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## The Struggle for the Union: The Constitutional Union Party in the Election of 1860

### Abstract

One of the most important and influential periods in our nation's history, the outbreak of the Civil War occurred as a result of the pivotal presidential election of 1860. The Constitutional Union Party, less well known than the others, attempted to provide a national united force at a time of crisis; their goal was to support the Constitution and not divisive political policies. Despite their efforts in Northern and Southern states, their candidates did not capture any of the major offices and the Constitutional Union Party disbanded shortly after.

## The Struggle for the Union: The Constitutional Union Party in the Election of 1860

By Lauren Jensen

*One of the most important and influential periods in our nation's history, the outbreak of the Civil War occurred as a result of the pivotal presidential election of 1860. The Constitutional Union Party, less well known than the others, attempted to provide a national united force at a time of crisis; their goal was to support the Constitution and not divisive political policies. Despite their efforts in Northern and Southern states, their candidates did not capture any of the major offices and the Constitutional Union Party disbanded shortly after.*

Resolved, That it is both the part of patriotism and of duty to recognise no political principle other than *the Constitution of our country, the union of the States, and the enforcement of the Laws...* [under the] Constitution of our fathers, [that] has solemnly bound every citizen of the United States, to maintain a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility...and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.<sup>43</sup>

In the months leading to the presidential election of 1860, most Americans understood the grave importance of the contest that eventually led to a political confrontation between the industrializing Northern states and the agriculturally slavery based Southern states. However, some citizens did not see the divided landscape of the Union, and united together to form the Constitutional Union Party. The Constitutional Unionists' efforts were some of the final attempts to save the United States from disunion, as well as some of the most overlooked by historians.

Political chaos had taken hold of American politics throughout the 1850s and conflicting opinions were more prevalent than ever in the 1860 election. The election of 1856 was a tight contest between the Democrats and Republicans, with the American Party trailing in third. Stephen A Douglas's support of the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act during the mid-term election of 1858 reiterated this strain placed upon the Union. His policies were either divisive, oriented to increase the divide between the northern and southern states, or were the final stages of compromise while some Southern states, notably South Carolina, talked about secession from the Union. Not only was southern pride hurt before the election, there was a southern fear that northern abolitionists wanted slaves to rebel and murder their masters in their beds. Fear of slave rebellions ran rampant throughout the South; however, time showed that no such plot existed on a large-scale organized level. Yet the raid at Harpers' Ferry and the anti-slavery movements elsewhere in the country fueled political and social turmoil. With so many divided opinions, it is no surprise that the nation's political parties were divided as well.

From January to November of 1860, southern and northern politicians clamored for reconciliation. Generally, northerners did not rush to appease the demands of the southern states just as southerners were not readily willing to give up the possibility of slavery and the Southern way of living spreading to the new territories in the West. Slavery was not the only cause of strife, but it was the main principle of the campaigns of the election. Every party attempted to outline its position on slavery strategically, so citizens knew the goals of each party and could

<sup>43</sup> The Daily National Intelligencer. Constitutional Union Convention, Detailed Report of the Second Day. Washington D.C.: Gales & Seaton. Saturday, May 12, 1860.

vote accordingly. The 1860 presidential election was unique because there were four political parties, which divided the country and two separate elections occurred that November. In the South, Breckenridge and the Southern Democrats battled against Bell and the Constitutional Unionists. In the North, on the other hand, Lincoln and the Republicans challenged Douglas and the Northern Democrats. While most Democrats remained true to their geographical area, some Southern Democrats supported Douglas and certain Northern Democrats promised to vote for Breckenridge.

Members of the Democratic Party headed to Charleston to attend their convention first. Questions of territorial and slavery expansion had split the party into two factions, one following the leadership of Stephen Douglas, supporting popular sovereignty, and the other the principles of John C. Calhoun, William Yancey, and Chief Justice Taney. These Democrats endorsed the spread of slavery into new territories along with the principles of the Constitution.<sup>44</sup> Douglas angered southerners when he said that the Dred Scott decision did not decide the fate of slavery and instead proposed the idea that it only settled the fact that a black person was not a citizen, and therefore could not bring a case before a court. In addition to the slavery question, the Democratic Party was split, like the nation, over the admission of Kansas into the Union under the Lecompton Constitution. Again Douglas appeared to be an enemy of the South. "No longer would the South parley with a Northern man with Southern principles, no longer compromise or fall short of insistence upon their extreme position. To compromise was a losing policy."<sup>45</sup> In Charleston, where political turbulence matched that of the Democratic Party, the Douglas faction managed to pass their platform which quickly prompted the walkout of 50 delegates from the Lower South.<sup>46</sup> With the absence of Southern delegates, Douglas could not reach the two-thirds threshold needed for the nomination. Before reaching a decision, the convention decided to reconvene in Baltimore in June.

After the walkout, the seceding members met in Charleston and held their own convention. The delegates listened to speeches but went "on record as opposed to the adoption of a new party name and to the issuing of a separate platform of principles."<sup>47</sup> The few weeks in between were filled with tension. Northerners returned to their home states angry with their Southern counterparts and Southern Democrats were grossly disappointed with the stubbornness and unwillingness of their Northern brethren to compromise. When the convention convened in Baltimore, most of the northern delegates were willing to seat southerners, but the "anti-Douglas southerners wanted all or nothing."<sup>48</sup> As the eyes of the nation were focused on the Democratic convention, some noted that it would foreshadow the general election. Ex-Governor Herschel V. Johnson of Georgia wrote that "The overthrow of the national Democratic Party would be a gigantic stride toward dissolution."<sup>49</sup> His statement proved true for the nation: first came the split of the Democratic Party, and then the split of the Union. As the delegates attempted to acquire the two-thirds needed for nomination, Douglas's main rival, John C. Breckinridge, emerged as a strong challenger who better represented the ambitions of the South, receiving only forty less votes than Douglas. Nevertheless, Douglas was declared the nominee of Democratic

<sup>44</sup> Fite, Emerson David. *The Presidential Campaign of 1860*. New York: Macmillan Company, 1911. 92.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>46</sup> McPherson, James. *Battle Cry of Freedom, The Civil War Era*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2003. 215.

<sup>47</sup> Fite, 107.

<sup>48</sup> McPherson, 216.

<sup>49</sup> Fite, 108.

Party and Herschel Johnson was chosen as his vice presidential candidate. Upon hearing the declaration the southern Democrats again walked out of the convention and organized their own.

Southern Democrats, unhappy with the national party's platform, separated and nominated John Breckinridge for president and Joseph Lane as his vice president. Although they formed their own party, this was not their original goal. Southern Democrats were loyal party members and the destruction of the national Democratic Party was not their prime target. However, the defeat of Douglas was. Yancey and others looked forward to a move for southern independence and the annihilation of the national party seemed a step in the right direction.<sup>50</sup> The split simply renewed northern disgust of their southern counterparts, a feeling which would surface again after Lincoln's election.

The Republican Party held their nominating convention in Chicago where they faced problems different from that of the Democratic Party. The Republican Party was comprised of conflicting elements, old Whigs and former Democrats, which made it difficult to find and nominate a candidate that all new Republicans and sections of the country could agree upon. Like their opponents, the beginnings of the convention centered on a single man, William H. Seward, who believed he was the favorite and was bound to take the nomination on the first ballot. However, just as division followed Douglas, Seward had a host of issues threatening to split the fledgling party if he was nominated. His reputation centered on "irrepressible conflict" which made him popular with the radicals and essentially a "sponsor for political antislavery."<sup>51</sup> Seward's radicalism alienated southern counties of northern states; he opposed Know-Nothingism, the remnants of which the Republicans needed as a source of support, and was associated with corruption in the New York legislature, which did not make him a favorable candidate for members from all regions.

The question facing the convention was, if Seward's nomination failed, who would be the best nominee? As a host of minor candidates moved forward, four stood out: Salmon P. Chase of Ohio, Simon Cameron of Pennsylvania, Edward Bates of Missouri, and Abraham Lincoln of Illinois. While state delegations were discussing their options, the convention lost no time in settling debate over the platform. On the second day it was passed with less than one-third of its content related to slavery, illustrating that their antislavery passions from 1856 had abated.<sup>52</sup> Abraham Lincoln was the prime candidate for the Republican Party. Lincoln had gained attention for himself with the 1858 debates against Douglas, had few enemies, and was more likely to win the lower North. Lincoln gained support from Know-Nothings and former Whigs and his stance on slavery had remained the same. He was consistent and opposed slavery, but proceeded with the plan to halt the expansion of slavery into the territories rather than outlawing it completely. On the third ballot, the Republican convention nominated Abraham Lincoln for president and Hannibal Hamlin, from Maine and a friend of Seward's, for vice president to balance the ticket.

As summer approached, the Democrats and the Republicans had held their respective conventions which resulted in a three-way contest between southern Democrats, northern Democrats, and the more united Republicans. However, there was a growing movement of constitutional unity whose advocates thought that none of the three parties met their needs. As a result, the Constitutional Union Party was founded. Mass "Union Meetings" throughout the Northeast, and later on in the Midwest, gathered locals to the cause. New York, New Jersey, and

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 116.

<sup>51</sup> Fite, 119.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 124.

Kentucky were among the first to hold meetings and elect delegates. The delegates from most of the states decided that the safest route would be a platform which did not address any of the issues that caused division between northern and southern states. From the beginning their strength was considerably weaker than that of the two Democratic parties and the Republicans, but the Constitutional Unionists were not in the race to win the presidency, but rather to weaken Lincoln in the lower North and therefore throw the election into the House of Representatives. If this was achieved, then the Constitutional Unionists hoped to reconcile the differences between the North and the South by electing a president who would attempt to settle sectional differences.

Throughout northern and southern states, union meetings were sanctioned in the months before the convention, where citizens pledged their support to a movement, not yet a party, which promised to maintain unification. John J. Crittenden called the convention to order and nominated Washington Hunt of New York as the temporary chairman to proceed over the convention. Hunt addressed the delegates and onlookers in an opening address: "We are brought by no partisan influences, for in times like these the interests of party and schemes of personal ambition become utterly insignificant and worthless. . . . Let us know no party but our country, and no platform but the Union."<sup>53</sup> During the afternoon session, he continued to reiterate the purpose of the Constitutional Union Party:

We are one people and one country; we go forth under one flag; we stand upon national ground, representing the interest of a great continent which Providence has entrusted to our charge; and I believe the people will yet prove themselves equal to the destiny which has been given to them, and hand it over, as one harmonious nation, to those who are to come after us."<sup>54</sup>

When the delegates turned their attention to the development of a platform, the result was one without much substance. Thomas Swann of Maryland believed that they should "repudiate all platforms but the Constitution" and Erastus Brooks of New York agreed, stating that "this Convention [is] to present no platform to the country save the Constitution of the United States."<sup>55</sup> Edward Everett, the soon-to-be vice presidential candidate said: "The Constitution of the United States is Platform enough and the public character of Individuals sufficient guaranty [sic] of their fidelity to it [and that the Party was to] assume the position of moderation in the great sectional conflict."<sup>56</sup> After discussing their platform, the delegates moved straight to the nomination of their candidates on the second day. By the end of the second ballot, they nominated John Bell of Tennessee for president. Edward Everett of Massachusetts, a contender for the presidential nomination, was chosen for the office of vice president despite his protests.<sup>57</sup> By the time the nomination results were published, Constitutional Union Party supporters began to question their ability to maintain the Union:

Would it not be a glorious thing for the peace and unity and prosperity of our whole country if each and all of the other parties, discarding their several dissensions and predilections, could unite upon them in a spirit of comprehensive patriotism, and thus

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<sup>53</sup> The Daily National Intelligencer. Friday May 11, 1860.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> The Daily National Intelligencer. Friday May 11, 1860.

<sup>56</sup> Brown, Thomas. "Edward Everett and the Constitutional Union Party of 1860." *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 11:2. 71.

<sup>57</sup> Varg, Paul A. *Edward Everett, The Intellectual in the Turmoil of Politics*. Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1992. 190.

give us once more a thrice happy era of good feeling? What say you, gentlemen, delegates of Chicago, Richmond, and Baltimore? Can you do better?<sup>58</sup>

Conducting two separate campaigns under the same flag was not the goal of the Constitutional Unionists; it hurt their cause of nationalism. Even though the Democratic Party had split, Douglas remained a strong challenger for Lincoln. Honest Abe's credentials were increased as scandals over the Democratic spoils system emerged and the Republicans took full advantage, appealing to voters' sense of integrity and honesty. The charges did not settle well for the current Buchanan administration and reflected poorly on the Democratic candidates. The sale of government property, bribery of judges, and the corruption of the civil service were all part of a House investigating committee report that was published in June of 1860. This gave the Republicans just enough time to produce a shortened version for distribution.

As the campaign continued, the threat of secession from the Union by southern states increased in proportion to the fear of a Republican administration. Horace Greeley and other Republicans promised not to attack slavery unless using constitutional means; Southerners thought that no matter how dedicated to the Constitution a Republican administration would be, they would still seek to undermine slavery.<sup>59</sup> The southerners feared more incidents like John Brown and the abolition of slavery altogether. Their argument rested on the notion that if the fugitive slave law and the 'rescues' of fugitives were threatened under the Democratic Buchanan administration, then there was no hope for the southern plantation system to survive under a Republican president. This fear compounded and Southerners thought that not only their way of life would be endangered, but also their pride and rights would be taken from them.

The South believed that cotton was king and that their independence could be maintained with the plantation system. In addition, Europe would rush to the South's aid because they would need King Cotton. The South believed that the North could not survive without the system of slavery supporting them, therefore giving Southern demands more leverage. Unfortunately, this theory would not prove useful once the Lower South had seceded. It is important to keep in mind that not all Southerners advocated secession in the case of Lincoln's election. Many thought that it would be to their disadvantage because of the costs of setting up a government and the taxation that the citizens would endure.<sup>60</sup> None of the parties openly supported secession, but the Bell-Everett campaign made it one of their goals to entice the Breckenridge Democrats into openly admitting their support and "convict them of their true secessionist sentiment."<sup>61</sup> It was difficult for the Breckenridge Democrats to deny this because most of their supporters were the most radical and the least supportive of the Union.

The other candidates also addressed the growing concern over Southern secession. Bell made a strict plan to adhere to moderation and compromise because those were the principles of the Constitution itself, but members of his party did have a reputation for growing violent on the subject. Douglas's campaign for unionism rested with the idea that if a Republican (Lincoln) was elected, the southern states did not have the right to secede and that the president did have the power to enforce all laws in defense of the Union. As November drew nearer, Douglas focused more and more of his campaign on preserving the Union and less on his own election. One citizen wrote that he did not fear dissolution of the Union:

<sup>58</sup> The Daily National Intelligencer. Friday May 11, 1860.

<sup>59</sup> The Daily National Intelligencer. Friday May 11, 1860, 163.

<sup>60</sup> Fite, 172.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 175.

Whatever diversity of opinion may be among the four Presidential candidates as to slavery and the power of Congress over it, they are all united on one point—every one is in favor of the Union. . . . Under these assurances, the people must feel perfectly easy in their minds in regard to the future of the country, no matter how the election may turn. The fact that they all defer to the Union sentiment of the country proves that the Union is a little too strong yet for either of them to destroy, if they were so disposed.<sup>62</sup>

Douglas however, did not share the same opinion. He was the first to break with tradition and campaign for himself and, in a bold move, he traveled to southern states where he was despised by the people, in hopes of saving parts of the Union.

The Breckenridge campaign found weakness in the Constitutional Union Party's stance; whose interpretation of the Constitution did they follow, that of Washington and Madison, Calhoun, Yancey and Taney, or Douglas?<sup>63</sup> Between the two, neither Bell nor Everett had issued a formal statement on their opinion of slavery, which added to vague platform. Even though this presented Bell as a weak candidate allowing "his Southern campaign supporters to praise slavery . . . [and] at the same time his Northern supporters in Massachusetts, the home of Everett, the vice presidential candidate, stoutly denied any sympathy or connection with slavery." Everett's antislavery record appeared later in the campaign. Once the double-front of their campaign became apparent, it weakened their attractiveness as a Union party.

The Republicans never truly found secession an issue which they should be concerned with and "they ridiculed the Southern braggadocio, joked about it, but almost never took it up in earnest debate."<sup>64</sup> After secession had been attempted, however northern Republicans took the issue seriously. But to discuss the matter before Lincoln's election would seal the fate of the southern states and many of Lincoln's supporters would have thought harder about casting their ballot for him if it meant the onset of civil war. Most historians have agreed that this was the Republican Party's major error of the campaign, and "hindsight was to reveal that Southerners means what they said."<sup>65</sup>

In the meantime, supporters of the Constitutional Union Party sought another goal. Instead of discussing divisive issues, such as the Homestead Act, like the Democrats and the Republicans, the Constitutional Unionists tried to revive the ideals and policies of the Founding Fathers in an effort to uphold the Union. Members of the party felt that "all party issues were declared secondary to the preservation of the Union."<sup>66</sup> Since the party declared no formal platform, although some members of the Pennsylvania delegation did want a tariff proposal, party members expected to fail. In its place, the Constitutional Union Party that formed consisted of members of the populace who were determined to avoid civil war and disunion. This was an atypical party destined to fail, but the Constitutional Unionists did not give up hope; they continued to campaign and took a drastically different approach at the election than their three counterparts.

First, their appeal to the Constitution and the enforcement of the laws was exactly what every political party claims to stand for; a party would not pledge themselves as disloyal to the

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<sup>62</sup> The Daily National Intelligencer, June 30, 1860.

<sup>63</sup> Fite, 186.

<sup>64</sup> Fite, 187.

<sup>65</sup> McPherson, 230.

<sup>66</sup> Parks, Joseph Howard. *John Bell of Tennessee*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950. 355.



Constitution and in favor of political mutiny. Their appeal was calculated towards reason and caution and their 'platform' did not generate much excitement. Ironically, the Constitutional Unionists' strong point was also their weakest. Since the party decided not to take a stand on any of the issues, they lost out on political contests and support from voters; most voters were not going to be excited about leaders that promising to do nothing.<sup>67</sup> One citizen from Mattoon, Illinois wrote in support:

I believe that the perpetuity of the Union and the liberties of our people depend upon the success of a 'National Party' that shall not adopt the extreme views of either of the present prominent political parties. When I see what has passed in Congress, threatening disunion, I am not astonished that the conservative element of the country, seeing a crisis at hand, have determined to divert the public mind into a different channel, and thereby avert the blow that must have fallen ere long very heavily upon that best interest of the country.<sup>68</sup>

Their hope lay in a combination of voters from all backgrounds with enough Union sentiment to avoid civil war, and to politically work out the differences between the North and the South. Ideally, they wanted to appeal to voters in the middle.

Constitutional Unionists hoped to gain support from all areas of the country, though they did not focus much time or energy in the western states. Their campaign slogans appealed to the patriotic elements in every citizen. Some of the most notable are: "In Union there is strength. The Union: nothing can dissolve it. Applause follows merit where-Ever-et goes. A vote for Breckinridge is a vote for Lincoln. Satan was the first Seceder. The patriots of '76, we feel their spirit and will perpetuate their work. The States: Distinct as billows; one as the sea."<sup>69</sup> In Massachusetts, Everett's home state, and other northern states like New York, Union meetings took place in mass, but the candidates did not expect to win there. Everett admitted that he thought the battle had been lost even before the election took place. He hoped to block the election of Lincoln, and Bell wished the same. Bell anticipated that moderate Republicans would sense Lincoln did not have a chance as a sectional candidate and switch their votes to the Constitutional Union Party to prevent a Democratic victory. Since the Democrats were split anyway, it seemed logical to vote for Bell, the one candidate that attempted to bridge the gap between the sections.<sup>70</sup> Everett had a similar outlook; he hoped to gain votes from the South to create a non-sectional voting bloc. Everett described Lincoln as a "moderate and reasonable man"<sup>71</sup>, but he feared Lincoln's election as a representative of a sectional, antislavery party would undoubtedly lead to Southern succession. In other words, the Constitutional Unionists hoped to pull enough votes to throw the election to the House.

Even this task proved too difficult for the non-sectional party. In the North, the Constitutional Unionists knew that Lincoln had enormous strength and Everett expected to lose Massachusetts. Early polling indicated that there was a possibility that the Unionists could take New York, but by November Republican strength was more than they could handle. In the South, Bell and Everett opened with an appeal to southern Unionists and for the most part, the

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 356.

<sup>68</sup> The Daily National Intelligencer, March 14, 1860.

<sup>69</sup> The Daily National Intelligencer,, August 10, 1860.

<sup>70</sup> Parks, 356.

<sup>71</sup> Varg, 190.

plan worked. They had a strong showing in the beginning but their support faltered as Election Day neared, just like it had in many northern states. The Breckenridge Democrats attacked Everett as antislavery and even published articles stating that his children went to school with blacks.<sup>72</sup> Everett admitted that they did, but he found no merit in arguing over something he saw as insignificant. This charge helped weaken the Unionists showing which lead to a sweep of southern states by Breckenridge. The *Daily National Intelligencer*, sympathetic to the Unionist cause and managed by a friend of Bell's, defended the Unionists position noting that electing a Republican, or either of the Democrats, would be a worse choice for the nation.

By the time November 6<sup>th</sup> rolled around, it was a known fact that Republicans held a majority of the strength throughout the campaign and the Democrats half-expected defeat. The only hope for the northern and southern Democrats and the Constitutional Unionists would be an amalgamation of all three parties in order to deny Lincoln the electoral majority he needed, and therefore throw the election into the House of Representatives. This was not likely to happen with the "legacy of warfare between Douglas and Buchanan [which] thwarted cooperation, while the Know-Nothing ancestry of the Constitutional Unionists bred distrust among foreign-born Democrats."<sup>73</sup> The feud between the Breckenridge and Bell supporters grew fierce as Election Day approached. Last minute efforts in eastern states like New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania did produce some fusion tickets which combined the efforts of the Constitutional Unionists and both Democratic factions in order to prevent a Republican victory. The fusion tickets' goal was to attract enough voters to deny the Republicans votes and preserve the Union at the same time. Unfortunately, the fusion movement was not strong enough.

Lincoln and the Republican Party were victorious. Lincoln did not capture a majority of the popular vote, earning 39.82 percent, but did succeed in winning 59.4 percent of the electoral vote, making him the next President of the United States. Lincoln carried seventeen states, all northern or western. Douglas achieved his only northern victory in New Jersey, which was only accomplished through a fusion ticket of all three opposition parties. John Bell managed to capture parts the Border States of Virginia, Kentucky, and his home state of Tennessee, but did not succeed in taking any states from Lincoln. It is important to note that he captured thirteen percent of the popular vote. This is significant in the fact that this was the party's first (and last) election, he won more electoral votes than Douglas, and was only behind Breckinridge by five votes. Despite competition from the Constitutional Unionists, Breckinridge managed to sweep most of the upper and the entire lower south.<sup>74</sup>

Lincoln's election was the beginning of disunion. A battle between antislavery supporters and Unionists, who favored some concessions in order to preserve the Union, raged in the North, while in the South, politicians were unwavering. They wanted concessions or nothing. Northern papers and Republican supporters rallied to the South's warnings and stated that Lincoln and his administration did not seek to destroy them, but it was too late. The Secession Crisis had taken hold of the incoming Republican administration and, for the first time, the southern warnings sank into northern ears. Despite encouragement from Democrats, northern and southern, as well as Constitutional Unionists, Lincoln said nothing during the crisis. Partly because of this, Republicans did not have much reason to celebrate their victory. A month later South Carolina succeeded from the Union. Lincoln's lame duck administration waited while prospects for maintaining the Union grew weaker and weaker.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> McPherson, 232.

<sup>74</sup> See Figure 1.

Why were the Constitutional Unionists unsuccessful in their bid to save the Union with a national party? The first noticeable problem was their lack of a platform. The party did not stand for anything that distinguished them from the rest; every party claimed to uphold the Constitution. Second, Bell's nomination as the party's candidate for president "was probably an unwise move."<sup>75</sup> He was hated by many southern Democrats and Whigs, but was a slaveholder and lost the trust of many Republicans, even though the two groups may not have united for a non-Republican Party anyways. Moreover, he lacked the charismatic qualities of a party leader. His speeches were well-planned and too organized to solicit enthusiasm from supporters.<sup>76</sup> Everett was an educated academic and had a lack-luster personality.

The Constitutional Unionists' candidates' character flaws were not the only problem. Throughout the campaign, the Unionists were criticized for not taking a stance on any of the issues. They were attacked by the proslavery Democrats for keeping quiet on the slavery issue despite attempts from both Unionists and opposition parties to attain some position. Still, Bell refused to commit himself to a stance. The Unionists were consistently berated and this eventually took its toll. Bell and the rest of the party members were demoralized shortly after the convention by Lincoln's ever-growing strength. During the summer, some party members' efforts turned to creating a fusion ticket between the Democrats and Unionists but this venture also failed. New York and New Jersey attempted the endeavor but without success. This illustrated another problem that plagued the Unionists-the party was disorganized. Representatives from different areas of the country did not coordinate with each, especially in regards to fusion tickets at the state level.

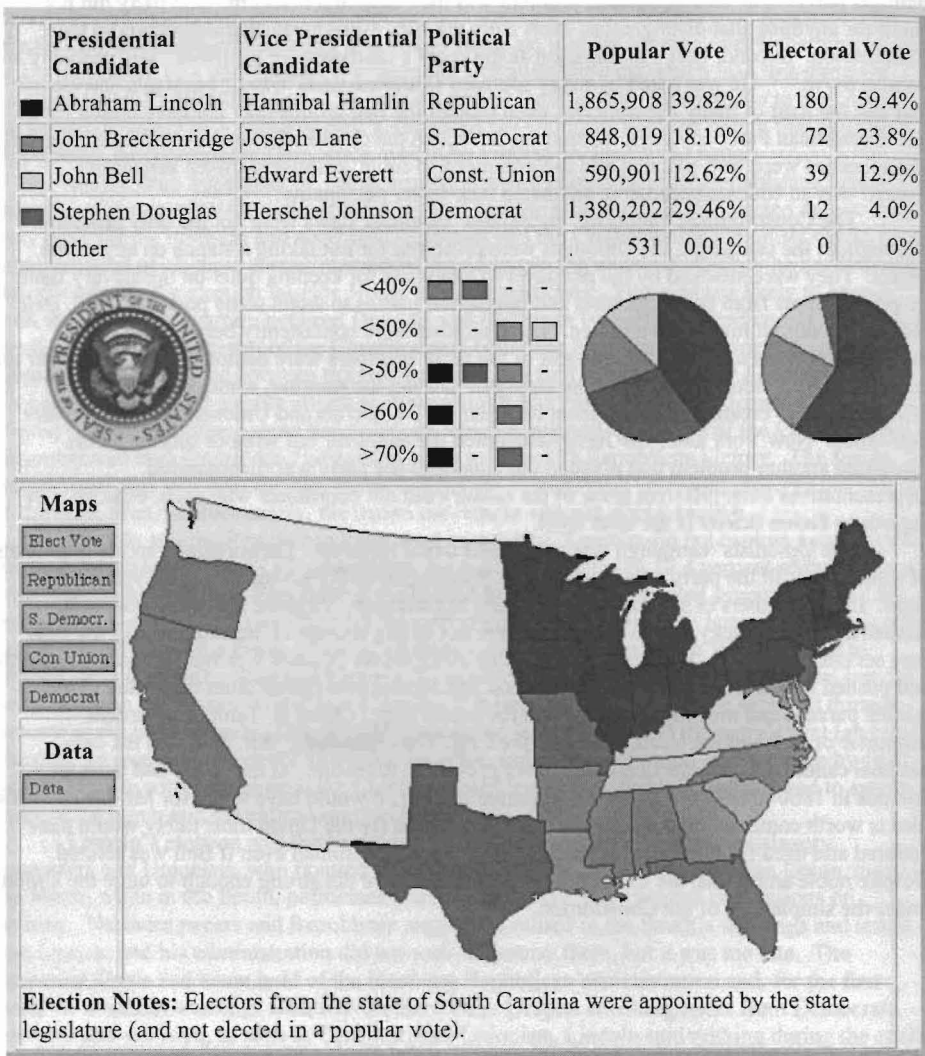
The Unionists' campaign was not all bad news, however. Encouraging reports of pockets of support did fill the party's headquarters in Washington D.C., giving Bell and Everett some hope. Large numbers of supporters were found in Delaware, Virginia, Maryland, Georgia, Alabama, and Kentucky, but the numbers were not strong enough in the end to fulfill the goal they set out to achieve. The Pennsylvania state elections on October 9 proved Lincoln's strength and pushed him closer to winning the election and southerners farther from the Union. Last minute parades and meetings failed to win the public over. Oliver P. Temple, an ardent supporter of Bell and the Union well into the Civil War, remarked, "Mr. Bell was the only national candidate. His election would have prevented secession. If the North had been as anxious in 1860 to save the Union as it became in 1861, it would have voted for Mr. Bell."<sup>77</sup> His idea is worth contemplation, but in the end, the struggle for the Union most likely would have endured and need for compromise probably would have continued even if Bell was elected. Despite noble ambitions, the Constitutional Unionists were not strong enough to unite the Union under the simple idea of the Constitution.

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<sup>75</sup> Parks, 357.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Parks, 388.

Figure 1: 1860 Presidential Election Results<sup>78</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Leip, David. "1860 Presidential Election Results." US Election Atlas. 1999.  
[www.uselectionatlas.org/USPRESIDENT/GENERAL/pe1860.html](http://www.uselectionatlas.org/USPRESIDENT/GENERAL/pe1860.html)

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