,618	76,504	84.9%
Arkansas	4	5,357	48,795	90.1%
Delaware	3	4,888	11,227	69.7%
Florida	3	223	13,078	98.3%
Georgia	10	11,581	95,136	89.2%
Kentucky	12	27,015	119,201	81.5%
Louisiana	6	7,625	42,885	84.9%
Maryland	8	8,260	84,242	91.0%
Mississippi	7	3,282	65,813	95.3%
Missouri	9	75,829	89,734	54.2%
North Carolina	10	2,737	93,975	97.2%
Tennessee	12	11,281	134,825	92.3%
Texas	4	18	62,837	100.0%
Virginia	15	18,085	148,806	89.2%
TOTALS		189,799	1,087,058	**85.1%**

[c]Excluding South Caroline, where there were no direct elections for presidential electors

Table 4b: Lincoln/Douglas and Breckinridge/Bell pop vote totals in Free States

State and electoral votes		Douglas / Lincoln Popular Vote	Breckinridge / Bell Popular Vote	Douglas / Lincoln % of the popular vote
California	4	76,732	43,080	64.0%
Connecticut	6	58,919	15,900	78.7%
Illinois	11	332,386	7,245	97.9%
Indiana	13	254,542	17,601	93.5%
Iowa	4	125,941	2,798	97.8%
Maine	8	92,504	8,414	91.7%
Massachusetts	13	141,054	28,494	83.2%
Michigan	6	153,538	1,220	99.2%
Minnesota	4	33,989	798	97.7%
New Hampshire	5	63,406	2,537	96.2%
New Jersey	7	121,215	0	100.0%
New York	35	523,276	151,879	77.5%
Ohio	23	419,130	23,600	94.7%
Oregon	3	9,465	5,293	64.1%
Pennsylvania	27	284,795	178,871	59.8%
Rhode Island	4	19,951	0	100.0%
Vermont	5	42,457	2,187	95.1%
Wisconsin	5	151,131	1,048	99.3%
		2,904,431	490,965	**85.2%**