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## **"Patriots not Partizans": The Response of Independent Newspapers to the Rise of Political Parties in California**

**Sean Chamberlain**

Today, it is easy to see that political parties are entrenched and established in California, and across the nation. The major political parties have established infrastructures, clearly defined bases of supporters, and more. These party apparatuses are active and visible throughout the state, and it is difficult to think of a time when they were not. When California first entered the Union in 1850, however, political parties worked feverishly to establish themselves, drawn by the potential political capital of the new state.<sup>1</sup> This was not always easy or welcomed though, as California was 3,000 miles from Washington D.C. and had different concerns from older, more established states. The way that independent newspapers assailed the Democrats, Whigs, and eventually the Republicans revealed this and demonstrated some of the issues with the political parties of the time. These criticisms may not have stopped the parties from gaining power in California, but they provide insight into the nature of politics at the time and are a look into the challenges of party building in a new state. As the independent newspapers of the early 1850s demonstrate, many Californians resented or dismissed the political parties of the era, who had to fight to establish themselves as powers in the state.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the history of California see: Kevin Starr, *California: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2005). Starr's work chronicles various eras of California's history and numerous topics. For more information on early California politics and government see: Joshua Paddison, and Teena Stern. *Taming the Elephant: Politics, Government, and Law in Pioneer California*, Edited by John F. Burns, Richard J. Orsi, and Marlene Smith-Barazini, 1st ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), California had an interesting beginning, politically, and Paddison and Stern cover a variety of topics and figures in depth. For more information on California's connections to the Civil War and the national politics of the era see: Leonard L. Richards, *The California Gold Rush and the Coming of the Civil War*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007). National events and politics played a key role in California's development and the views of those leading the state.

Instead of these corrupt parties, during the early 1850s these newspapers seemed to hope for and imagine a more independent and principle-based style of politics. This hatred of corruption and the different priorities of Californians revealed how the political parties were deeply flawed and were not inherently appealing for those away from the centers of their political power and control. As demonstrated by non-partisan newspapers during the early 1850s, the Whigs, Democrats, and others were viewed as corrupting forces, stripping Californians of their independence and ability to advocate for their own needs, which only made existing disinterest in politics worse for many Californians.

Before looking at non-partisan newspapers from the early 1850s, it is first necessary to understand California's political position in the Union at the time. The federal government had long been interested in California, with Andrew Jackson even offering to buy much of the state from Mexico in 1837.<sup>2</sup> It was not until 1849 though that delegates met in Monterey to write California's state constitution.<sup>3</sup> This group was far from representative of the state and included "...no women, Native Americans, African Americans, or anyone of Asian descent [and] Only eight were Hispanic."<sup>4</sup> Delegates from Northern California outnumbered those from the less populous South, and, unrepresentative of the state's population, the delegates were "not primarily miners," but instead, many were lawyers, businessmen, or men of "elegant leisure."<sup>5</sup> California had not yet entered the Union, and "its government was extralegal," but its first election led to the approval of the state's constitution, elected a governor, lieutenant

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<sup>2</sup> Joshua Paddison, and Teena Stern, "Capturing California," In *Taming the Elephant*, 130.

<sup>3</sup> Gordon Morris Bakken, Joshua Paddison, and Teena Stern, "The Courts, the Legal Profession, and the Development of Law in Early California," In *Taming the Elephant*, 74.

<sup>4</sup> John F. Burns, Joshua Paddison, and Teena Stern, "Taming the Elephant: An Introduction to California's Statehood and Constitutional Era," In *Taming the Elephant*, 7.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

governor, and the legislature.<sup>6</sup> Some have argued that the first state legislature "...may have been the purest and best," despite its shortcomings, such as its discriminatory laws and policies, and its reputation as the "Legislature of a Thousand Drinks."<sup>7</sup> This group also faced challenges due to the rapidly expanding and gold fever-fueled population that was quickly flooding into the state, and was primarily concerned with "'making their pile' and going home" as quickly as they could.<sup>8</sup>

California also dealt with the issue that not everyone was interested in civic responsibilities.<sup>9</sup> As a result, "A tension between order and chaos ran through gold-rush society. Clergymen, businessmen, and entrepreneurs spoke of the need to 'tame' wild California..."<sup>10</sup> This language betrayed the racialized attitudes of the Anglo-American newcomers to be sure, but the state government also grappled with lawlessness and a lack of established institutions. California was filled with transient newcomers seeking to make their fortune, however misguided this might have been, who often ignored the "other duties" that citizens have and this hindered the growth of the body politic.<sup>11</sup> California though was able to establish a government and enter into the Union.

Regardless of the issues with California's early government, it soon became bogged down by national politics. Those in California's government believed that "...the federal government would... (as it had other territories and states) ... [remit] to it those monies collected by customs officers at local ports of entry in

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<sup>6</sup> Judson A. Grenier, Joshua Paddison, and Teena Stern, "'Officialdom': California State Government, 1849–1879," In *Taming the Elephant*, 137.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 130.

<sup>8</sup> Burns, "Taming the Elephant: An Introduction to California's Statehood and Constitutional Era," 4-5.

<sup>9</sup> "The Approaching State Election," *Alta California*, September 15, 1850, *Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers*.

<sup>10</sup> Paddison, "Capturing California," 128.

<sup>11</sup> "The Approaching State Election," *Alta California*. See also: Warren C. Wood, "Fraud and the California State Census of 1852: Power and Demographic Distortion in Gold Rush California," *Southern California Quarterly* 100, no. 1 (2018): 28, 37.

1848–49, the so-called ‘civil fund.’ But... no such money ever was provided. It was a grave handicap for the fledgling state.”<sup>12</sup> The state was in a “... financial straitjacket that crippled the government’s ability to function...” since many of its proposed taxes failed and the federal government was failing to aid it. California was also in a difficult position since a “Question and answer between Washington and San Francisco took up to three months, leading the San Francisco newspaper [the] *Alta California* to remark, ‘The Golden State is the only one which, in consequence of its isolation, is forced to work out her own destiny.’”<sup>13</sup> All of this put significant responsibility on the state government. California was on the nation’s periphery, and this separated it from assistance and the nation’s political centers, leading many to have a more independent mentality.

The federal government and national politics did not completely ignore California though. After the “...state’s admission to the Union [had been] delayed for months until a new balance between free and slave states could be reached. National political parties transplanted themselves to California with varying degrees of success.”<sup>14</sup> With this, “The federal government [helped to build] an infrastructure—but it [also] brought along corrosive political patronage.”<sup>15</sup> The national parties attempted to establish their influence in California, and six of the first seven governors were Democrats, with the only other being a Know-Nothing.<sup>16</sup> The Whigs, although unsuccessful in statewide elections, also attempted to gain support in California.<sup>17</sup> Another example is how the Republicans’ first presidential nominee was John C. Frémont,

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<sup>12</sup> Grenier, “‘Officialdom’: California State Government,” 142.

<sup>13</sup> Robert J. Chandler, “An Uncertain Influence: The Role of the Federal Government in California, 1846-1880,” *California History* 81, no. 3/4 (2003): 225.

<sup>14</sup> Paddison, “Capturing California,” 131.

<sup>15</sup> Chandler, “An Uncertain Influence: The Role of the Federal Government in California,” 225.

<sup>16</sup> Paddison, “Capturing California,” 131-2.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 131-2.

who had helped start the Bear Flag Revolt of 1846.<sup>18</sup> As a result of these efforts, "...as the decade of the 1850s progressed, the legislative and executive branches increasingly were caught up in the partisan bickering that accompanied the rise of political parties and rancor over the spoils of office."<sup>19</sup> These parties constantly struggled with each other, even though they shared similar patterns, such as how "... when a new party came to power, it fell into the same pattern of patronage and payoffs as its predecessor."<sup>20</sup> Political parties saw opportunities in California and pursued them while drawing criticism from many Californians and the independent press.

Analyzing newspapers from the early 1850s demonstrates that attempts at establishing political parties in California extended into the local media. The major parties in California had "...respectable array[s] of newspaper[s that had the] ability to commend and defend them..."<sup>21</sup> These were not always the most reliable sources of information though, and "were one to judge... the chances of success by the confidence with which each editor speaks of the prospects of his party, it would be an extremely difficult matter to decide who will be elected."<sup>22</sup> These papers acted as extensions of the various political parties and thus were more concerned with rallying support for them than providing honest information and analysis. One article from 1850 described how partisan presses "... are invariably cringing to the dictates of their masters, even while they profess to dictate. In reality they follow, while they assume to lead," as they were completely dependent on their parties.<sup>23</sup> Partisan presses were widespread and thus disseminated this slanted information, and as a result, "The

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 131-2.

<sup>19</sup> Grenier, "'Officialdom': California State Government, 1849–1879," 137.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 147.

<sup>21</sup> "The Political Parties," *Alta California*, 15 July 1851, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> "Party Struggles," *Alta California*, 15 Sept. 1850, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.

independent press... [was an] important... influence in the production of results, and is so generally relied upon, in the State and out of it... [as] it is extremely important to an elucidation of our true political condition.”<sup>24</sup> The partisan newspapers could not be relied upon to produce accurate information, for the state, local communities, or the rest of the nation, so papers that proclaimed themselves to be independent, such as the *Alta California* in San Francisco, the *Herald* in San Francisco, the *Herald* in San Diego, and the *Los Angeles Star*, were important sources of trustworthy information.<sup>25</sup>

These papers held an important role in society, and were so significant that one newspaper proclaimed, in 1851, that “The State may... be fairly... divided into three parties: the Independent, Democratic and Whig. The two last of these parties have made their nominations for the State general ticket and are exerting themselves to organize and concentrate their forces...” the third though, “...the independent party—the true California party—has made no nominations.”<sup>26</sup> The independent press competed with partisan organizations in communicating with the public. These newspapers had an idea of what California should be, but they considered themselves to be more honest and open than partisan newspapers.

An example of a neutral paper is the *Alta California*, which was published from 1841 to 1891.<sup>27</sup> This newspaper was based in San Francisco and covered a variety of topics.<sup>28</sup> Edward Gilbert was one of the founders and the editor of the *Alta California* at the time. He was born in New York and spent time in a New York Volunteer Regiment as a lieutenant before eventually helping to

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<sup>24</sup> “The Political Parties,” *Alta California*.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> “Daily Alta California (1849-1891),” *UCR: California Digital Newspaper Collection*, <<https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=cl&cl=CL1&sp=DAC>>.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

found the paper.<sup>29</sup> He was also a part of California's constitutional convention in 1849 and served in Congress as a Democrat for just under six months.<sup>30</sup> He was killed a year later though in a duel in San Francisco.<sup>31</sup> Because of Gilbert's experience as a Democratic politician, it would be easy to think that the paper would lean toward Democrats, but this does not appear to be the case. Instead, the paper was highly critical of all the major political parties and lacked a clear partisan slant, revealing some of the resistance to political parties and partisanship in California at the time.

One paper claimed "... that both the *Alta California* and *Pacific News* are in politics Democratic," but the *Placer Times* responded that these allegations were "...unfounded... [and that] there is nothing clearer in the world to the public mind here and elsewhere, than the uncompromising neutrality of the *Alta California*..."<sup>32</sup> These non-partisan newspapers saw themselves as neutral and important parts of the public discourse. Yet some partisan papers, vying for some of the same readers, responded by trying to discredit more neutral newspapers. These independent newspapers, even if they had their own biases and leanings, were different from many of the partisan presses that were filled with material clearly supporting one party or faction and attacking all others. Reading through these newspapers, they lack an obvious partisan slant, instead, they focused on criticizing all political parties.

The political parties of the time, particularly the Whigs and Democrats, fought for control of California. This struggle was often characterized as "More a struggle for power [rather] than principle."<sup>33</sup> Much of what people were exposed to, when it came to the various political parties, were partisan attacks, instead of

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<sup>29</sup> "Gilbert, Edward," Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, <<https://bioguide.congress.gov/search/bio/G000172>>.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> "Present Politics and the Prospective Press," *Placer Times*, 29 Apr. 1850, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.

<sup>33</sup> "Party Policy," *Alta California*, 1 Aug. 1851, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.



substantial policy debates. This was so prevalent that “Part of the political creed... [appeared to be making] the opposite party appear as ignorant, ridiculous and wrong as is possible, for on the defamation of one the other lives and thrives.”<sup>34</sup> Partisan attacks, in the media and outside of it, were common and dominated politics. This was likely seen as an easier, or at least quicker, way to win voters than working to understand the interests of Californians and then ensuring that this is reflected in party platforms or building up an infrastructure to secure votes. For example, the *San Joaquin Republican* in 1859, while pondering what a Democrat is, described Democrats as “... ultra hater[s] of every political thing, act, opinion, expression, thought that did not have friendly intercourse with the great, grand and glorious dogma of popular sovereignty.”<sup>35</sup> There is only the slightest suggestion of political policies and ideas here, but the substantive part of this piece is the partisan attacks against the Democratic party.

Many in California found partisan politics and partisan attacks disillusioning. One article described how, despite seemingly significant campaign efforts there was “... scarce any feeling, and no enthusiasm, is yet evinced by the masses.”<sup>36</sup> The lack of political interest was also demonstrated in 1849 when the “... California constitution was put up for ratification... [but] with virtually all white men able to vote, ‘interest could not have been intense,’ and only about 15 percent...” of those eligible voted.<sup>37</sup> There are a variety of reasons why people may not have voted, and many were not allowed to vote, but feeling disconnected from the political parties of the time was likely part of it. The rivalries, divisions, and beliefs of political parties simply do not seem to

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> “Now, Therefore, What’s a Democrat?” *San Joaquin Republican*, 24 December 1859, UCR: California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>36</sup> “The Political Contest,” *Alta California*, 15 July 1851, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.

<sup>37</sup> Joshua Paddison and Teena Stern, *Taming the Elephant: Politics, Government, and Law in Pioneer California*, Edited by John F. Burns, Richard J. Orsi, and Marlene Smith-Barazini, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2003), 5.

have connected with Californians early on, and the parties struggled to distinguish themselves to Californians who often did not care about the policies that were being proposed.

This goes along with how many felt that the concerns of the national political parties were simply not relevant to Californians because they cared about different issues. Many people could not differentiate between the parties, because, from their perspective, the views and goals of the major political parties were very similar, and they did little for California.<sup>38</sup> People did not feel connected to the platforms and arguments of the national parties, because "What have we... to expect from the ascendancy of either of these great parties? Are we a manufacturing community? Or an agricultural, and have [we]... ought to look for from a high or low tariff?"<sup>39</sup> The issues of national politics were far removed from California, or at least the minds of Californians, and seemed irrelevant to many. Additionally, California was still establishing itself and did not have long-standing connections to the national parties, proposals, or platforms, let alone a unified identity that would have allowed Californians to better understand what the state wanted or needed. Some even believed that:

It seems to us almost wickedly absurd to try and make appear the necessity of organizing for an election here in California, upon the old exploded and by gone differences of Whigs and Democrats... [especially] in the face of the fact that on the one question which was and is of more interest to us than all others, there was no show in Congress of Whig or democratic party. It seems an absurd attempt to make alive in California what is nothing but a corpse at home.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> "Correspondence of the Placer Times," *Placer Times*, 17 Nov. 1849, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> "Getting Ready," *Alta California*, 15 Oct. 1850, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.

California did not have a legacy or tradition of entrenched party politics or relationships with any political parties, since it was a new state and thus had not been part of the country long enough to develop these. Also, with many Californians focused on gaining wealth and not on developing a strong government, there was not much of a reason for many to desire these connections. The squabbles of the Whigs, Democrats, and others were far removed from California and many simply did not care about them.

This is not to say that people saw no value in political parties, but nothing immediate. Many believed that if “matters of great magnitude, and immediately local” importance to California were given prominent positions in platforms and the actions of politicians, then they would support them.<sup>41</sup> California was part of the plans of various political parties to accumulate power, but these parties had yet to learn how to represent Californians. There were also a “... few who... [thought] that the safety of the country depends upon a majority, or at least plurality of voters exercising their privilege in favor of the men whom these warm partizans favor.”<sup>42</sup> Some had political leanings for various reasons, often based on the beliefs they had before coming to California, but this does not appear to be the case for many. For the most part, people do not seem to have been interested in the political parties due to their lack of support for the needs and desires of California and Californians. This was only exacerbated by how some believed that the state had “been very improperly treated by Congress, and the general government,” such as the earlier mentioned decision not to give California access to the “civil fund.”<sup>43</sup> Many argued that the state was taxed at high rates, but did not see anything, or at least not enough, of value in return, either due to the unwillingness of politicians to spend money in the state or because they did not

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> “Party Policy,” *Alta California*. See also: Grenier, “‘Officialdom’: California State Government,” 142.

care about the state.<sup>44</sup> The national parties were criticized for being filled with "...ambitious men... [who] are so much more anxious for office than for their country's good..."<sup>45</sup> The success of their party seemed to be more important to many politicians than the good of the people.

Beyond the political parties being seen as largely irrelevant to the state's politics, many argued that they were attempting to trick Californians for selfish reasons. Some even saw the work of the political parties as an attempt "... to create a kind of Albany regency similar to the cliques that pull the wires in the states and pull the wool over the eyes of the dear people."<sup>46</sup> Many neutral newspapers interpreted the actions of political parties as attempts to incorporate California into the broader, corrupt political system that dominated the nation. One article even described how, leading up to an election, "The political cauldron, which has simmered, seethed, boiled and bubbled with 'Double, double, toil and trouble,' for the past six months, into which have been thrown the usual election ingredients, and around which the incantation of party has been performed, over and over again..." seemingly describing disdain for political parties and corruption.<sup>47</sup>

Many viewed the parties as trying to assert their power in the state, not for public benefit or out of principle, but out of a desire for power. Independent papers seem to have believed that the goal of the political parties was to create men "... who [have] no will but to vote for whomsoever a certain party nominates, no matter by what means and methods that nomination has been effected, and irrespective of any fitness for the office or worthiness of the individual candidate..."<sup>48</sup> One described these men as "slave[s for]

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<sup>44</sup> "Party Policy," *Alta California*.

<sup>45</sup> "The Presidency," *Alta California*, 31 Oct. 1850, *Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers*.

<sup>46</sup> "Getting Ready," *Alta California*.

<sup>47</sup> "The Election Day," *Alta California*, 15 Sept. 1851, *Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers*.

<sup>48</sup> "Getting Ready," *Alta California*.

all intents and purposes” to a political party.<sup>49</sup> Non-partisan newspapers wanted Californians to resist the corrupting powers of the political parties, and maintain a greater sense of independence to avoid the toxic politics that dominated the rest of the country. Independent papers wanted people to think critically and independently. They wanted voters to “Feel themselves perfectly free to vote for the men they have reason to believe will make the best officers. It is absurd everywhere to think of chaining the choice of freemen irrevocably down to the dictum of party.”<sup>50</sup> Without this, voters and democratic society were not free, instead, they were trapped by pressure from political parties. Non-partisan papers did not want to eliminate politics, rather, they wanted to create a more open and free style of politics

Independent newspapers also claimed that “political pretenders” had, more than in other states, “... plundered [California] in various ways, through the unprincipled schemes of these seekers after place, power, or wealth, and her public character has been injured and sullied by the ills they have brought upon her. Poor State.”<sup>51</sup> Some even claimed that Democrats had corrupted California’s initial allocation of seats in the House of Representatives to gain an extra seat for their party.<sup>52</sup> To them, this was not done in the best interests of the state, but instead in furtherance of the power of the political parties, as evidenced by California being

...regarded as a country which possesses none of the elements of stability, security and morality which are essential to the well-being and prosperity of a commonwealth. We are regarded as living in a

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> “Political Pretenders,” *Alta California*, 16 Jan. 1852. Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.

<sup>52</sup> “The Pacific Courier,” *Placer Times*, 29 Apr. 1850, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers. See also, Wood, “Fraud and the California State Census of 1852,” 11.

modified barbarian condition, where... dangerous human passions are restrained only by the remembrance and the influence of the latent spirit of civilization which we have brought hither with us from our former homes.<sup>53</sup>

California was not considered to be strong and stable, because of how new of a state it was and its unique conditions due to the boom of the Gold Rush. Independent newspapers wanted California to stop being part of the wild west, and instead, have more strongly established laws and government, and join the reformed society some had been accustomed to.

It was not only the existence of organized political groups that agitated these newspapers, but also, their apparent lack of effectiveness. These papers endorsed the "old Roman's" ideal that when one

...had been elected to an inferior office, [and] his friends [attempted to dissuade] ... him from accepting it, upon the ground that the office was not honorable. His reply was, then I will accept it and make it honorable. Such should be our course— Elect men to office who are able to make the position they occupy more honorable because they are in it.<sup>54</sup>

These papers did not dismiss the importance of government or the political process, but they believed that it had to be done differently. They believed that what they were doing and arguing for was what was truly best for California. One paper urged Californians that with "The election... fast approaching... it would be well to discuss like patriots, rather than partizans, the many and interesting questions involved in it."<sup>55</sup> These newspapers

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<sup>53</sup> "Political Pretenders," *Alta California*.

<sup>54</sup> "What Should Our U. S. Senator Be?" *Alta California*, 15 Jan. 1851, *Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers*.

<sup>55</sup> "The Approaching State Election," *Alta California*.

understood how important politics were, and that is why they were critical of political parties. They may have attacked political parties and politicians, but they still believed that “The election has been an exciting one, intensely exciting... in the quiet of each honest patriot’s heart.”<sup>56</sup> These writers understood the importance of what they were writing about, but they were upset with the direction of politics in California. They did not want the lawlessness of the wild west or the combination of apathy, party loyalty, and corruption that the political parties desired and were cultivating across the nation, instead, they wanted fervent patriots to favor the common good over partisan goals.

These writers had hopes that California could be better, as they thought that the “Independent party so greatly outnumbers the others that little progress can be made against them. Beyond the few whose associations in the Atlantic States have brought them to regard party as the charm that is to preserve the Republic, there is no interest or enthusiasm manifested in the political contest thus far.”<sup>57</sup> They thought that they would win their struggle and establish a better California that would resist the corruption and division that had infected politics elsewhere, particularly as the Civil War neared. To them, their main concern was the terrifying “...idea of raising fifth rate or fiftieth rate men to honorable and responsible stations for the offices to honor, while [these] officers are incapable of giving any in return.”<sup>58</sup> The goal of these newspapers was to convince Californians to move away from partisanship and to a more open style of politics that focused on principles, integrity, and results.

With their main concern being the betterment of California, and with the understanding that “... it is undeniable that party politics have so far entered into the present contest that either the Democratic or Whig ticket must succeed. Much as many regret this, it is evident that either one ticket or the other is to achieve

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> “The Political Parties,” *Alta California*.

<sup>58</sup> “What Should Our U. S. Senator Be?” *Alta California*.

success by the influence and votes of the third or independent party.”<sup>59</sup> Because of this understanding, the independent newspapers were not able to completely abandon the parties, but instead, they pressured them to nominate better candidates. The political parties of the time did wield significant power, so keeping them out of the state’s government was not reasonable, so these newspapers pursued the next best thing: trying to pressure these parties to improve. Because of this, so long as the candidate that was elected was honorable and a true patriot “... we will rest content, be he Whig or Democrat. And we must earnestly appeal to political men, that if they must vote alone for men of their own party, to vote for the best one of the party.”<sup>60</sup>

Independent newspapers in California struggled against the national parties that attempted to establish themselves in California. They did this because they believed that many politicians were unwilling to do what was truly best for the state, at least not when it cost their party. The political parties of the time were not strongly connected to Californians. It may have been difficult to do so, and they did make some efforts, but these national organizations were focused on national issues and ambitions, so it was easy for one new state to be ignored in some ways. The political parties of the time seemed to be unable or unwilling to adapt to California, and this likely reflects national political conditions at the time. This was a chaotic time in American history, as the Whig party collapsed and the Civil War was on the horizon, likely limiting the flexibility of political parties. Independent papers were fearful of major political parties becoming dominant in politics and not paying attention to the true desires and needs of Californians. In the end, the hopes of independent newspapers to move away from partisanship have not been realized and national political parties have become established in California and across the nation. Anti-political party

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<sup>59</sup> “The Political Parties,” *Alta California*.

<sup>60</sup> “United States Senator,” *Alta California*, 15 Feb. 1851, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.



sentiments are not unheard of in American history and this leaves open the question of whether there were similar sentiments and opposition to political parties forming in other new states. The independent newspapers of California demonstrate that these sentiments existed during the early 1850s in California.