

# Cataclysm

On November 6, 1860, Springfield, Illinois, came alive as cannon fire signaled Election Day. Despite tensions across the nation, the atmosphere was charged with anticipation as citizens flocked to vote. The election featured multiple candidates, with Abraham Lincoln seen as a frontrunner. The outcome was uncertain; if no majority emerged, the decision would fall to the House of Representatives. As Springfield's residents mobilized toward the polling place, the local ice cream parlor welcomed Republican women with refreshments, a nod to camaraderie amidst political rivalry.

Lincoln walked five blocks to the state capitol's campaign office, a privilege granted by the governor. He expressed introspective thoughts, equating elections to "big boils" that, although uncomfortable, ultimately benefit the nation. Meanwhile, across the nation, representatives like Charles Francis Adams acknowledged the historic peacefulness in deciding new leadership.

Lincoln's potential victory posed a cataclysmic shift. A win would displace the proslavery Democrats, establishing the Republican Party's dominance. The fragmentation within the Democratic Party allowed Lincoln's party to gain traction, while the Southern fears intensified, characterizing him as an abolitionist threatening their way of life. Southern papers even encouraged immediate secession should Lincoln win.

At 3:30 PM, Lincoln cast his vote, greeted by enthusiastic supporters and nicknamed "Old Abe" and "Honest Abe." His public engagement drew a crowd eager to witness the moment. As Lincoln proceeded to drop his ballot, he humbly snipped his name from it, showing a commitment to his principles over self-promotion.

As evening fell, telegraphs brought reports of a strong lead for Lincoln, including significant victories in Chicago and Connecticut. However, anxiety lingered until news from New York solidified his success, granting him crucial electoral votes. Celebrations erupted in Springfield, highlighting the mixed emotions of achievement and foreboding as Lincoln grasped the burdens of leadership.

Ultimately, the election saw Lincoln receiving the highest popular vote percentage of any president but still a minority overall. The South, particularly South Carolina, reacted vehemently, with resignations among federal authorities indicating a willingness to defy the democratic process. The South's despair over the election results underscored the brewing division, with Lincoln puzzled by the hostility, emphasizing his stance against interfering with slavery where it existed. He struggled to communicate his intentions, reflecting a profound misunderstanding of Southern anxieties about his presidency .