



Lincoln Lore

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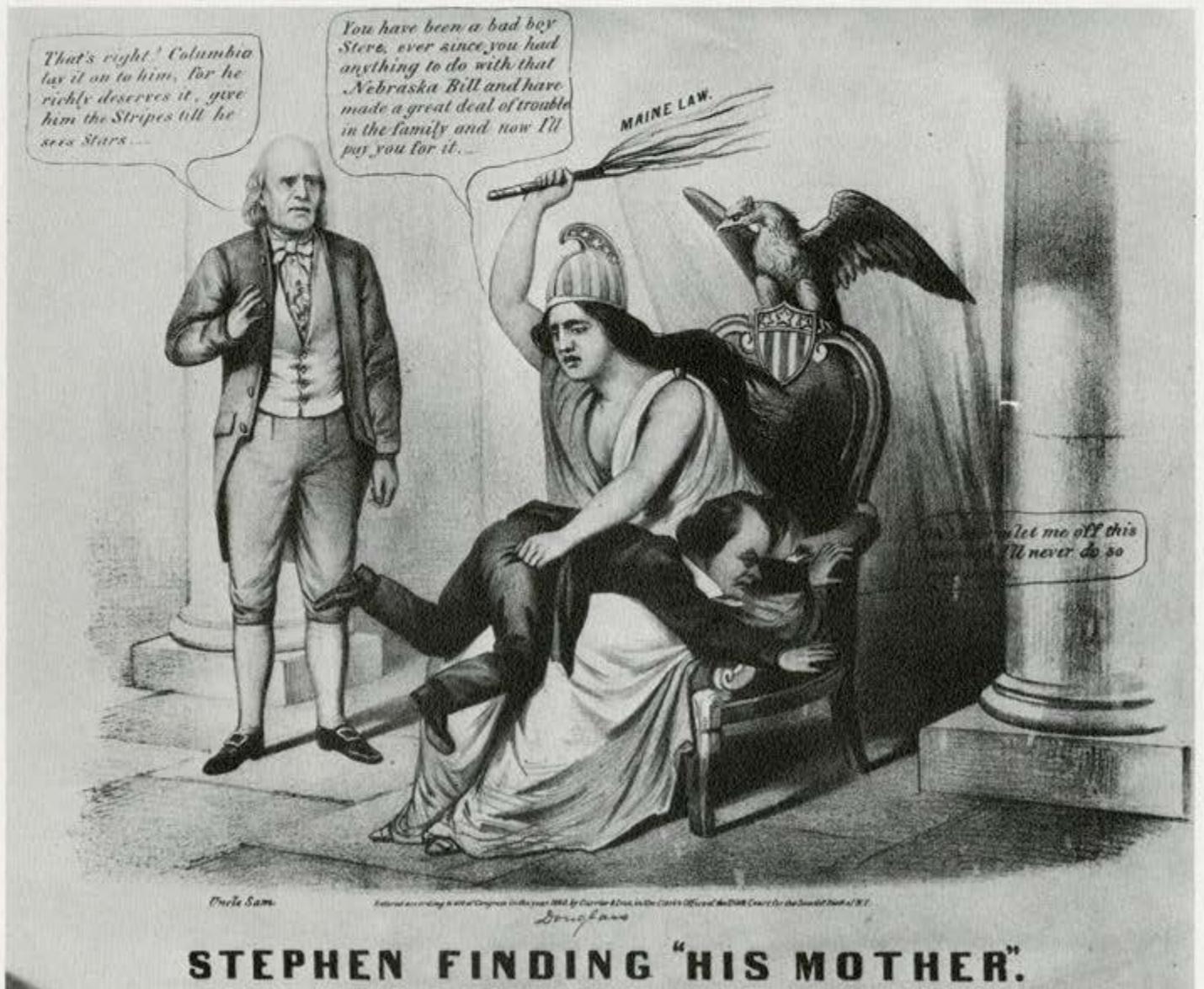
LINCOLN, DOUGLAS AND THE "MAINE LAW"

Editor's Note: I am heavily indebted to Michael Fitzgibbon Holt's *Forging a Majority: The Formation of the Republican Party in Pittsburgh, 1848-1860* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969) for the interpretation of the origins of the Republican Party discussed below. I also owe a debt to Eric Foner's *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970). William H. Townsend's *Lincoln and Liquor* (New York: The Press of the Pioneers, 1934) supplied many of the specificities of Lincoln's relationship to the temperance crusade. Clifford S. Griffin's *Their Brothers' Keeper: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1960) and Stephen Hess and Milton Kaplan's *The Ungentlemanly Art: A History of American Political Cartoons* (New York: Macmillan, 1968) were helpful for the impact of the Maine

Law and the use of cartoons, respectively. Other more specific items of indebtedness are noted in the text.

The following is, of course, a highly speculative matter of interpretation, but I know of no other treatment of the document in question.
M. E. N., Jr.

Anyone who has looked at the political cartoons generated by the campaign of 1860 knows from the haunting presence of the anonymous black faces in those cartoons (otherwise remarkable for the almost photographic likenesses of politicians) that there was more to sectional conflict than disputes over the relative benefits of pro-



STEPHEN FINDING "HIS MOTHER."

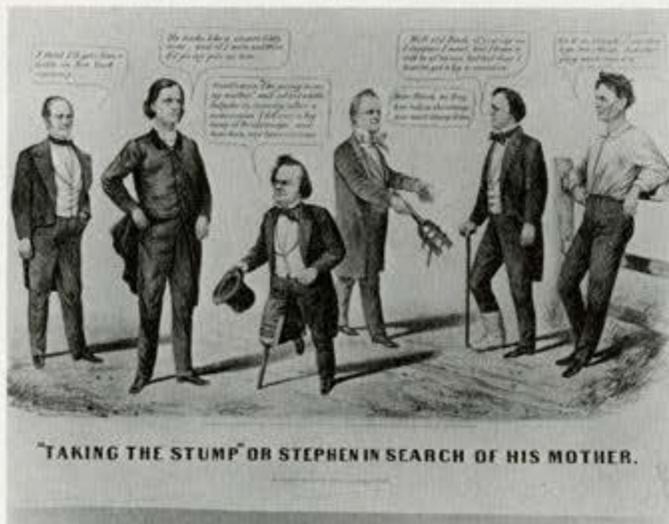
tective tariffs and homestead legislation. Political cartoons can betray with forceful impact issues and controversies slighted or forgotten by historians who examine conventional campaign documents like formal party platforms. The problem, of course, is to interpret the picture correctly, and it is an especially difficult problem when the cartoon utilizes puns or veiled references to now-forgotten scandals and headlines of the day. Both the virtue and the difficulty of using political cartoons are well illustrated by the Currier and Ives political cartoon pictured on the front of this bulletin.

Nathaniel Currier and James Merritt Ives employed artists to draw cartoons critical of all candidates in a presidential contest. In some cases, the same artist drew cartoons both for and against a candidate; Louis Maurer, for example, did both pro- and anti-Lincoln cartoons even though he apparently voted for Lincoln in 1860. The cartoons were printed in large numbers to sell at bulk rates to interested parties (no doubt to local political headquarters); the cartoons could also be purchased singly. American cartoonists did not go in for caricature, but instead drew scrupulously accurate facial likenesses and depended for humor on the improbable physical situation the candidates were involved in — in this case, Stephen Douglas's being whipped by his "marm," Columbia, the female personification of the United States.

A cartoon like this one, recently added to the Library and Museum's collection, serves to remind us of forgotten controversies and headlines, but requires considerable exegesis for that very reason: the issue is forgotten or obscure today. The caption is a case in point. The situation was suggested by the improbable explanations offered for Douglas's behavior in the 1860 campaign. As a carry-over from colonial political ideals, Americans in the nineteenth century held that the office should seek the man rather than the man the office. American presidential candidates did not take to the stump for themselves or for their party before 1860. Stephen Douglas broke precedent in campaigning vigorously for his election to the presidency in 1860. The shock to contemporary American assumptions about seemly political behavior is documented in the cartoon below and in the lame excuse offered by some Democrats that Douglas was giving speeches on the way to visit his mother's home. From this controversy stemmed the situation in the recently acquired cartoon as well.

Having found "his mother," Douglas was administered a whipping, according to this cartoon, but not, apparently, just because he had breached political decorum by seeking the office actively. It is the "Maine Law" with which Columbia administers the lashing. Again, the issue seems obscure.

In 1851, Maine passed the first state-wide prohibition law forbidding the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages. It was an important event, symbolizing a radical turn in American sentiments about the consumption of alcoholic beverages. Contrary to popular opinion, America has not had a long anti-liquor heritage. To say "teetotalism" is "puritanical," for instance, is a mis-



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

nomer, for the New England Puritans drank substantial quantities of wine and rum. Hoping to live simply in the world but not of it, they held an ideal of moderation in alcoholic consumption. Moderation (in everything) was the ideal of the eighteenth-century in America, and such "enlightened" American thinkers as Benjamin Franklin thought that one should not drink to excess or impair that faculty which separated man from the animals, reason.

It would be more proper to call teetotalism "Victorian," for prohibition sentiment dates from the nineteenth century, in particular, from the enthusiastic revivals of America's Second Great Awakening. The crucial move in this change of sentiment was the identification of the consumption of alcohol as a *sin*. By the 1830's, an ever-increasing number of Americans thought that drinking held back the millennium, and that the person who aspired to a virtuous life must say "no" to any proffered drink.

The Maine Law also signalled a move from moral suasion to legal coercion as the way to encourage the defeat of the sin of drunkenness. It split the anti-liquor movement (already split between old-fashioned advocates of temperance and advocates of total abstinence), and it also had cataclysmic effects on American political parties. The "Maine Law Agitation," as it was sometimes called, spread immediately to Vermont, which passed a prohibition measure in 1852 endorsed by an 1853 referendum. The legislatures of Michigan and Wisconsin produced prohibition measures in 1853; these too were endorsed by referenda.

Significantly, when the Maine Law agitation hit Illinois in the early 1850's, Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas could be found on different sides of the question. That is not to say that Lincoln was a Maine Law man (though some have claimed he was) or that Douglas was a drunkard (though some have claimed he was). But Lincoln, who was by all reports abstinent in his personal drinking habits, did, in 1853, place his name with that of thirty-eight other Springfield citizens requesting the publication of a sermon by the Reverend James Smith entitled "*A Discourse on the Bottle — Its Evils, and the Remedy; or, A Vindication of the Liquor-Seller, and the Liquor Drinker, from Certain Aspersions Cast upon Them by Many*," delivered before a convention of the Maine Law Alliance in Springfield. One should not jump to the conclusion from the title that the *Discourse* justified liquor sellers and drinkers. On the contrary, it attacked them, but it pointed to the legislature which gave the liquor seller the legal authority to traffic in spirits and the people of whom they were the servants as the ultimate culprits responsible for the drunkard. The letter was non-committal in regard to the substance of the lecture, and, perhaps significantly, referred to "temperance" rather than total abstinence or prohibition:

Rev. James Smith, D. D.: Springfield, January 24, 1853.

Sir:—The undersigned having listened with great satisfaction to the discourse, on the subject of temperance, delivered by you on last evening, and believing, that, if published and circulated among the people, it would be productive of good; would respectfully request a copy thereof for publication. Very Respectfully,
Your friends:

Simeon Francis,	R. F. Ruth,	G. Jayne,
Thomas Lewis,	J. B. McCandless,	J. C. Planck,
John Irwin,	C. Birchall,	John E. Denny,
A. Camp,	J. B. Fosselman,	W. M. Cowgill,
E. G. Johns,	Henry M. Brown,	D. E. Ruckel,
John Williams,	Thomas Moffett,	Thomas M. Taylor,
John T. Stuart,	B. S. Edwards,	John A. Chesnut,
A. Maxwell,	Thomas Alsop,	Mat. Stacy,
H. Vanhoff,	W. B. Cowgill,	H. S. Thomas,
D. Spear,	M. Greenleaf,	B. B. Brown,
Reuben Coon,	James W. Barret,	William F. Aitkin,
Henry Yeakle,	P. Wright,	Allen Francis,
E. B. Pease,	S. Grubb, sr.,	A. Lincoln.

[Roy Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, II (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 188.]

Though it is impossible to prove conclusively from available evidence whether Lincoln was a prohibitionist or not, it is certain that he was at least a temperance advocate. In fact, the signing of the letter to James

Smith culminated more than ten years' interest in the temperance movement for Lincoln. As early as 1842, he had addressed a meeting of The Washington Society, a temperance organization founded by reformed drunkards and committed to persuading people to take a pledge to abstain from drinking alcoholic beverages. Lincoln condemned attacks on drunkards as mentally or morally inferior and endorsed temperance advocated by "persuasion, kind, unassuming persuasion":

Whether or not the world would be vastly benefitted by a total and final banishment from it of all intoxicating drinks, seems to me not now to be an open question. Three-fourths of mankind confess the affirmative with their tongues, and, I believe, all the rest acknowledge it in their hearts.

Ought any, then, to refuse their aid in doing what the good of the whole demands? Shall he, who cannot do much, be, for that reason, excused if he do nothing? "But," says one, "what good can I do by signing the pledge? I never drink even without signing." This question has already been asked and answered more than millions of times. Let it be answered once more. For the man to suddenly, or in any other way, to break off from the use of drams, who has indulged in them for a long course of years, and until his appetite for them has become ten or a hundred fold stronger, and more craving, than any natural appetite can be, requires a most powerful moral effort. In such an undertaking, he needs every moral support and influence, that can possibly be brought to his aid, and thrown around him. And not only so; but every moral prop, should be taken from whatever argument might rise in his mind to lure him to his backsliding. When he casts his eyes around him, he should be able to see, all that he respects, all that he admires, and all that [he?] loves, kindly and anxiously pointing him onward; and none beckoning him back, to his former miserable "wallowing in the mire."

But it is said by some, that men will think and act for themselves; that none will disuse spirits or any thing else, merely because his neighbors do; and that moral influence is not that powerful engine contended for. Let us examine this. Let me ask the man who would maintain this position most stiffly, what compensation he will accept to go to church some Sunday and sit during the sermon with his wife's bonnet upon his head? Not a trifle, I'll venture. And why not? There would be nothing irreligious in it: nothing immoral, nothing uncomfortable. Then why not? Is it not because there would be something egregiously unfashionable in it? Then it is the influence of fashion; and what is the influence of fashion, but the influence that other people's actions have [on our own?] actions, the strong inclination each of us feels to do as we see all our neighbors do? Nor is the influence of fashion confined to any particular thing or class of things. It is just as strong on one subject as another. Let us make it as unfashionable to withhold our names from the temperance pledge as for husbands to wear their wives bonnets to church, and instances will be just as rare in the one case as the other.

"But," say some, "we are no drunkards; and we shall not acknowledge ourselves such by joining a reformed drunkard's society, whatever our influence might be." Surely no Christian will adhere to this objection. If they believe, as they profess, that Omnipotence condescended to take on himself the form of sinful man, and, as such, to die an ignominious death for their sakes, surely they will not refuse submission to the infinitely lesser condescension, for the temporal, and perhaps eternal salvation, of a large, erring, and unfortunate class of their own fellow creatures. Nor is the condescension very great.

In my judgment, such of us as have never fallen victims, have been spared more from the absence of appetite, than from any mental or moral superiority over those who have. Indeed, I believe, if we take habitual drunkards as a class, their heads and their hearts will bear an advantageous comparison with those of any other class. There seems ever to have been a proneness in the brilliant, and the warm-blooded, to fall into this vice. The demon of intemperance ever seems to have delighted in sucking the blood of genius and of generosity. What one of us but can

call to mind some dear relative, more promising in youth than all his fellows, who has fallen a sacrifice to his rapacity? He ever seems to have gone forth, like the Egyptian angel of death, commissioned to slay if not the first, the fairest born of every family. Shall he now be arrested in his desolating career? In that arrest, all can give aid that will; and who shall be excused that can, and will not? Far around as human breath has ever blown, he keeps our fathers, our brothers, our sons, and our friends, prostrate in the chains of moral death. To all the living every where, we cry, "come sound the moral resurrection trump, that these may rise and stand up, an exceeding great army"—"Come from the four winds, O breath! and breathe upon these slain, that they may live."

If the relative grandeur of revolutions shall be estimated by the great amount of human misery they alleviate, and the small amount they inflict, then, indeed, will this be the grandest the world shall ever have seen. Of our political revolution of '76, we all are justly proud. It has given us a degree of political freedom, far exceeding that of any other of the nations of the earth. In it the world has found a solution of that long mooted problem, as to the capability of man to govern himself. In it was the germ which has vegetated, and still is to grow and expand into the universal liberty of mankind.

But with all these glorious results, past, present, and to come, it had its evils too. It breathed forth famine, swam in blood and rode on fire; and long, long after, the orphan's cry, and the widow's wail, continued to break the sad silence that ensued. These were the price, the inevitable price, paid for the blessings it bought.

Turn now, to the temperance revolution. In it, we shall find a stronger bondage broken; a viler slavery, manumitted; a greater tyrant deposed. In it, more of want supplied, more disease healed, more sorrow assuaged. By it no orphans starving, no widows weeping. By it, none wounded in feeling, none insured in interest. Even the dram-maker, and the dram seller, will have glided into other occupations so gradually, as never to have felt the shock of change; and will stand ready to join all others in the universal song of gladness.

And what a noble ally this, to the cause of political freedom. With such an aid, its march cannot fail to be on and on, till every son of earth shall drink in rich fruition, the sorrow quenching draughts of perfect liberty. Happy day, when, all appetites controlled, all passions subdued, all matters subjected, mind, all conquering mind, shall live and move the monarch of the world. Glorious consummation! Hail fall of Fury! Reign of Reason, all hail!

And when the victory shall be complete — when there shall be neither a slave nor a drunkard on the earth — how proud the title of that Land, which may truly claim to be the birth-place and the cradle of both those revolutions, that shall have ended in that victory. How nobly distinguished that People, who shall have planted, and nurtured to maturity, both the political and moral freedom of their species.

[Roy Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, I (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 276, 277, 278-279.]

I say the Smith letter culminated Lincoln's association with temperance agitation advisedly, because after 1853 he was rather conspicuously silent on the issue. When a Maine Law referendum campaign was being vigorously waged in Illinois in 1855, Lincoln was thinking about a Senate seat and apparently took no active part in the prohibition campaign.

Lincoln's silence may have been dictated by the political volatility of the prohibition issue, for volatile it was. In fact, some historians now think that the roots of the Republican Party are to be found not simply in the slavery extension issue but in a whole complex of issues that disrupted the old parties, including slavery extension, prohibition, and nativism. For example, Stephen Douglas, admittedly hardly a reliable witness where Republican intentions are concerned, said in 1855 that the new political movement brought into being by the Kansas-Nebraska Act was "a crucible into which poured Abolitionism, Maine liquor law-ism, and what was left

of northern Whiggism, and then the Protestant feeling against the Catholic and the native feeling against the foreigner." Douglas, incidentally, opposed all the movements he mentioned, opposed the Illinois prohibition law, and, according to his biographers, was himself given to rather frequent and heavy consumption of strong drink. Douglas was not alone in viewing the origins of the Republican Party this way; a Connecticut political observer in 1854, for example, commented on the "political revolution . . . growing out of the excitement in relation to the Kansas-Nebraska outrage, and the Maine Law question."

The State of Indiana provides an interesting example. According to Emma Lou Thornbrough's, *Indiana in the Civil War Era, 1850-1880* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1966), the 1852 state elections saw temperance advocates demanding a Maine Law and urging voters not to vote for candidates of either party who were on record against such legislation. The state legislature in 1853 responded feebly with a local option law allowing each township to decide each year whether to prohibit liquor sales or not. This was declared unconstitutional by the Indiana Supreme Court, and in 1854 prohibition advocates increased their efforts. Significantly, the Democratic Party's state convention responded with a platform plank condemning prohibition legislation. Democrats left their party on account of this plank as well as the Kansas-Nebraska bill, so that — again as Thornbrough points out — disaffected Democrats complained about *two* things: "Democrats Arouse! Those who aspire to be our leaders have betrayed us . . . they have attempted to bind and sell us to the slave driver of the South, and the rum seller of the North." These same groups later merged with Whigs and Know-Nothings to form the Republican Party. Thus some people certainly voted Republican because they identified the Democrats with liquor, whatever they may have thought of the slavery issue.

The anti-Democratic coalition called the People's Party (many of whom would later become Republicans) which gained control of the state legislature in Indiana in the 1854 elections, passed a prohibition law, also struck down by the Indiana Supreme Court in 1855. The same was true in other states as well. Anti-liquor Republicans attempted to pass a prohibition law in Wisconsin in 1855, which was amended by the State Senate to exempt cider, wine, and beer and then vetoed by the Democratic governor. Anti-Nebraska forces in Iowa behind their governor James W. Grimes, an anti-slavery temperance Whig who would become a Republican, also passed a Maine Law, repealed in 1856.

If anti-Democratic forces were so frequently against liquor, then the obvious question is, why did Lincoln become more silent on the temperance issue in the late 1850's? The answer, to make a long story short, is that in most states of the Old Northwest, Republicans quickly hushed up the temperance issue in order to gain the German vote, which could often be attracted to platforms opposing the extension of slavery but which most often opposed prohibition of alcoholic beverages. In Illinois, according to James M. Bergquist in "People and Politics in Transition: The Illinois Germans, 1850-60" (in Frederick C. Luebke, ed., *Ethnic Voters and the Election of Lincoln* [Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1971]), Republicans in the mid-1850's figured it was more important to accommodate the Germans, who otherwise would return to their traditional Democratic voting habits, than the temperance advocates, who would hardly be likely to turn to the anti-prohibition Democratic Party.

With this elaborate background of mid-century political events, the cartoon under discussion takes on considerably more meaning and significance. Obviously the cartoon attests to the fact that prohibition sentiment was not a dead matter for some people even by 1860. Perhaps in localities where the German community was insignificant in number, such a cartoon could have been used to rally prohibitionists against Douglas. About the specific uses of specific cartoons and their volume of distribution in particular areas we at present know very little. But the existence of the cartoon should stand as a warning to historians who would place exclusive emphasis on the slavery issue in the politics of the 1850's and the campaign of 1860.

An interesting postscript to this discussion is suggested by still another Currier and Ives cartoon not in the possession of the Lincoln Library and Museum. Apparently the printers saved some time and money by publishing the same cartoon with the lash carrying the label not of "Maine Law" but of "News from Maine." In 1860, the national election day was not necessarily election day for the states. Pennsylvania and Indiana, two crucial states for the Republicans, voted in October for state offices. Maine was the first state in the Union to vote; their state elections were held in September. Attention out of proportion to the electoral vote was focused on Maine for this reason. Lincoln expressed his concern in a letter to his vice-presidential running mate Hannibal Hamlin on September 4, 1860:

Springfield, Illinois, September 4, 1860.

My dear Sir: I am annoyed some by a letter from a friend in Chicago, in which the following passage occurs: "Hamlin has written Colfax that two members of Congress will, he fears, be lost in Maine—the first and sixth districts; and that Washburne's majority for governor will not exceed six thousand."

I had heard something like this six weeks ago, but had been assured since that it was not so. Your secretary of state,—Mr. Smith, I think,—whom you introduced to me by letter, gave this assurance; more recently, Mr. Fessenden, our candidate for Congress in one of those districts, wrote a relative here that his election was sure by at least five thousand, and that Washburne's majority would be from 14,000 to 17,000; and still later, Mr. Fogg, of New Hampshire, now at New York serving on a national committee, wrote me that we were having a desperate fight in Maine, which would end in a splendid victory for us.

Such a result as you seem to have predicted in Maine, in your letter to Colfax, would, I fear, put us on the down-hill track, lose us the State elections in Pennsylvania and Indiana, and probably ruin us on the main turn in November.

You must not allow it. Yours very truly, A. Lincoln.
[From Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, IV (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 110.]

Hamlin denied Lincoln's charge, and Maine belied the prediction in the election. The total vote in Maine was the largest ever cast, and all of the Republican congressional candidates won. Thus did the state of Maine administer its lashing to Stephen Douglas.

