Michael F. Holt. *The Election of 1860: A Campaign Fraught with Consequences"* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2017, 272 pp. ($29.95 cloth, $29.95 ebook).

Michael Holt's fresh look at the 1860 election persuasively highlights the important role of the corruption issue in facilitating Lincoln's nomination and election, a point that most previous historians have not fully appreciated. Holt correctly maintains that Lincoln was not perceived as more moderate on slavery than William Henry Seward, his main competitor for the Republican presidential nomination. Lincoln prevailed because he was as firm an opponent of slavery as was Seward, but was also considered more electable because he was unsullied by corruption. Seward, on the other hand, had an alter ego, Thurlow Weed, widely known as a shady wheeler-dealer who had recently been involved in questionable street railroad contract awards in Manhattan. In addition, Lincoln had not been as conspicuous a foe of nativism as Seward and, unlike Seward, he came from a key swing state.

In 1856, the Republican presidential nominee, John C. Fremont, had lost mainly because 400,000 Northerners voted for the American Party candidate, Millard Fillmore. To triumph in 1860, Republicans had to retain the Fremont backers (by nominating a committed antislavery man) and woo enough Fillmore supporters (by emphasizing some other issue), along with many first-time voters. Lincoln managed to win because he was an outspoken anti-slavery champion who was viewed as a man of integrity who would restore honest government to Washington. If Republicans had wanted to play down the slavery issue, they would not have nominated Lincoln but rather someone like Edward Bates.

There is abundant evidence – far more than Holt musters in this brief contribution to the press's American Presidential Elections series – that Republicans in 1860 heavily stressed the Buchanan administration's corruption, and that such an appeal persuaded many men who cared little about slavery (e.g., Fillmore supporters in 1856) to vote Republican. As Holt acknowledges, in the absence of public opinion surveys, it is impossible to identify with precision which issue was the primary one influencing the outcome of the election. But based on what happened in 1856, it seems reasonable to conclude that corruption was an important *secondary* issue in 1860 and that opposition to slavery was the *main* issue. In 1856, Fremont won a million more Northern votes than did Fillmore. In all likelihood, Lincoln's 1,800,000 Northern votes in 1860 included the vast majority of the 1,400,000 Northern votes that Fremont had received while running on an anti-slavery (not anti-corruption) platform in 1856.

Holt "decenters" (his term) the Lincoln campaign, focusing mostly on the Constitutional Union and Democratic parties. He argues that the slavery issue was the principal concern only of the Southern Democrats, who nominated John C. Breckinridge. But in fact, the Republicans as well as the Northern Democrats, led by Stephen A. Douglas, emphasized the slavery issue much more heavily in their platforms and campaigns than Holt acknowledges. One of the Republicans' most widely circulated campaign documents was Lincoln's edition of his debates with Douglas in 1858, which focused on slavery, not corruption. Moreover, by 1860, it

was widely understood that Republicans were first and foremost opposed to slavery. Holt rightly states that slavery *expansion* was less of an immediately pressing issue in 1860 than it had been in 1856, but for many Republicans, slavery *expansion* served as a proxy for slavery *extinction*. So even if it did seem that slavery was not likely to expand into any territory then owned by the U.S., the issue of slavery itself still remained salient. (Moreover, new territory suitable for plantation slavery might be acquired in the future.) Lincoln had famously declared that Republicans were dedicated to the "ultimate extinction" of slavery.

Holt rightly notes that mid-nineteenth-century American voters paid closer attention to parties than candidates. That was especially true in the South. Kenneth Rayner, a North Carolina Whig and later Unionist leader, explained that Southerners objected less to Lincoln than to "the fundamental idea, that underlies the whole movement of his nomination, the canvass, & his election. It is the declaration of unceasing warfare against slavery as an institution, as enunciated by the Representative men of the party – the Sewards, & Wades, & Wilsons & Chases, & Sumners &c. &c. We Southern people, being warm-hearted, and candid, & impetuous, are also confiding & credulous. When men of high position assert anything seriously, we believe they are in earnest."

Holt's well-written book is a useful contribution to the literature, even if it oversells one of its most important theses. Holt was moved to write it in part because he disagreed with James Oakes' 2012 study, Freedom National, which stressed how deeply committed most Republicans were to the eventual abolition of slavery. In fact, Oakes makes a solid argument which Holt's book ably supplements rather than contradicts.

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