

Mr. Republicans:

Goldwater, Taft and a Usable Past in Mid-Century American
Conservatism

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For R.R., wherever I may find you.

Abstract

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Why did Senator Barry Goldwater, the standard-bearer for mid-century American conservatism, so methodically rebuff the legacy of his predecessor, the first “Mr. Republican,” Senator Robert A. Taft? I argue that despite the overwhelming ideological and political accord, a handful of discrepancies exacerbated by the political realities of Goldwater’s 1964 Presidential run made the Taft legacy not an asset, but a liability. In short, it was an unusable history. But rather than explain this incongruity, previous research has bolstered it. Pundits and scholars have promulgated the Goldwater foundational narrative, the widely accepted belief that the contemporary conservative movement began in the late 50s and early 60s. In doing so they canonized Goldwater’s exclusionary history and allowed Robert Taft to be written out of the master conservative narrative.

This work examines the historical and political context that guided Goldwater’s careful handling of the Taft legacy. Section I explores a previously overlooked narrative from 1952 presidential primaries that serves as chronological and theoretical jumping off point for a discussion of the Taft-Goldwater relationship. Section II qualifies the nature of the historical quandary and proposes a methodology to investigate it. Sections III, IV and V offer background while qualifying key terms, ideas, and trends. Section VI, the first of two political biographies, historicizes Robert Taft and the Taft legacy. In offering points of continuum and contrast with Section VII, the Goldwater narrative, we may engage Goldwater’s wary treatment of the Taft legacy in section IIX. Here we identify the three primary causes of Goldwater’s rejection of Taft, a defining moment in the creation of the conservative foundational narrative. Finally, the work concludes with a contemporary, forward looking conclusion that transposes the lessons of Taft-Goldwater to the contemporary conservative movement.

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I. In Media Res

On Saturday April 26th, 1952, four hundred and ninety five Republican delegates from across the state of Arizona descended upon Phoenix Union High School. Kingmakers, pundits and party figures packed the auditorium. Their task, in theory, was simple: nominate their state's Republican candidate for President. But warring party factions complicated convention proceedings. Supporters of conservative Ohio Senator and three time presidential aspirant, Robert A. Taft, battled the camp of former general and current university president, Dwight D. Eisenhower, for representation at the national convention. Arizona, they said, was Taft Country.

Ten of the fourteen national delegates had pledged for Taft. The remaining four split between an Eisenhower candidacy and non-commitment. The Taft camp sought to pad this lead and pushed the "unit rule" to a floor vote. The archaic procedure, "an open faced-steal play," would have awarded Taft all fourteen delegates.¹ Eisenhower voters, a young Barry Goldwater among them, would have none of it. A 230 to 143 vote defeated the "unit rule" motion but it did not stop the Taft camp. Party leaders turned to Goldwater, an aspiring senatorial candidate, to deliver a speech to break the deadlock.

The boyish conservative pushed through the crowd and onto the stage. "You are bringing scorn on the party," bellowed Goldwater, then just a Phoenix City Councilman, his hands trembling in anger.² "We're not big enough in Arizona to fight each other."³ The

¹ Jerry Poole, "Eisenhower Captures Two Arizona Delegates," *The Arizona Republic*, 27 April 1952, Scrapbook #7, Goldwater Papers, The Arizona Historical Foundation (AHF). N.B. As the AHF has not yet catalogued the entire Goldwater collection there are no reliable box or folio numbers.

² Jerry Poole, "Arizona GOP Bit Groggy from Taft-Ike Squabble," *The Arizona Republic*, 28 April 1952, Scrapbook #7, Goldwater Papers, AHF.

³ *Ibid.*

audience murmured. Some huffed in agreement. Others jeered. All eyes fell upon the demagogue. "Don't let this railroad go through!" he finished, pounding the lectern. An outburst of cheering muted the rasp of his gold elephant cufflinks on the lacquered wood. He paused and looked to the crowd. There was passion in his voice and sweat on his brow.⁴ If it was 80 degrees in Phoenix, it was 95 in the crowded theater.⁵

Jerry Poole of the *Arizona Republic* called Goldwater's speech "blunt and unexpected."⁶ It was a rather modest estimation of the previous day's proceedings. The actions of Taft supporters had enraged Goldwater. He made it widely known that so long as a third of the delegates were for Eisenhower, it was disenfranchisement to award the state to Taft. Ike's backers, Goldwater argued, "have an honest right to be represented."⁷ His speech, emotional and impromptu, made the convention "somewhat peaceable" but did not resolve the deadlock.⁸

Critics rushed to condemn the speech. They said Goldwater "damaged his chances for the Senate race."⁹ Goldwater had been one of the few undeclared politicians who, when called upon, openly endorsed Eisenhower.¹⁰ Poole noted that "some Taft supporters were so miffed at Goldwater's stand they refused to sign his nominating petitions."¹¹ It was a far cry from what the Taft campaign had anticipated. Advisers wrongly assumed that Goldwater would "cooperate at the proper time."¹² They underestimated the young politician's maverick tendencies. Asked why he voted against the majority of his constituency, Goldwater replied, "It was a matter of principle, and if I didn't have the courage to stand up and say what I think on something like that, I wouldn't be fit to run for senator."¹³ They were prophetic words. Barry

⁴ Memorandum "Re: Arizona" from Tom Coleman to Vic Johnston, John Hamilton, Dave Ingalls, Jack Martin, and Ben Tate, 29 April 1952, Box 321, 1952 Campaign – Arizona Miscellaneous, 1951-2, TP LOC.

⁵ "The Weather Throughout the Nation," *The New York Times*, 26 April 1952, 46.

⁶ Poole, "Arizona GOP Bit Groggy from Taft-Ike Squabble," Goldwater Papers, AHF.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Bill Turnbow, "Under the Capitol Dome," *The Phoenix Gazette*, 28 April 1952, Scrapbook #7, Goldwater Papers, AHF.

¹⁰ Poole, "Arizona GOP Bit Groggy from Taft-Ike Squabble," Goldwater Papers, AHF.

¹¹ Conspicuously, Governor John Howard Pyle missed that vote.

¹² Poole, "Arizona GOP Bit Groggy from Taft-Ike Squabble," Goldwater Papers, AHF.

¹³ Memorandum "Re: Arizona" from Tom Coleman to Vic Johnston, John Hamilton, Dave Ingalls, and Ben Tate, 24 January 1952, Box 321, 1952 Campaign – Arizona Miscellaneous, 1951-2, TP LOC.

¹⁴ Poole, "Eisenhower Captures Two Arizona Delegates," Goldwater Papers, AHF.

Goldwater defeated incumbent Democrat and Senate Majority Leader, Ernest McFarland in the '52 election. His victory ushered in a new age of American conservatism.

II. A Historical Quandary

We have, on paper, the beginnings of a perfectly scripted transition between Taft and Goldwater. Robert Taft, the first “Mr. Conservative” and “Mr. Republican,” died months after Goldwater’s election. One could imagine Taft passing the proverbial torch to the new conservative standard-bearer, a man who proudly inherits his legacy and his moniker. Both are ideologues. Both are constitutional conservatives. Both are senators. Both are virulent anti-Communists. Both are anti-statist. It is sequential, neatly packaged, and palatable. But it never happened. There was no fluid transition. In 1952, Goldwater endorsed Eisenhower, a green politician with a “moderate” reputation who vacillated between the Democratic and Republican parties, over Taft, the bookish intellectual who led the anti-New Deal Conservative Coalition.¹⁴ It represented the first step towards a new conservative foundational narrative. Today, a majority of conservatives see Goldwater, the charismatic cowboy, as the movement’s “founder.” A vocal minority, however, look past the 1960s to Taft’s cautious Midwestern conservatism. So much for a tidy teleology.

Goldwater’s endorsement of Eisenhower in 1952 is a historian’s dilemma. Why did the conservative ideologue rebuff Taft and the Taft legacy not only in 1952, but for much of his political career? A solid understanding of political utility and usable pasts will clarify these historical and contemporary questions.

The juxtaposition of Taft and Goldwater speaks directly to this problem. Goldwater rebuked Taft formally in 1952 and spent the better part of the century avoiding his legacy. To

¹⁴“Taft,” wrote columnist George F. Will, was “somewhat dour, often sour [man] with three-piece suits and wire-rim glasses.” The word “fun,” he said, “did not spring to mind.” See George F. Will, “A Life Athwart History,” *The Washington Post*, 29 February 2008, sec C07.

wit, there is not *one* official mention of the Ohioan in the records of the 1964 Republican National Convention, a celebration of American conservatism just a decade after Taft's death.¹⁵ To offer a brief historical parallel, that is the equivalent of the contemporary Republican Party not invoking Ronald Reagan once over three days of speeches and festivities. A similar omission today is tantamount to heresy. Or better yet, bad politics. But before we go further let us address the issue of scope: Why must this paper highlight the efforts of Senators Taft and Goldwater from 1938 to 1964 to explain the evolution of conservatism and its foundational narrative?

Taft is a given. We're monitoring *his* legacy as the nation's conservative political leader. In doing so we place Taft the man, a legislator, and the ideologue, champion of a particular strand of early 20th century conservatism, in conflict with nascent conservatism of the late 1950s and early 1960s. "Why Goldwater?" requires a bit more social science. Goldwater represented the vanguard of the Republican Party. His meteoric rise as the new Mr. Conservative left him with a cumbersome historical burden. The first term senator had replaced Taft as leader of the conservative wing of the GOP. He was the historical actor best positioned to either integrate or reject Taft legacy, and, in turn, shape the conservative tradition. Few on the Right would have doubted his sincerity or questioned his understanding had he vigorously fought for Taft's inclusion.

But as archival and empirical research reveals, Goldwater's rejection of Taft's legacy was never so straightforward as the silence at the 1964 Republican convention suggests. Goldwater respected Taft. The outspoken men disagreed on a handful of issues like housing and education, but they often found themselves in accord. Thus, it was with fine distinction that Goldwater broached Taft's legacy. Consequently, to know the reasons that governed Goldwater's treatment of Taft is to better understand the nature of narrative construction and the political purposes of inventing usable pasts.

¹⁵ Lloyd L. Harkins, ed., *Official Report of the Proceedings of the Twenty-Eight Republican National Convention* (Washington: Republican National Committee, 1964).

Goldwater invoked Taft in matters pertaining to labor, but not foreign policy, the growth of centralized government, or even in the construction of a conservative lineage. On such matters it was not politically expedient to do so. The explanation for this is threefold. First, Taft's sudden death in 1953 as the Senate Majority Leader left him unable to alter or amend his own legacy. Without the opportunity to react to the Cold War and globalization, the image of Taft as a three time presidential failure and "isolationist" stuck. By 1964 leaders of both political parties advocated hawkish foreign policies. Isolationism in an era of bipolarity was political suicide; there was nothing for Goldwater to gain in referencing Taft's nuanced but outdated foreign policy.

Second, distinct personalities led to divergent leadership roles within the GOP. Whereas Taft marshaled Congressional votes, Goldwater marshaled activists. This gave both men unique power and standing within the party. Taft's influence was internal. He sat on key committees and had powerful connections. Goldwater had an external influence, the support of a vocal and growing national movement. This distinction manifested itself during the recurring inter-party platform fights, but what, historically, does this mean? Throughout the 1950s and 60s the conservative wing of the GOP fought liberal party leaders who had thrice upset Taft. In 1964 Goldwater could gain little by invoking a dull non-interventionist and three time presidential failure. Taft was incontestably conservative, but he was not, like Goldwater, a "movement" conservative.¹⁶

Finally, we must remember that while similar, Taft and Goldwater espoused different brands of conservatism. Taft was born into a pragmatic and long established strand of Midwestern conservatism. He counted two presidents – his father, William Howard Taft, and Iowa native Herbert Hoover – among his mentors. Goldwater, the son of pioneering merchants, was never so lucky. Goldwater drew inspiration from Arizona's frontier ethos. This unique conservative-libertarianism, the first of its kind in national politics, led Goldwater to

¹⁶ Alan Brinkley, conversation with author, New York, NY, 28 February 2008.

criticize several of Taft's "socialist" domestic programs. It gave the libertarian Arizonan just another reason to cautiously invoke the Taft legacy.

III. Conservatism 101

Definitions are fickle things. This is especially true with contemporary issues and controversial politics. A cogent argument requires that the author and his reader agree on clearly defined nomenclature. Accordingly, this section will engage particularly contentious terms: “conservative,” the “Eastern Establishment” and “usable history.”

I cannot, in one or one hundred pages, resolve the epistemological and metaphysical “liberal/conservative” dichotomy. What is incontrovertible, however, is that these labels assumed a shifting political dimension in the 20th century. The Democratic Party emerged as the party of liberals, and the Republicans, almost by default, became the party of the Right. Neither is a monolithic institution. There is a wide breadth of ideology and thought in both movements. Sometimes the constituencies within each formed working coalitions. Other times they cannibalized one another for votes and influence. From 1938 to 1964 the conservative movement within the Republican Party survived both trends. But what exactly is “American conservatism?”

American conservatism is a reactionary creed. What we have come to call American liberalism is actually a progressive doctrine that favors the expansion and centralization of government to promote the common good. Proponents of progressivism rose to power in the Franklin Roosevelt Administration where their policies had a transformative effect. They redefined the powers of the federal government according to the Keynesian paradigm, and in doing so gave conservatives a new *raison d'être*.¹⁷ Previously, early 20th century conservatism

¹⁷ To understand Keynes and the conservative rejoinder please see John M. Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* (Orlando: First Harvest/Harcourt, 1964) and Friedrich Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 50th Anniversary Edition 1994).

had strong aristocratic, European and pro-business tendencies.¹⁸ Fears of statism, specifically the threat of lost liberty and individuality, motivated a new generation of activists and politicians. Taft led this embryonic movement in the 1930s as the head of an eclectic anti-New Deal Conservative Coalition and reclaimed the *classical* liberal tradition in a failed attempt to combat the perceived excess of a strong central government. But it was not yet a “majority” movement. What changed? In the years immediately following Taft’s death the Cold War polarized domestic, intellectual and international politics.

Communism replaced Roosevelt’s New Deal as conservatism’s common enemy. Special interest groups agreed. Religious Americans detested Communism’s militant atheism. Businessmen rejected socialism. Traditionalists lamented the death of the West and schoolchildren feared “the bomb.” Wilsonians wept for Eastern Europe while foreign policy realists warned of Soviet aggression. Theocons, paleocons, and libertarians all had a vested interest in defeating Communism. This unprecedented alignment launched a lasting alliance; broad appeal produced intra-party influence.

By 1964 American conservatism had emerged on the national scene as a viable contender. Whereas Taft’s Conservative Coalition fought a protracted legislative battle in D.C., conservatives in 1963 found success in an expanding base. This is what we mean by “movement.” It has an ideological, political and popular dimension. Taft had national supporters, but his faction never coalesced. It was a top-down, elite driven reaction that lacked both the dynamism and grassroots dialecticism of Goldwater’s movement. Yet the 1964 election was no coronation. Conservatives faced hurdles within their own party: namely, the Eastern Establishment.

The “Eastern Establishment” is an equally vague and contentious term. In popular use it represents two incongruous groups: East Coast political interests, banking and big business,

¹⁸ For a brief overview of conservative intellectual thought from 1900 to the present see Robert Crunden, ed., *The Superfluous Men: Conservative Critics of American Culture, 1900-1945*. (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2nd edition 1999); George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2006); Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind From Burke to Eliot* (Washington: Regnery, 7th edition 2001); and Matthew Holden, Jr., ed., *Varieties of Political Conservatism* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1974).

and liberal Republicans, the majority of whom hailed from the Northeast. The groups are not necessarily interchangeable, but they often supported the same candidates and policies.¹⁹ Author Theodore White defines the term as “convenient shorthand for describing a twenty year period where eastern [interests] dominated the national machinery of the Republican Party.”²⁰ Others downplay the mythology, calling it just a political “coalition.”²¹ Nonetheless, with wealth, influence and a substantial base they were a political force in American politics.

This “Eastern Establishment” emerged on the national scene in the late 1930s when it orchestrated Wendell Willkie’s successful 1940 candidacy. Willkie, a utilities lawyer with internationalist and progressive sympathies, defeated stalwart Midwestern conservatives Senators Taft and Arthur Vandenberg (R-MI) for the party’s nomination. He lost the election, but liberal Republicans rebounded in 1944 and 1948 with political wunderkind and New York Governor, Thomas Dewey, and again in ‘52 with politically moderate war hero, Dwight Eisenhower. While the Eastern Establishment would never again muster a candidate with such wide appeal, their influence did not immediately wane. The conservative movement that coalesced around Goldwater in the early 1960s threatened the Eastern Establishment in the way Taft and the Midwestern conservatives could not. As the untested challenger, Goldwater’s conservatives had to articulate both a common past and a coherent vision for their future. This required a usable past.

A “usable past” is utilitarian history.²² It has a purpose. It is the narrative that can be told to justify and legitimize something in the present. Usable pasts engender sympathy and when used strategically, build social and political capital. Of course, a useable past does not

¹⁹ This included a mutual respect for the free market, but a proclivity toward government intervention; progressive race relations; centrist tendencies, internationalism, and “across-the-aisle” bipartisanship.

²⁰ Theodore H. White, *The Making of the President – 1964* (New York: Anteneum Publishers, 1965), 63.

²¹ John H. Kessel, *The Goldwater Coalition: Republican Strategies in 1964* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1968).

²² Historian Carl Becker developed the concept of a usable past to mean a history that can explain something in the present. Quite cynically, I have politicized the term so as to reflect the realities of image and legacy creation in contemporary America. It is worth remembering what Becker once wrote: “Mr. Everyman fashions [history] out of his individual experience, adapts [it] to his practical or emotional needs, and adorns as well as may be to suit his aesthetic tastes.” This is not the professional’s history, but the politicians’. See Carl L. Becker, *Everyman His Own Historian: Essays on History and Politics* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1966), 242-246; Carl L. Becker, *Detachment and the Writing of History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1958); Michael Kammen, ed., “What is the Good of History?” *Selected Letters of Carl L. Becker* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973).

depict history as it necessarily happened, but how vested parties wish to see it. In this manner it is often self-editing and prone to omissions. A usable past in politics mitigates the importance and frequency of deviations from the ideal, favoring instead affirmative narrative histories. No state or institution is immune from its effects. Even the contemporary Democratic Party's is guilty of whitewashing their history for a usable past. They have actively written the Solid South and their racist record out from their foundational narrative. Indeed, leaders have long relied on usable pasts to both ground and orient political movements. But what ultimately decides the nature and shape of these histories? Political utility.

Great Men acquire reputations and affiliations that successive generations use, exploit and avoid. As with most faction leaders, Taft's legacy assumed a particular gravitas. After fifteen years as America's "Mr. Conservative," Taft was inexorably bound to a particular brand of conservatism. Goldwater, tasked with conservatism's rehabilitation, had to chart a viable, new course. The young, vote-hungry movement needed popular support. It could not survive deadly labels (isolationists) or conflicting messages (i.e. a sometimes progressive domestic policy). Despite Goldwater's sincere admiration for all things Taft, the Arizonan had to selectively embrace only those aspects of the Taft legacy that would advance conservatism in the new political era. Ironically, America's conservative movement could not afford to conserve its own tradition.

V. Conservatism in Word and Print

There is a small but growing amount of scholarly literature dedicated to 20th century conservative studies.²³ Few, however, address the Taft-Goldwater relationship. This omission is itself instructive. Who, if not the academics, guides, revisits and corrects the history of conservatism? Collectively, pundits, politicians, and popular memory do. Public discourse about conservatism presupposes a navigable lineage and offers insight into the motivations of historical actors. The popular retelling of a foundational narrative is raw historical data itself and must be treated as such. Conversely, it's also "bad" history. Politicians and image makers had free reign to make and remake narratives and legacies as was politically expedient. That, in light of this paper's particular focus, is quite helpful in analyzing Goldwater's treatment of Taft. So what narrative did the conservative politicians and writers create?

Townhall, a magazine of conservative opinion, distributed a special edition entitled "Who Decides What is Conservative?" to the attendees of the 2008 Conservative Political Action Conference. Author Jennifer Rubin began the headline article not with a historical postulate, but a statement of fact: "The modern conservative movement, twenty years after Ronald Reagan left office and forty years after Barry Goldwater's presidential run, has expanded beyond its founders' wildest dreams."²⁴ The argument is clear: Conservatism starts with Goldwater. Indeed, the popular conservative foundational narrative begins not in 1938, but

²³One particularly influential work in this rising field investigates mid-century conservative grassroots activism in Southern California and its origins. In many ways it is a microcosm of the larger period movement: Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

²⁴Jennifer Rubin, "Who Decides What Is Conservative?" *Townhall*, February 2008.

1964. The key relationship is not the Taft-Goldwater transition, but a Goldwater-Reagan continuum.²⁵

The Goldwater-Reagan continuum does not suffer from the same problems of historical transmission and political expediency as the Taft-Goldwater narrative. First, for two decades Goldwater and Reagan held, concurrently, national office. Goldwater had just half a year in the Senate with Taft. It is an easily overlooked point, but each Goldwater-Reagan photo op strengthened the legacy. Similarly, Goldwater's retirement in 1986 gave the elder Senator the occasion to promote, augment, and adjust his legacy as a classically liberal conservative wary of new political developments. Chief among them for Goldwater: the emergence of the Religious Right. Taft never had such an opportunity with respect to Cold War defense policy.

Third, historians and political observers credit Goldwater with Ronald Reagan's rise in national politics. In 1964 the Goldwater campaign selected Reagan, an articulate conservative spokesman since his days at General Electric, to deliver a crucial pre-election campaign speech.²⁶ "The Speech" was televised across the country. Millions watched the actor-turned-politician eloquently assail Johnson's Great Society.²⁷ "We will keep in mind," Reagan crooned, "that Barry Goldwater has faith in us. He has faith that you and I have the ability and the dignity and the right to make our own decisions and determine our own destiny."²⁸ It was a mutual and public endorsement, something Taft and Goldwater never had in 1952. Furthermore, this relationship did not traverse political epochs. Goldwater and Reagan were Cold Warriors committed to similar foreign policy ends.

Finally, there's a pragmatic reason to embrace Goldwater-Reagan over Taft-Goldwater as the master narrative of the rise of American conservatism. The former was successful. "We -- 27,178,188 of us -- who voted for him in 1964 believe he won," George F. Will wrote in his

²⁵ In other words, why does The Goldwater Institute, a conservative think tank, offer a Ronald Reagan Fellowship but nothing in honor of the late Senator Taft? Similarly, for an in-depth exploration of the Reagan mythology see Kyle Longley et. al., *Deconstructing Reagan: Conservative Mythology and America's Fortieth President* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2007).

²⁶ Thomas Evans, *The Education of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 57-80.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 111-126.

²⁸ For video of the speech please see A Time for Choosing. American Rhetoric. www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/ronaldreaganatimeforchoosing.htm (accessed February 27th, 2008).

eulogy for Goldwater, "it just took 16 years to count the votes."²⁹ Hindsight allows conservatives to construct an inclusive victor's narrative. Popular memory favors the 1964 election because it was a clear and concise starting point. It tells a simple, straightforward story: Goldwater created a movement that coalesced a decade later around its new standard bearer, Ronald Reagan. Academics might point to the founding of the *National Review* in 1955, the establishment of Young Americans for Freedom in 1961, or the rise of conservative think tanks, but such nuanced history detracts from the simplicity Goldwater-Reagan narrative.³⁰ In contrast, the Taft-Goldwater transition lacked these elements. For all similarities, there were a handful of issues and positions that Taft cultivated during his political career that significantly weakened his political utility in 1964.

²⁹ George F. Will, "The Cheerful Malcontent," *The Washington Post*, 31 May 1998, sec C07.

³⁰ For more on the consolidation of the conservative movement see Jonathan Martin Kolkey, *The New Right, 1960-1980, with Epilogue, 1969-1980* (Washington, University Press of America, 1983), especially 21-75, 173-203; the slightly more laudatory Jeffrey Hart, *The Making of the Conservative Mind: National Review and its Times* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2005), especially 1-15, 65-83; Mary C. Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties: The Conservative Capture of the GOP* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Gregory L. Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism: Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of the Contemporary Right* (New York: New York University Press, 1999); John A. Andrew, *The Other Side of the Sixties: Young America for Freedom and the Rise of Conservative Politics* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997); Jerome L. Himmelstein, *To the Right: The Transformation of American Conservatism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); and Kurt Schuparra, *Triumph of the Right: The Rise of the California Conservative Movement, 1945-1966* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1998). **Note the exclusive focus on the 1960s.** These scholarly works uphold the "Goldwater-Conservative" foundational narrative as few address Taft in any meaningful or significant way.

VI. Robert A. Taft: Mr. Conservative

The Education of Bob Taft

“My dear Mr. Hoover,” wrote a twenty-nine-year-old Robert Taft, “I would now greatly prefer to enter an Army Training Camp, and I am inclined to believe that it is my duty to do so.”³¹ Ohio’s native son was torn. He believed it his duty to fight and aid the American war effort abroad, but recognized his commitments to Herbert Hoover’s American Food Administration. He petitioned his boss for advice. Hoover cautioned the Harvard Law graduate from making a rash decision. “I do not believe,” the businessman turned bureaucrat responded, “that you would want to sacrifice a very effective work and find yourself merely tied up in the Army on a peace basis.”³² Taft agreed. Either way, Europe was in his future. Hoover, appointed by Wilson to direct the American Relief Administration, named Taft his executive assistant.

Rebuilding Western Europe from the comforts of the Tuileries Gardens, Taft experienced the tribulations of international cooperation, European infighting and bureaucratic oversight firsthand. In effect, the conservative critique of government and top-down planning that would define the generation’s great anti-statist crystallized under Hoover’s guidance. As early as January 1919, Taft railed against price controls, the Communist menace, and liberal internationalism. Writing to his father, former President and future Supreme Court Justice William Howard, the younger Taft affirmed Hoover’s criticism of Wilson as “too Bolshevistic”

³¹ Robert Taft (RT) to Herbert Hoover, Washington, 18 October 1918, *The Papers of Robert A. Taft*, vol. 1, ed. Clarence E. Wunderlin, Jr. (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1997), 153-154.

³² *Ibid.*, 154.

and ruinously “absolute” in his approach to postwar reconstruction.³³ Not yet thirty, Taft had begun to solidify the principles that guided him from a shared law office to the Senate rostrum.

A decidedly nuanced thinker, Taft adroitly avoided the excesses of dogmatism. His policies evolved publicly as times changed and new realities presented themselves, but he never abandoned his core principles. For many, this made Taft a man of conviction and contradiction. How, for example, could a man once so eager to join the military and fight on European shores so tenaciously resist mobilization against German aggression just two decades later? In the same way, how did the unrelenting critic of Roosevelt’s interventionism justify American support to Greece, Turkey and Formosa? While one could posit similar questions for any American politician, Taft proves an especially challenging study. He was, in the eulogizing words of Congressman Judd (R-WI), a public figure “about whom so many people held such wholly different opinions, and were so almost violently sure that their understanding of him was the correct one, and the only correct one.”³⁴ Indeed, the juxtaposition of Midwestern pragmatism and conservative ideology have muddled Taft’s legacy for historians and contemporaries alike.

The Critic: Opposition to the New Deal

In 1919, Taft returned to a quiet life in the United States. He could not, however, stay clear of Midwestern politics. His loyalty to Hoover was too strong and his name too recognizable. Taft encouraged a still undecided Hoover to vie for the presidency in 1920 as a Republican. He rebutted editorial columns critical of Hoover in papers across the Midwest and established a grassroots network of “Republicans for Hoover” clubs in Ohio. It was a bold move. The young Taft had put his name and resources behind Hoover, not fellow Ohioan and eventual victor, Warren Harding. Taft, frustrated with the Hoover campaign, but boundless in ambition, decided to run for office. The victory came easily for the son of Ohio’s First Family.

³³ RT to William H. Taft, Paris, France, 5 January 1919, *The Papers of Robert A. Taft*, vol. 1, 171-173.

³⁴ Joint Committee on Printing, *Memorial Services: Robert Alphonso Taft*, 83rd Cong., 2d sess., 1954, Government Printing Office, 220.

For five years Taft articulated a no-nonsense, common sense conservative platform of fiscal responsibility and tax reform in the Ohio State legislature. While Taft quit politics in 1927, the death of his father in 1930 had “placed [Robert] at the head of the most prominent family both in Ohio and in Republican Party politics.”³⁵ With Hoover in the White House and the economy tumbling toward the depression, Taft, the new standard-bearer for Midwestern conservatism, saw his chance to enter the national debate.

Taft immediately applied the lessons of Paris and Cincinnati to the Depression. If he was to critique it, he had to first understand it. Jotting down notes he explained the economic downturn as the result of “a violent readjustment produced by war [and] international loans.”³⁶ Leaders, he believed, had contributed to the economic failures through their attempts to manage it. Taft did not exculpate Hoover, but he reserved his strongest criticism for Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal Administration. It was during this period that citizen Taft developed and honed his trademark constitutional critique.³⁷ The effective criticism that carried Taft into the Senate and sustained his popularity had begun as a distinctly regional attack against the “Democratic State Administration” for “sponsoring an orgy of extravagant governmental expenditures.”³⁸ By the mid-1930s this jeremiad had evolved into a stinging rejection of statism. Increasingly vocal, Taft turned to the Senate in 1938 for the legislative power needed to check the New Deal.

Taft succeeded in national politics because he was able to articulate a fiercely ideological platform in a pragmatic manner that did not alienate all FDR supporters. “As a rule,” he wrote to Senator Arthur Vandenberg, “I do not mention Roosevelt’s name, because I find he is more popular than any of his policies, but I do not hesitate to go after the New Deal.”³⁹ A growing number of Americans rallied behind Taft’s invocations of local government and private industry. The GOP parlayed general disillusionment with Democratic policies into votes during

³⁵ Editors comments, *The Papers of Robert A. Taft*, vol. 1, 325.

³⁶ RT notes on the Great Depression, Cincinnati, 25 August 1933, *The Papers of Robert A. Taft*, vol. 1, 447-453.

³⁷ For a conservative traditionalists posthumous appraisal of Taft’s constitutionalism and foreign policy see Russell Kirk, *The Political Principles of Robert A. Taft* (New York: Fleet Press Corporation, 1967), especially 62-105, 158-185.

³⁸ RT to Stanford A. Headley, Cincinnati, 23 May 1934, *The Papers of Robert A. Taft*, vol. 1, 466-468. Stanford was the director of the Citizens’ Committee Campaign in Hamilton County.

³⁹ RT to Arthur H. Vandenberg, Cincinnati, 14 October, 1938, *The Papers of Robert A. Taft*, vol. 1, 590-591.

the 1938 election, but Republican gains did not last.⁴⁰ German aggression in Europe refocused the debate from domestic to foreign policy.

The Crisis in Europe: On the Wrong Side of History

The popular contemporary narrative portrays Taft as an anti-war obstructionist on the wrong side of history. It is an oversimplification for only the latter is true. In truth, Taft's views on interventionism were far too nuanced for his own political good. His Republican and Democratic opponents ritualistically typecast him as the backwards "isolationist." It was a terribly effective charge that persisted long after his death.

In reality, Taft argued against emotional appeals for war, and for an objective appraisal "based on reason, and not solely on prejudice."⁴¹ Having witnessed firsthand the many failures of the First World War, he questioned the high idealism of Wilsonian internationalism that had not prevented war, but "set up more dictatorships than the world had seen for many days."⁴² Taft did not want to not send "America's sons" to fight and die in another European affair, one he saw as a localized affair. Hitler, he argued, was too limited a menace to threaten American interests. America needed only to strengthen her military and she would emerge unscathed. Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the Soviet Union, affirmed for Taft his iconoclastic proposition. A staunch and vociferous anti-communist, Taft boasted that through mutual destruction "the Russo-German war might actually lead to peace."⁴³ He did not fully comprehend the gravity of the situation.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ In the 1938 elections Republicans picked up 81 seats in the House and 6 in the Senate. For more on the race, especially in Ohio, consult James T. Patterson, *Mr. Republican: A Biography of Robert A. Taft* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972), especially 160-179.

⁴¹ RT address to the Illinois Republican Party, Vienna, IL, 30 September 1939, *The Papers of Robert A. Taft*, vol. 2, ed. Clarence E. Wunderlin, Jr. (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 2001), 74-79.

⁴² RT address on the Neutrality Act revision, Minneapolis, 6 September 1939, *The Papers of Robert A. Taft*, vol. 2, 69-73. In this speech Taft also invoked the classic isolationist principle of location: "We have an isolated location," he said, "and it is still isolated in spite of all the improvements in air transpiration. [...] Why can't we stay out? Holland, Switzerland, Scandinavia stayed out in the World War, though they were in the very midst of it."

⁴³ RT radio address on Russia and the Four Freedoms, Washington D.C., 25 June 1941, *The Papers of Robert A. Taft*, vol. 2, 253-258.

⁴⁴ Soviet involvement was a recurring theme throughout Taft's career. From his criticism of the Nuremberg Trials as *ex post facto* justice turning a blind eye to Soviet crimes to his critical views toward the United Nations Security Council, Taft regarded Allied cooperation with Soviet Russia as a moral failing. Across the aisle, John Kennedy praised this idealism, a

Conversely, Taft assailed Roosevelt's warmongering through the lens he knew best: the New Deal. Practically, Taft added, the New Deal discouraged military readiness. Domestic spending ran in the billions, but the Administration took few preventive measures to meet external threats. Worse, argued Taft, Roosevelt used the specter of war as "an excuse" to divert "the people's attention [from the] dangers and collapse of New Deal policies."⁴⁵ It was, at heart, a constitutional argument. Taft feared those "who feel [that] we must give arbitrary power to the President to tell every citizen what he shall do, in manufacture, in commerce, in agriculture; to draft power and capital; to fix all wages and prices." Mr. Conservative accused Roosevelt of abusing the power of the Executive to wage war without the authority of Congress and the people. Simply stated, Taft believed that the use of the war to pass controversial legislation severely undermined American liberties.

Taft & the Rise of the Eastern Establishment

Electoral politics were as contentious as the popular debate over war preparedness in 1940. Polls indicated strong majorities against war, but a sudden escalation of hostilities shifted support toward FDR's aggressive posturing. As a result the Republican Party fractured. Taft's intellectual and heavily criticized positions fluttered among a leaderless pack. "Isolationists" split their primary ballots among the Ohioan and Senator Vandenberg.⁴⁶ Others flocked to the darling of the East Coast liberal establishment, Thomas Dewey, who commanded a seemingly insurmountable 64% percent lead just a month before the convention. By his own admission Taft lacked Dewey's popular and moderating "appeal."⁴⁷

In that same poll, Wendell Willkie, an unknown Hoosier utilities lawyer, polled just 4%. *The New York Times* dubbed Willkie, a registered, FDR-voting Democrat until 1939, "the

willingness to speak out when there was nothing to gain politically. See *Profiles In Courage* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 216-225.

⁴⁵ RT address to the Illinois Republican Party, Vienna, IL, 30 September 1939, *The Papers of Robert A. Taft*, vol. 2, 75.

⁴⁶ For more on Republican policies and their impact during the war see Richard E. Darilek, *A Loyal Opposition in Time of War: The Republican Party and the Politics of Foreign Policy from Pearl Harbor to Yalta* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976), especially 18-58.

⁴⁷ RT to Vincent Starzinger, Washington D.C., 8 May 1940, *The Papers of Robert A. Taft*, 140-141.

darkest of horses in the stable.”⁴⁸ Convention delegates thought otherwise. Willkie espoused an internationalist rhetoric unlike that of his opponents. At times Willkie criticized Roosevelt to build support within the GOP, but he was largely supportive of the President’s pre-war posturing. This included support for a peacetime draft, a measure flatly rejected by the Junior Senator from Ohio. Taft, writing to friend and public relations expert Richard B. Scanrett Jr. five days before the Republican convention, tore into Willkie:

The Willkie boom has proceeded quite rapidly, but I do not think he will get more than one or two votes in Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. [He will] have a good many in Massachusetts [but] I don’t think he will ever get more than five in Indiana, and about the same in Missouri. Politicians coming in from the West are nearly all anti-Willkie. I think it will become obvious that he is a Wall Street and utility candidate.⁴⁹

Convention delegates disagreed. Amid the deafening shouts of “We Want Willkie,” the underdog captured the Republican presidential nomination on June 24th, 1940.⁵⁰ The selection was unprecedented, unexpected, and for some, unwanted. Taft and the conservative “Old Guard” shunned Willkie. “We think it’s all right for the town whore to join the church,” chided an indignant Senator James Watson (R-IN), “but we don’t let her lead the choir on the first night.”⁵¹ Senator Watson had reason to worry. The liberal Eastern Establishment had masterminded the Willkie Boom in an effort to derail the candidacy of isolationists and anti-interventionists. But as ideology assumed a new importance within the GOP, Party figures circled the wagons. In a reply to a concerned Miss. Mildren W. Leach of Philadelphia, Taft bit his tongue to defend the new Republican candidate:

The Convention was taking a chance when they nominated Mr. Willkie without being fully advised as to his views. However, I happen to know him and I know

⁴⁸ As quoted in Steve Neal, *Dark Horse: A Biography of Wendell Willkie* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 1989), 49.

⁴⁹ RT to Richard B. Scandrett Jr., Washington D.C., 19 June 1940, *The Papers of Robert A. Taft*, 158.

⁵⁰ The Reminiscences of Horace Taft, interview by John T. Mason Jr., The Taft Project, 1970, 49.

⁵¹ Charles Peters, *Five Days in Philadelphia: The Amazing “We Want Willkie!” Convention of 1940 and How it Freed FDR to Save the Western World* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2005), 94-95. For more on Willkie’s relationship with the GOP see Johnson, Donald. *Republican Party & Wendell Willkie*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1960.

he is a very able man who is one hundred per cent against the New Deal. I very much hope that all Republicans will support him in time.

Conspicuously, there were no mentions of foreign policy in his reply.

By the end of 1941, war had found its way to American soil. Republicans and Democrats set aside their differences to wholeheartedly endorse the war effort. "The position of interventionists and non-interventionists alike," clarified Taft, "was always consistent with 100% of any war which did occur. Past differences are forgotten by 85% of the people. They should be forgotten by all."⁵² They would have to be. Willkie's abrupt death in 1944 left the Senator to lead the opposition party in a post-war world.

Triumphs, Tragedy and Change: 1944-1952

War's end forced a reappraisal of national and foreign affairs. "I believe," Taft told the graduating class of Grove City College a year before Americans set foot on European soil, "the time has come when we should sit down and determine just why we are fighting the war and what we are going to do with victory when we obtain it." Domestically, the conservative senator had to reconcile the Depression era New Deal and big wartime government with a post-war boom. He would not give the Democratic administration a free, unchallenged hand to make decisions that involved "the very lives of millions of our citizens and the future of free government."⁵³ Taft kept constant and public pressure on the new President to scale back government excess. "I like Truman," wrote Taft to his cousin, Robert Ingalls, "I think he is a straightforward frank man."⁵⁴ But the Yale went on to lambaste the haberdasher for lacking "the education or background or ability to analyze soundly the larger problems which are before him."⁵⁵ Taft feared Truman's "inclination to accept the policies of the previous

⁵² RT speech to the Executives Club of Chicago, Chicago, 19 December 1941, *The Papers of Robert A. Taft*, vol. 2, 302-311.

⁵³ RT speech on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Washington D.C., 30 March 1949, *The Papers of Robert A. Taft*, vol. 4, ed. Clarence E. Wunderlin, Jr. (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 2003), 58-63.

⁵⁴ RT to Robert I. Ingalls, Washington D.C., 12 May 1945, *The Papers of Robert A. Taft*, vol. 3, ed. Clarence E. Wunderlin, Jr. (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 2003), 45-46.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 45-46.

administration without criticism or question” as a tacit endorsement for Roosevelt’s “New Deal policies.”⁵⁶

Taft argued that while “Old Age pensions” and certain public programs fell under the jurisdiction of the federal government, universal healthcare and price fixing did not. Often overlooked in popular memory, Taft had long justified efficient, well-managed New Deal programs as concordant with his conservatism. The best domestic programs, he believed, had become an integral part of the state and society. They had to be optimized and not, as Goldwater would later have it, dismantled.⁵⁷ Pundits and concerned citizens on the Left and Right criticized Mr. Conservative for his stance. The Senator rebuffed the *Washington Evening Star* for a particularly scathing profile in which they labeled Taft a proponent of “limited socialism.”⁵⁸ Taft, however, justified his policies not as those of a paternalist state, but as laws in the tradition of the “Anglo-Saxon government principle.”⁵⁹ He thought aid necessary and principled when states did “not have the resources.”⁶⁰ On domestic matters, Taft was a classically liberal conservative, not a libertarian economist like Goldwater.

In contrast, adapting to the new realities of internationalism and interdependence required a fundamental change in philosophy. Mr. Republican responded in kind with a surprisingly aggressive platform. It was, however, uniquely Taftian – characterized by its constitutional concerns and virulent anti-Communism. Taft, for instance, accused the Democrats of pouring “out billions in aid” while making decisions at Teheran and Yalta “which seriously hindered all European recovery.”⁶¹ He could not stress enough the fiscal failings of an Administration willing to spend billions abroad while not relaxing government control of the

⁵⁶ Ibid., 45-46.

⁵⁷ In *Conscience of a Conservative* Goldwater unambiguously states, “I have little interest in streamlining government or in making it more efficient, for I mean to reduce its size. I do not undertake to promote welfare, for I propose to extend freedom. My aim is not to pass laws, but to repeal them.” Barry Goldwater, *Conscience of a Conservative* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 1990), xx-xxi.

⁵⁸ *Washington Evening Star*, 15 April 1949, as quoted in RT to Benjamin McKelway, Washington D.C., 19 April 1949, *The Papers of Robert A. Taft*, vol. 4, 68.

⁵⁹ RT to Benjamin McKelway, Washington D.C., 19 April 1949, *The Papers of Robert A. Taft*, vol. 4, 68.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 68.

⁶¹ Taft referred to the Marshall Plan as a glorified Morgenthau Plan, a post-war scheme that called for the demilitarization and deindustrialization of Germany. The goal was to rebuild Germany as an agricultural and largely pastoral nation. It was heavily criticized at home and abroad, but received early support. For more of Taft’s views on the subject please see RT speech to the Economic Club of Detroit, Detroit, 23 February 1948, *The Papers of Robert A. Taft*, vol. 3, especially 401 - 410.

economy at home. The senator was equally concerned with the Administration's lax treatment of the Far East.

"Secretary Marshall," Taft told the Economic Club of Detroit, "does not like the Chinese and has no interest in their problems." The son of the former Governor-General of the Philippines could not comprehend the Administration's Eurocentric focus. In the years preceding Chang-Kai Shek's flight to Formosa, Taft observed that "unless vigorous action is taken immediately, and wholeheartedly, sincere action, all Manchuria will soon be lost to Communism."⁶² This time he was right. The former Lend-Lease critic led Congressional efforts to defend Formosa knowing that "there is not the slightest evidence that Russia will go to war with us because we interfere with a crossing [of Chinese Communists] to Formosa."⁶³ The aggressive policy shift was also apparent in Taft's response to the Korean War. Although the Korean Peninsula was "not vitally important to the United States," Taft "urged a much more determined attitude against communism."⁶⁴ He supported Truman's UN sanctioned foray into Korea, but capitalized on the President's dismissal of General MacArthur as indicative of Secretary of State Dean Acheson's policy of "appeasement."⁶⁵ While Taft retained his healthy skepticism of the Administration, there was no denying the remarkable shift in his foreign policy. Those who promulgated the "isolationist" label did not take this into account.

Mr. Republican: Senate Majority Leader

Taft's domestic policies in the late 1940s were equally controversial. At home, organized labor made every effort to unseat Taft during the 1950 elections. He drew labor's ire for the Taft-Hartley Act, legislation that sought to reform New Deal programs like the National Labor Relations Board while banning closed shops and purging Communists from labor

⁶² RT speech to the Economic Club of Detroit, *The Papers of Robert A. Taft*, vol. 3, 402 - 406.

⁶³ RT statement on Formosa delivered on the floor of the US Senate, Washington D.C., 11 January 1950, *The Papers of Robert A. Taft*, vol. 4, 124-127.

⁶⁴ RT speech on the Korean Crisis delivered on the floor of the US Senate, Washington D.C., 28 June 1950, *The Papers of Robert A. Taft*, vol. 4, 167-172.

⁶⁵ RT speech on American policy in the Far East, Washington D.C., 27 April, 1951, *The Papers of Robert A. Taft*, vol. 4, 277-281.

management.⁶⁶ Labor, however, found him more popular than ever. “I had always expected to win,” boasted Taft to Major General Beightler, “but I was certainly pleased with [the] outstanding fact [that] I carried 84 out of 88 counties.”⁶⁷ He had won every major industrial region in the State. Ohio’s native son was set to try for the Presidency third and final time in 1952, but the boy who had grown up on 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue was destined never to return.

Taft had made inroads throughout the nation, but could not compete with the name recognition of Supreme Allied Commander, Dwight Eisenhower. Eisenhower, Taft said, lacked “any basic knowledge of the principles of government; consequently, he is likely to accept the advice of those who happen to be intimate with him at the moment.”⁶⁸ Taft, like Goldwater, feared the influence of Eastern Establishment on Ike’s campaign. Practically, “a predominantly liberal Republican administration would be more difficult to oppose politically than a Democratic administration.”⁶⁹ Concerned, Taft drafted a memo to clarify his thoughts: “I have been campaigning around the country for more than a year on certain principles. These principles are opposed by most of Eisenhower supporters, some of them by Eisenhower himself. I cannot do anything to indicate that I am giving up [on them].”⁷⁰

A historic two hour breakfast with General Eisenhower in Morningside Heights, New York City eased Taft’s concerns. He downplayed foreign policy differences as mere “differences of degree” and espoused his conviction that Eisenhower would govern “by the Republican principle of continued and expanding liberty.”⁷¹ Publicly, Eisenhower promised to “maintain the unity of the entire party by taking counsel with all factions and points of view.”⁷² Privately, Taft questioned what influence – if any – he would have on the new Administration.

⁶⁶ No discussion of Robert Taft’s domestic policy is complete without mention of the Taft-Hartley Act. Truman rejected the controversial measure only to have his veto overridden by a two-thirds majority of Congress. Goldwater would capitalize and expand upon Taft’s legislation in the decade to follow. For more information please see Fred A. Hartley Jr., *Our New National Labor Policy: The Taft-Hartley Act and the Next Steps* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1948), especially the Forward by Robert Taft.

⁶⁷ RT to Robert S. Beightler, Cincinnati, 24 November 1950, *The Papers of Robert A. Taft*, vol. 4, 217-218.

⁶⁸ RT to Robert S. Beightler, *The Papers of Robert A. Taft*, vol. 4, 217-218.

⁶⁹ Editorial commentary, *The Papers of Robert A. Taft*, vol. 4, 396.

⁷⁰ Analysis of the Results of the Chicago Convention, Pointe-au-Pic, Quebec, July 1952, *The Papers of Robert A. Taft*, vol. 4, 398-403.

⁷¹ Statement by Senator Robert A. Taft, 12 September 1952, *The Papers of Robert A. Taft*, vol. 4, 416-419.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 419.

The Eastern Establishment had triumphed once again. The Eisenhower/Nixon ticket defeated Adlai Stevenson with 55% of the popular vote. The Republicans had swept control of Congress and the White House. Taft was Ike's choice for Senate Majority Leader.

Taft ran the Senate efficiently, but his tenure was short. Taft died July 31st, 1953, just months after his appointment.⁷³ His contributions, however controversial, were not lost on his peers. The junior Senator from Massachusetts, John F. Kennedy, nominated the late Senator for "the man of the year in 1953."⁷⁴ Senator McCarthy, the Republican firebrand from Wisconsin, avoided the high-rhetoric of his peers. He added just two sentences to the Congressional register:

Mr. President, to the grand eulogies which have been heard here today, I would merely add that the greatest man I have ever known died today. Were Bob Taft on the Senate floor, he might well rise to say, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."⁷⁵

⁷³ See Jhan Robbins, *Eight Weeks to Live: The Last Chapter in the Life of Robert A. Taft* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1954) for the best account of Taft's fateful last days.

⁷⁴ Joint Committee on Printing, *Memorial Services*, 190.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

VII. Barry Goldwater: The New Mr. Conservative

*“Perseverance, that’s been the story of my family.”*⁷⁶

“I was born in a log cabin,” Barry Goldwater would tell friends, “with a golf course, a pool table, and a swimming pool.”⁷⁷ For the son of Baron Goldwater, formerly Goldwasser, and Josephine Williams, a transplanted Episcopalian heiress, money was never an issue.⁷⁸ Years before his birth, Goldwater’s father and uncle, Morris Goldwater, transformed the inherited family general store from a simple shop to a chain of department stores.⁷⁹ The Goldwaters of Arizona were the Macys of the America’s burgeoning southwest. Goldwater, however, did not see himself not as the coddled child of the Phoenician elite, but as the descendent of self-made Jewish émigrés and American pioneers.⁸⁰ Goldwater modeled himself in the Goldwasser tradition.

Michel Goldwasser, Goldwater’s grandfather, fled Russian occupied Poland in the mid-19th century. The growing family moved across the American west, ultimately settling in the nascent Arizona community of Prescott.⁸¹ This was Barry Goldwater’s Arizona. This was his America. A Turnerian at heart, Goldwater recognized the transformative nature of the frontier.⁸² Free men and women fought, he believed, struggled and survived. They succeeded on their own accord with hard work and unwavering determination. In transposing this frontier ethos to

⁷⁶ Robert Alan Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 2.

⁷⁷ Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater*, 27.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁷⁹ Peter Iverson, *Barry Goldwater: Native Arizonan* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 5.

⁸⁰ Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater*, 29

⁸¹ Jack Bell, *Mr. Conservative: Barry Goldwater* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1962), 35.

⁸² Turner, a professor of history, postulated his “Frontier Thesis” in 1893. In it he argues that the frontier, qua the West, was integral in the formation of a unique and rugged American identity. Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1920)

American society as a whole, Goldwater set in place the formative philosophy behind his unique brand of libertarian-conservatism.

Goldwater's childhood, however, proved decidedly forgettable.⁸³ An unruly, but curious youth, he was a career C student. At Virginia's Staunton Military Academy, Baron's last hope for his wayward son, Goldwater led his class in demerits but graduated as "the best all-around cadet in his class."⁸⁴ It was an impressive accomplishment. But like Taft, tragedy struck in 1930. Baron's death forced Barry, the eldest of two sons, to abandon his studies to care for his mother and mind the family business. Decades later Goldwater recalled this moment with the deepest of regret. He felt "shortchanged" and overwhelmed.⁸⁵ In Congress he had to work with men, like Taft, "who had graduated from the nation's best colleges and who had received the benefit of training in the country's best law schools."⁸⁶ He would never be a great intellectual like Taft. Twenty-one years old, Goldwater would just have to draw from the private sector to shape his political philosophy.

Under the tutelage of his uncle and mentor, Morris, a staunch Jeffersonian-Democrat and co-founder of the Arizona Democratic Party, Barry perfected sales and marketing strategies. He co-owned four stores with a total annual revenue of 7.5 million dollars, but worked alongside his employees selling everything but "shoes and brassieres."⁸⁷ They called him "Barry" and respected him for what he would openly refer to as a "radical" business plan.⁸⁸ In the words of biographer Jack Bell:

Barry set about making the Goldwater stores a civic institution. He showed his interest by forming a flying club for employees, setting up the first health-hospital plan in any Phoenix mercantile firm, providing insurance and retirement benefits, and put the widows and wives of old employees who had died on the payroll. During World War II he operated a farm to supplement the food needs of those who worked in his stores.⁸⁹

⁸³ Iverson, *Native Arizonan*, 15.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁸⁷ Bell, *Mr. Conservative*, 39.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

The Goldwater store operated more on a “sense of fairness and a desire to do the right thing for those economically dependent on their decisions.”⁹⁰ It was a smart, pro-active business practice that also reflected the Goldwater family morality. In an age of labor unrest and strikes, his employees voted twice against unionization.

Inherent in Goldwater’s life-long critiques of statism and socialism is an affirmation of free markets and free men. This was not an empty platitude. Goldwater sincerely believed that private enterprise could simultaneously safeguard freedom and promote the wellbeing of the community. He believed it because he practiced it.

A Political Life

Growing increasingly dissatisfied with the bureaucratic New Deal government Goldwater turned his political and philanthropic attention toward local and state-wide affairs.⁹¹ World War II, however, put local concerns on hold. On a warm Arizonan afternoon in early December, 1941, word of the attack on Pearl Harbor reached Barry and Josephine Goldwater at their local golf course. Witnesses remember an emotionally distraught Goldwater “dropping his clubs and running.”⁹² To where is still not clear. The Japanese attack forced Goldwater to rethink his cautious outlook. He, like Taft during World War I, volunteered for active duty, but his astigmatism and age, then 32, kept him in supporting roles as a Personal Relations officer in the Air Force and later, a pilot.⁹³

Goldwater returned from the war to find a changed Arizona. Military bases, industrial facilities, and an availability of well-paying jobs had spurred development. The population exploded and as a consequence, voter rolls evened out. For decades Arizona had been a

⁹⁰ On page 50 Robert Goldberg adds, “Their employees worked five day and forty hour weeks with wages substantially higher than the national retail-store average. It was not uncommon for the Goldwaters to “help employees by paying overdue bills, providing paid vacations, and even assuming home mortgages.”

⁹¹ Goldwater joined any charitable and civic board that would have him. His wife, Peggy Johnson Goldwater co-founded Arizona’s first Planned Parenthood.

⁹² Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater*, 51.

⁹³ Goldwater, a professional photographer and associate member of the The Royal Photographic Society of London, traded airmen their photographs for practice time behind the yoke. In this way the self-taught pilot accumulated enough flying hours to qualify for overseas work transporting goods and personnel over the Himalayas, “the hump,” for the Air Force. For more on Goldwater’s military career see William Rentschler, *Goldwater: A Tribute to a Twentieth-Century Political Icon* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 2000), 26-39.

solidly Democratic state with a substantial seven-to-one advantage over registered Republicans.⁹⁴ In fact, before 1952 Arizona had never sent a Republican to Congress. The influx of conservative Midwesterners and entrepreneurial young families with Goldwater's "pioneering spirit" challenged this political orthodoxy.⁹⁵ Sam Goodard, Arizona's Democratic Governor, argued that "there was a time when you could have had a meeting of the Republicans in a telephone booth. We got shipped [sic] East Texas, North Chicago, and Orange County. And they came here in droves. It altered the whole demography of the place."⁹⁶ The voter registration differential fell to four-to-one. With newfound experience, connections, and wealth, Barry Goldwater, Phoenix's "Man of the Year" in 1949, was poised to lead Arizona's new post-war conservative base.⁹⁷

Goldwater headlined a city council ticket comprised largely of Republican reformers in the '49 election. It was his first and last local campaign. They won handedly on Goldwater's strength as a straight-talking community leader. But even then the "young merchant prince" proudly, albeit defiantly, upheld his unique brand of libertarian-conservatism against the statist overtures of his fellow councilmen.⁹⁸ Goldwater thrived in the minority. He was the lone dissenting vote against popular proposals to build municipal parking lots for city businesses, grant the Federal Housing authority the power of eminent domain, and, among others, to prohibit a local merchant from selling liquor.⁹⁹ As it was on the council it would be in Congress; Goldwater was a faithful Party supporter with maverick libertarian tendencies. As one political foe remarked, "The only time Barry Goldwater will ride the fence is when we tar and feather him and stick him on it."¹⁰⁰

Smitten with Arizona politics and armed with a twin-propeller plane, Goldwater would not have to wait long for bigger and better opportunities. The Arizona GOP had turned to John

⁹⁴ Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater*, 82-90.

⁹⁵ Goldwater would refer to this "extra something" as "characteristic of life in Arizona and other parts of the Far West." For more on Goldwater's lifelong fascination with Arizona see Barry Goldwater, *The Coming Breakpoint* (New York: Macmillan, 1976), 6-8.

⁹⁶ Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater*, 83.

⁹⁷ Bell, *Mr. Conservative*, 59.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 81-82.

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Bell, *Mr. Conservative*, 64.

Howard Pyle to deliver a banner year for Arizona Republicans. Pyle accepted their nomination for Governor and called upon an up-and-coming Barry Goldwater to serve as campaign manager. Goldwater was young, popular and enthusiastic; he had political and private connections to match. Goldwater joined the campaign and immediately implemented an aggressive get-out-the-vote operation. He flew Pyle across the state to the furthest and most desolate cities, those rarely visited by candidates.¹⁰¹ Their efforts paid off. Pyle won the 1950 gubernatorial election. Arizona's native son had coveted that job, but it would not be his. Barry Goldwater would have to settle for the Senate.

Go Go Goldwater! The Senator from Arizona

At 42 years old, with little more than city councilman and campaign manager on his political resume, Barry Goldwater challenged incumbent Democrat and Senate Majority Leader, Ernest William McFarland, for his Senate seat. Few thought Goldwater would place, never mind win. The skepticism was so rampant that Goldwater himself had to joke. Speaking before the Arizona Alfalfa Club he told the audience, "Gentlemen, I am flattered that you thought first of my name. I have every confidence that with all of you behind me I could be another Alf Landon."¹⁰² Still, he lumbered on.

The campaign kicked off September 17th, 1952 in the Goldwater stronghold of Prescott. Goldwater's first speech in national politics held nothing back:

The Truman Fair Deal [was] seven years of expanding governmental bureaucracy, of increasing central authority, of economic tinkering, and of government created inflation; seven years of the greatest spending program; seven years which have brought us from a peak of power and respect in the world to a position where we must now get down on our knees and pay ransom

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 72-75.

¹⁰² Alfalfa Club speech, Personal, Senate Campaigns, Goldwater Papers, AHF. Alf Landon was the 1936 Republican Presidential candidate who lost to FDR by 11 million votes.

for the release of an American citizen. This is an appalling record of waste, inefficiency, dishonesty and failure, both at home and abroad.¹⁰³

Goldwater's fiery and unapologetic rhetoric hit a popular nerve. He had discovered a burgeoning conservative populism taking root among Arizona voters. Post-war demographic and economic changes encouraged Americans to rethink the once sacrosanct New Deal. Wariness of big government and federal bureaucracy coalesced with a Cold War anxiety that embraced a strong military. Libertarians, traditionalists and anti-communists – strange bedfellows – joined together. Goldwater was on the cusp of this movement. He and the conservative politicians that followed learned to exploit it.

Transformation within the GOP was neither immediate nor total. A fiercely loyal wing of progressive Republicans remained, as did the Midwestern moderates. Holding domain over much of the East Coast, this “Eastern Establishment” was rich, powerful and well connected.¹⁰⁴ The party schism was not new. As we have seen, these very forces organized presidential nominations for Wendell Willkie in 1940, Thomas Dewey in 1944 and 1948, and Dwight Eisenhower in 1952. Eastern interests had weakened substantially over that period time, but General Eisenhower was too strong and too viable a candidate to pass over. Goldwater referred to the ideological divide, if only in passing during a press interview, in June of 1952:

Goldwater: I am not a "Me TOO" Republican. I am not a "Fair Deal" Republican. I am a Republican opposed to the super-state, gigantic bureaucratic centralized authority, whether it is administered by Democrats or Republicans. I am a Republican who is opposed to appeasement.¹⁰⁵

In Goldwater's frank estimation: not all Republicans were created equal.

¹⁰³ First campaign speech, Prescott, Arizona, 17 September 1952, Personal, Senate Campaign Speeches, Goldwater Papers, AHF.

¹⁰⁴ Goldwater would later remark to the *Washington Star*, “Sometimes I think this country would be better off if we could just saw off the Eastern seaboard and let it float out to sea.” As quoted in Thomas Morgan, ed., *Goldwater Either/Or: A Self-Portrait Based Upon His Own Words* (Washington: Public Affairs press, 1964), 67.

¹⁰⁵ Radio transcript, June 1952, Personal, Senate Campaign Speeches, Goldwater Papers, AHF.

This was a rather bold statement at the time. Nobody, to be sure, doubted the existence of ideological divisions within the party, but political expediency had greatly mitigated them. For the better part of the past two decades the Republicans had been the minority party. Congressional Republicans had to put aside intra-party differences as best they could in an attempt to curtail the perceived excesses of Democratic administrations. In this respect, Goldwater's polarizing dichotomy was as much a stinging critique of Democrats as it was of "compliant" Republicans. Goldwater did not shy away from the looming ideological fight. Rather, he exacerbated inter-party tensions with his critique of liberal Me-Tooism.

This is something of a historical conundrum. Goldwater endorsed middle-of-the-road Eisenhower over Mr. Republican *and* Mr. Conservative, Robert Taft. Why? There is no one incontrovertible answer, but several intermingling realities. Driving it all, however, was Goldwater's desire to win. In a state with four-to-one voter registration local Republican candidates needed a boost from the Republican presidential candidate, the party's standard-bearer.¹⁰⁶ Taft was a popular candidate among Arizona Republicans and shared many of Goldwater's ideals, but he lacked cross-over appeal for moderates, independents and Democrats. Eisenhower, remembered Goldwater, was "a fresh political personality. He could win."¹⁰⁷

Goldwater was right. Republicans rode Eisenhower's "very stiff, nice coat-tail" to victory as Goldwater upset McFarland by three percent.¹⁰⁸ In one election cycle the GOP reclaimed the White House and both chambers of Congress. In the House, they picked up twenty-two seats to control floor proceedings with an eight member majority. The Senate race was a far closer contest. Republicans gained one seat. It was a modest victory, but enough to equalize the vote. With Vice President Nixon to break any deadlock, the Republicans had wrestled control of the Senate away from an ousted Ernest McFarland. Significantly, few Republican pickups won by more than three percentage points. Eisenhower had delivered what a Taft

¹⁰⁶ Historically, popular presidents encourage straight, down-the-party-line voting in local elections.

¹⁰⁷ Barry Goldwater, *Goldwater* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 96.

¹⁰⁸ The Reminiscences of Barry Goldwater, interview by Ed Edwin, The Eisenhower Administration Project, 15 June 1967, 2.

candidacy most likely could not: a sweep. Even if, as his biographer reports, “Taft, rather than Eisenhower, was the man he admired,” Goldwater recognized Eisenhower’s political utility.¹⁰⁹

If true, was Barry Goldwater, the conservative messiah and supposed ideologue, a political opportunist? Of course, but the term needs further qualification. “Opportunism” has a decidedly negative connotation. While Goldwater demonstrated his keen political wit and sagacity in unseating Senate Majority Leader, he - in his mind - never violated his own principles. Goldwater believed that Eisenhower was a true conservative. He publicly rallied around Ike’s call for “dynamic conservatism.”¹¹⁰ As Eisenhower once wrote to Goldwater, “One of the greatest political distortions in our history took place when ‘liberalism’ became identified in the public mind with an ever growing, ever more powerful central government. I hope we are making progress in dispelling that dangerous illusion.”¹¹¹ These were not the words of a progressive Republican. Goldwater reaffirmed this sentiment in a letter to Eisenhower the following year in 1957:

Our differences are not as great as some people would like to have you believe. In fact, I have found it necessary to disagree with you on so few occasions that they are difficult to recall, although on the budget I did, but I didn't keep it from you.¹¹²

On the eve of Goldwater’s 1964 presidential run, Eisenhower commissioned Bryce N. Harlow to document every case in which Goldwater spoke critically of his Administration. The report was revealing.

On examination of most of this material I conclude that Goldwater's only constant refrain respecting your Administration has been that you and he have seemingly agreed on virtually all matters of Republican principle but, Goldwater contends,

¹⁰⁹ Bell, *Mr. Conservative*, 75.

¹¹⁰ Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater*, 101.

¹¹¹ Eisenhower to BMG, 10 Jan 1956, Alpha Files, Dwight Eisenhower, Goldwater Papers, AHF.

¹¹² BMG to Eisenhower, 1 July 1957, Alpha Files, Dwight Eisenhower, Goldwater Papers, AHF.

you were driven off course by "liberal advisers," in which group he includes Sherman Adams and Arthur Fleming.¹¹³

From 1941 to 1960, Goldwater – in public and private – defended Eisenhower’s de facto conservatism while railing against the liberal interest who “manipulated” the political novice. In this light, Goldwater’s 1952 endorsement appears not as unprincipled politics, but as pragmatic policy making. Only a victory in the general election could advance the cause of conservatism and, distinctly, Republicanism.

The Making of a Candidate

Goldwater’s 1952 triumph was something of a hollow victory. He respected the office, but hated the job. He was not and would never be a great legislator. Unlike Taft, La Follette, Webster, Calhoun and Clay, his portrait would never hang in the Senate gallery. Goldwater had coveted the governorship, a position that would have kept him in the state he loved, but he soon found himself thousands of miles away in a humid Maryland swamp. There, however, he sought to make the best of the experience. Goldwater did not request appointments to the most prestigious and powerful committees, but those that dealt with his hobbies and interests: amateur radio, airplanes and military service. Senate Majority Leader Taft was not always so amenable.

Taft pulled Goldwater aside and “urged the Arizona freshman to take an assignment on the Labor Committee.”¹¹⁴ Goldwater demurred. “My people,” he said, referring to his Arizona employees, “aren’t organized because they never wanted to be. We have profit-sharing, liberal vacations, health and accident insurance, and all of that business.”¹¹⁵ It was a simple, but ineffective argument as Taft quickly dismissed his concerns. The Ohio Senator understood that “Republicans wanted a businessman on the labor committee and Goldwater filled the bill.”¹¹⁶ Goldwater accepted, yielding in part to the “growing conviction that he was cast in his patron’s

¹¹³ Memorandum from Bryce Harlow to DE, 10 Jan 1956, Alpha Files, Dwight Eisenhower, Goldwater Papers, AHF.

¹¹⁴ Bell, *Mr. Conservative*, 73-75.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹¹⁶ Bell, *Mr. Conservative*, 75.

national image.”¹¹⁷ It was, he later said, a “stroke of fortune.”¹¹⁸ The labor issue “propelled me into national attention.”¹¹⁹

The appointment provided Goldwater with the soapbox he needed to reform domestic policy. Halfway through his freshman term Goldwater spearheaded efforts to “remove the compulsory clauses of the Taft-Hartley Law that make compulsory unionism in this country,” by which he meant the union shop.¹²⁰ In doing so, Goldwater had revived the “right-to-work” struggle of early 1950’s Arizona. Compulsion, he believed, was anathema “to free people.” No worker should have to join a union to keep a job. He railed against union leaders, whom he believed to be corrupt, political and power hungry, but never the workers themselves. Speaking on the Senate Floor years after Senator Taft’s untimely death, Goldwater proudly invoked the Ohioan:

Not since Robert Taft stood in this chamber over a decade ago and, by sheer dint of his personal integrity and great courage, guided into law the Taft-Hartley act has this body the opportunity to forge a virtual "bill of rights" for the many millions of workingmen who are the backbone of this nation. If we do less at this time, than we did under the inspired leadership of the late Senator Taft, we shall have lost by default our greatest opportunity in a decade. If we do less than we did during those harried hours in 1947, we will have stamped with the seal of approval the very force which has heralded the beginning of the end in many other nations throughout history; that force being unchecked power in the hands of a vocal minority of politically ambitious men.¹²¹

Pundits would later recall the fervor with which Goldwater pursued the “right to work.”

The Sunday News recalled with all journalistic seriousness,

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 75.

¹¹⁸ Goldwater, *Goldwater*, 100.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 100.

¹²⁰ BMG to Eisenhower, 20 November 1957, Alpha Files: Dwight Eisenhower, Goldwater Papers, AHF.

¹²¹ BMG speech, “The Labor Bosses – America’s Third Party,” Washington D.C., 16 June 1958, Goldwater Personal Files, Media, 85th Congress speeches, statements, remarks, Goldwater Papers, AHF.

Not even the late Sen. Robert Taft - the original "Mr. Republican" - attacked union officials as vehemently as Goldwater has. And he is the only politician (or, for that matter, man) ever to challenge AFL-CIO Vice President Walter P. Reuther to personal combat.¹²²

They weren't exaggerating. Goldwater's labor efforts were by no means revolutionary, but they did reaffirm the Republican commitment to what he claimed was Taft's legacy. Moreover, he had openly disregarded the established axiom: freshman senators should be seen and not heard. Like Taft in 1938, Goldwater embraced his niche. He was the party's outspoken conservative. There were, of course, issues where he worked across the aisle.

Typically remembered as a staunch partisan, Goldwater fought alongside Robert Kennedy for the preservation of sacred Indian sites like Taos Pueblo.¹²³ Congressional leaders Democratic and Republican actively sought his insight and assistance on Indian affairs.¹²⁴ Goldwater's love of photography and Arizona history had, at a young age, led to a lasting relationship with Arizona's Indian population. Below the solid gold elephant cufflinks the man known as "Curly Head," "Barry Sundust," and "Barry One Salt" had four tattoos symbolizing his participation in traditional snake dances.¹²⁵

There was also a mutual camaraderie between two freshman senators, Barry Goldwater and John Kennedy. They represented a new generation of politicians, one that transcended party machines and appealed directly to the people. And on occasion the 44-year-old Goldwater and 36-year-old Kennedy found reasons to agree. The senators had differing visions for America's foreign policy, but they shared a strong anti-Communist, pro-liberty sentiment.

As a first year senator Goldwater challenged political conventions with an amendment highly critical of American policy toward French efforts in Indo-China. "Here today," he argued before 94 senators, "we are proposing to support a country, France, that has colonial

¹²² Newspaper clipping, "The New 'Mr. Republican': Liberalism Is a Four-Letter Word to Tough-Talking Barry Goldwater," *The Sunday News*, 31 July 1960, Personal Politics III, Goldwater Papers, AHF.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 162.

¹²⁴ Iverson, *Native Arizonan*, 161.

¹²⁵ Bell, *Mr. Conservative*, 46.

intentions; we are going against that wonderful second paragraph of our Declaration of Independence, which was probably the greatest collection of words that has ever been written by men.”¹²⁶ Goldwater promptly yielded the floor to the Senator from Massachusetts. “Mr. President,” Kennedy bellowed in a Bostonian twang most assuredly accompanied by an “ahhhh” or “ehhmmm,” “I am in complete agreement with the Senator from Arizona. I believe it is of vital importance that the United States place emphasis upon and use its prestige to advance the movement for independence for the people of the Associated States.”¹²⁷ Goldwater readily accepted Kennedy’s addendum, a slight change to the rhetoric, and called for a vote. Goldwater, Kennedy and 15 others voted in the yeas. Taft, Bridges (R-NH) and the rest of the Republican leadership voted against the proposal.¹²⁸ But as it was on the Phoenix City Council, this would not be the last time Barry Goldwater broke ranks to vote his conscience. Little did he know that this straight talk appeal would earn him the presidential nomination.

BaAuH₂O: The Race for the Presidency

On January 23rd, 1960, a handful of Goldwater supporters met at Chicago Union League Club to discuss the possibility of a presidential run. The powerful cadre of conservative activists feared Nixon’s political “Me Too-ism” and they were prepared to launch a concerted effort to put the Arizona Senator in the White House. Handsome, disarmingly charismatic and unabashedly conservative, Goldwater embodied the nascent movement. What survives from the meeting is illuminating:

Key members of this Committee months ago agreed upon the following strategy:
(A) Senator Goldwater would write a book called, "The Conscience of a Constitutional Conservative" (B) All members of the Committee will be asked to assist in getting the book widely distributed and favorably reviewed. (C) Stimulate

¹²⁶ Congressional Record clipping, 82nd Cong., 2d sess., 1 July 1953, 8011, Goldwater papers, AHF.

¹²⁷ Congressional Record clipping, 82nd Cong., 2d sess., 1 July 1953, 8015, Goldwater papers, AHF.

¹²⁸ Congressional Record clipping, 82nd Cong., 2d sess., 1 July 1953, 8020, Goldwater papers, AHF.

personal expressions by prominent people (D) It is our hope that these personal expressions [...] will manifest itself in the spontaneous organization of Goldwater Clubs (E) If the book results in this stimulation of popular sentiment and all goes according to plan, Senator Goldwater will then be willing to permit the public announcement of the formation of a National Committee to secure the Republican Presidential nomination.¹²⁹

The 127 page manifesto compiled from old speeches and ghostwritten by L. Brent Bozell Jr. sold over 3.5 million copies.¹³⁰ Conservative ranks swelled. Goldwater, then a dark horse candidate for the 1960 nomination, jumped to the top of the Republican 1964 short-list. *Conscience of a Conservative* had vitalized the budding conservative movement. Its idealism enraptured young activists like those who founded the pro-Goldwater Young Americans for Freedom on Buckley's Sharon, Connecticut estate.¹³¹ Just eight years after Goldwater's election and seven after Taft's death, the grassroots movement was well on its way toward national prominence.

John F. Kennedy's narrow victory over Richard Nixon in 1960 guaranteed another vicious power struggle within the Republican Party. Nixon was a sitting Vice President with strong ties to the liberal wing of the party who retained his California anti-Communist credentials. While there was little conservatives could do to derail his 1960 nomination, Nixon's electoral failure and subsequent retreat from public life created a power vacuum. With no natural successor or clear personality to unite the warring factions, the liberal Eastern Establishment put their hope behind New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller and Pennsylvania Governor William Scranton. They would face Goldwater, the new "Mr. Republican," in the 1964 Republican primaries.

¹²⁹ Abstract of minutes taken at Goldwater meeting, Union League Club, Chicago, IL., 23 January 1960, Writings #2, Personal, Writings Victor Publishing Company (folder 2 of 4), Goldwater Papers, AHF.

¹³⁰ Bozell was William F. Buckley's brother-in-law and close friend from his days at Yale. Buckley was a key figure in the consolidation of the conservative movement. *National Review*, *God and Man at Yale* and the *Firing Line* all gave the young movement the intellectual gravitas it needed.

¹³¹ Edward Cain, *They'd Rather Be Right: Youth and the Conservative Movement* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 254-255.

Here again hindsight presents something of a historical paradox. How exactly did Barry Goldwater inherit Taft's "Mr. Republican" moniker? Moderate-to-liberal forces dominated party politics throughout Goldwater's first two terms. He neither passed great legislation nor chaired important committees. On the rare occasions that he was in the Senate chamber, Goldwater fought passionately against Republican leadership. Senate Minority Whip Thomas Kuchel (R-CA) thought Goldwater to be a horrible Republican.¹³² In a way he was correct. On paper, Goldwater was the worst Republican in Congress.¹³³ In this light, Goldwater's claim to the Republican mantle was all the more remarkable. Amid contentious political infighting, the two term Senator from a small, solidly Democratic state assumed, without question or challenge, leadership of a large, but generally underrepresented Republican constituency. Goldwater had fundamentally redefined the popular understanding of Republicanism. This extreme ideological variance manifested itself in the turbulent primaries and general election of 1964.

In 1963, Jack Parr, host of the eponymous NBC program, asked Goldwater if he was "friendly" with political rival, Nelson Rockefeller. "Oh yes, I've known Nelson for many years," Goldwater chuckled, "We get along fine. I use his gasoline and he uses my taxes." This brief respite of levity on a daunting campaign circuit told viewers all they needed to know about the Republicans vying for the Presidency. The two men were cordial in their personal relationship, but bitter adversaries in public.¹³⁴ Both hailed from the Republican Party, but all astute observers recognized their significant differences. Conservative and liberal Republicans made sure of it.

James L Wick, Executive Publisher of the conservative publication *Human Events*, argued that "Rocky's strategy in 1964 will be the same as Dewey's in 1948: Talk like an honest-to-God Republican to get the nomination. Once nominated - beyond recall - *talk like a*

¹³² Morgan, *Goldwater Either/Or*, 70.

¹³³ Goldwater consistently voted against the 1960 Republican Platform drafted by Nixon and Rockefeller. Please see section IIX for further explanation.

¹³⁴ Rockefeller even went so far as to write an anonymous five thousand dollar donation for Goldwater's Arizona Historical Foundation. For more on their personal relationship please see: Nelson A. Rockefeller (NAR) to BMG, 16 February 1962, George L. Hinman Files, III 4 J.2 Box 20 Folder 117, The Papers of Nelson A. Rockefeller (PNAR), The Rockefeller Archives (RA).

Democrat.¹³⁵ Liberals shot back. Governor Scranton, a Rockefeller ally and second place finisher in the Republican primary, wrote Goldwater four days before his coronation at the 1964 Republican National Convention. In the letter he accused Goldwater of “too often reading Taft and Eisenhower and Lincoln out of the Republican Party.”¹³⁶ “Goldwaterism,” Scranton inveighed, “has come to stand for a whole crazy-quilt collection of absurd and dangerous positions.”¹³⁷ He continued:

These are not surface differences between you and the vast majority of Republicans. These are soul-deep differences over what the Republican Party stands for. Therefore, I am asking that you join me in a request to allow both of us to appear before the convention on Wednesday prior to the nominating speeches. Frankly, few people expect that you will accept my invitation. If that is true, the implication will be quite clear [...] you no longer have any regard for the opinions of uncommitted delegates or of the American public.¹³⁸

Goldwater declined. The damage had been done.

His conservative faction had won the inter-party struggle, but at what cost? The Republicans lost the Northeast but picked up the formerly Democratic South on the strength of Goldwater’s federalism. Goldwater, a supporter of the Arizona NAACP, had been the first retail employer in Arizona to hire black workers. White Southerners, however, looked past Goldwater’s constitutional arguments and tolerant past to states’ rights. Democrats took every possible step to exploit this new alliance and Goldwater only made their job easier. Throughout the ‘64 campaign Goldwater “avoided answering whether he would denounce the John Birch Society, stating that he would accept support from any group so long as they did not advocate the overthrow of the U.S. by force and violence.”¹³⁹ Goldwater’s ideological dogmatism clouded his vision. On principle he didn’t have to denounce extremist groups like John Birch or

¹³⁵ Magazine clipping, James L. Wick, “Will Kennedy-Gallup Hoax the GOP Into Nominating Rocky?” Nelson A. Rockefeller Personal Politics: George L. Hinman Files (GLHF), Goldwater, Barry III 4 J.2 Box 20 Folder 114, PNAR, RA.

¹³⁶ Letter from William W. Scranton to BMG, 12 July 1964, GLHF, Goldwater, Barry III 4 J.2 Box 20 Folder 117, PNAR, RA.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ BMG on Face the Nation w/ Molitor comments, 15 March 1964, NAR Gubernatorial Subseries 2, Campaign '64, III 15 22 Box 28 Folder 851, NARP, RA.

the KKK so long as the Democrats refused to denounce the Communists and Stalinists within their own ranks.¹⁴⁰ It was bad politics all-around.

On July 16th, 1964, in San Francisco convention hall, two disparate controversies came to a head. Standing before thousands of Republican supporters Goldwater delivered the most controversial presidential acceptance speech of the 20th century. “Anyone,” Goldwater bellowed, “who joins us in all sincerity, we welcome. Those who do not care for our cause, we don’t expect to enter our ranks in any case. And let our Republicanism, so focused and so dedicated, not be made fuzzy and futile by unthinking and stupid labels.” He paused. “I would remind you *that extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice.*” As the thunderous applause died, Goldwater continued, “And let me remind you also that *moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue.*”¹⁴¹

Supporters argued that the line penned by Harry Jaffa, a professor of political science at Claremont Men's College, and written into the address by libertarian-anarchist speechwriter Karl Hess, was an objective truth.¹⁴² Some called it distinctly Aristotelian, but progressive Republicans and politically astute Democrats thought otherwise. Liberal Republicans saw it as an overt attack on their wing of the party; Goldwater’s attempt to write them out of the GOP. Democrats sold it as a tacit endorsement of party extremists like the McCarthyites and the Klan. Either way Goldwater lost important momentum. The convention’s “take away line” had stalled the campaign before it even started.

¹⁴⁰ The John Birch Society is a conservative anti-Communist organization with Christian roots. Founded by Robert Welch, Jr. in the late 1950s the organization took controversial and often extreme stands on contemporary issues. The JBS feared Communist infiltration – as did many Americans – but Welch did much to discredit the organization nationally when he referred to Eisenhower as a potential Communist agent and traitor. This led to a falling-out between Welch and much of the conservative community. The following readings include primary sources as well as several poignant critiques: Benjamin R. Epstein and Arnold Forster, *The Radical Right: Report on the John Birch Society and Its Allies* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967); Allen Broyles, *The John Birch Society, Anatomy of a Protest* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964); and Robert Welch, *Blue Book of the John Birch Society* (Appleton, WI: Western Islands, 1961).

¹⁴¹ Harkins, *Official Report of the Proceedings of the Twenty-Eight Republican National Convention*, 418.

¹⁴² Stephen Shadegg, *What Happened to Goldwater? The Inside Story of the 1964 Republican Campaign* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 165-166.

The Election That Could Have Been

John Kennedy: So you really want this fucking job, huh?

*Barry Goldwater: I do, but I don't know why.*¹⁴³

The election of 1964 ended with a landslide victory for LBJ. Conservatism had faltered. Kennedy's successor won 61% of the popular vote and claimed all states save six, Arizona and the Solid South. It was not, however, the election that should have been.

On September 13th, 1963, Walter Cronkite announced that according to “recent surveys, one as late of today,” Barry Goldwater was the presidential “frontrunner.”¹⁴⁴ A widely distributed report entitled *Barry Goldwater: The Man and The Politician* confirmed the speculation. Goldwater himself added, “I think a conservative can beat a liberal, and a conservative can beat Kennedy.”¹⁴⁵ The report, however, had been issued November 11th, 1963, eleven days before the Kennedy assassination. Four decades later Barry Goldwater would relate his memories of the day to close friend and confidant, Bill Rentschler:

Verging on tears, Goldwater told me of his feelings of disbelief and grief when he learned of his good friend's assassination in Dallas. Some years later, Barry told me, ‘Bill, I knew the minute I heard the news Jack Kennedy was shot I had no chance to be president.’¹⁴⁶

Goldwater hated Johnson. The feeling was mutual. Johnson was not a statesmen but a political grappler. Despite an overwhelming advantage, Johnson resorted to cheap tactics and questionable imagery to brand Goldwater a crazed reactionary and a dangerous extremist.¹⁴⁷ Kennedy and Goldwater had other plans. As good friends and political enemies they had agreed to travel around the country, together, debating at each campaign stop. The young statesmen had hoped to reenact the great Lincoln-Douglass debates, each man making his case to the American people.

¹⁴³ As quoted in Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater*, 149.

¹⁴⁴ Goldwater/Cronkite interview, September 1963, NAR Gubernatorial Subseries 2, Campaign '64, III 15 Box 26 Folder 763, NARP, RA.

¹⁴⁵ Magazine clipping, “Barry Goldwater: The Man and The Politician,” 10 November 1963, NAR Gubernatorial Subseries 2, Campaign '64, III 15 22 Box 26 Folder 773, PNAR, RA.

¹⁴⁶ As quoted in Rentschler, *Tribute*, 148.

¹⁴⁷ See Lionel Lokos, *Hysteria 1964: The Fear Campaign Against Barry Goldwater* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1st edition, 1967) and White, *Making of the President – 1964*.

As Ted Kennedy recalled in 1986:

President Kennedy said of Barry Goldwater: 'I really like him – and if he's the Republican nominee and we're licked, at least it will be on the issues. At least the people will have a clear choice.' Today, two decades later, I can't help but reflect what a great debate it would have been ¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ Rentschler, *Tribute*, 78-79.

IIX. Usable Pasts for a Political Future: A Synthesis

Bob Taft, Isolationist

From 1938 to 1964 the Republican Party searched for a viable political identity. Robert Taft, in life and death, was an integral part of this search. As a senator he presided over a conservatism in transition from a pragmatic Midwestern ideology with progressive leanings to a Sunbelt based libertarianism.¹⁴⁹ His gains were modest, confined largely to Congressional chambers. The moral and intellectual leader of America's opposition party would never have the popular support of his successors. Taft died at the height of his legislative power, not able to capitalize on the Cold War to rally the conservative base.

Taft was no "hawk," but his strong anti-Communist sentiment led to equally strong stands on foreign policy. This is not, however, how succeeding generations have come to remember Taft. Why? Opponents used Taft's misappraisal of the Second World War as political fodder in each of his three presidential bids. "Isolationist" was a terribly effective charge. So was "reactionary." Writing in his diary in late 1951 Eisenhower noted that his political backers believed "that Taft's lack of appeal is the belief in the United States that he represents a reactionary type of thinking, and especially that he represents a reactionary wing of the Republican Party."¹⁵⁰ It would take twelve years and legions of devoted grassroots activists to turn "reactionary wing" into "conservative wing." But Eisenhower wasn't done with

¹⁴⁹ The Sunbelt is a geographic, demographic, political and economic creation. It is, on paper, a swath of the greater American South and Southwest from Florida to Southern California. It emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century as, arguably, the new center of American politics. Every elected president after Kennedy has hailed (politically) from the Sunbelt.

¹⁵⁰ Eisenhower diary entry, 29 October 1951, *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, vol. XII, ed. Louis Galambos (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 666-668.

Taft. The novice politician stepped up his criticism in 1952. *The New York Times* noted that “General Eisenhower, talking to a small hand-picked group of correspondents, referred to Senator Taft as an ‘isolationist.’”¹⁵¹

Nor did Taft help his cause. Campaign literature from 1948 featured a fighter plane-cum-dove with an olive branch highlighting text that read, “Peace for American Citizens: So that American boys may be saved from war.”¹⁵² This imagery appealed to a “cautious” constituency. Men like Philip J. Hickey wrote their local papers endorsing Taft for president because “Senator Taft is not an Isolationist or Internationalist but is an American realist. His foreign ideas are founded on honesty, honor, human treatment of the oppressed and above all demands respect for our Flag.”¹⁵³ If only history – and his fellow politicians – were so kind. Americans overlooked Taft’s Constitutional and decidedly intellectual arguments. Opponents from Willkie to Eisenhower did everything in their power to encourage the oversight.

Furthermore, Taft’s death came at an inopportune geopolitical time. He recognized, in theory, the dangers of Communism and the Soviet menace, but he did not live long enough to see that threat clearly manifest. 1953 predated not only the nuclear arms race but the escalation of the Cold War. Taft could not respond to the Warsaw Pact, Berlin Wall, and the Cuban Missile Crisis as he did World War II. Nor could he, like Hoover, exert an influence over party affairs and Republican policy decades after his time in office. The bespectacled senator would forever remain an isolationist sage.

This of course was not a usable past in 1964. At the height of the Cold War both Democrats and Republicans were hawks. If Johnson’s Democratic Administration was willing to fight in Indochina to bolster containment then conservative Republicans had no choice to but follow along. Their base, remember, was the product of anti-Communism. They could not, as Taft had done, portray themselves as the anti-interventionist opposition if they wanted to

¹⁵¹ Newspaper clipping, “Eisenhower Sees Victory Over Taft,” *The New York Times*, C12, Box 1285, Special File, Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1952, The Taft Papers (TP), The Library of Congress (LOC).

¹⁵² Pamphlet, “The leading Republican candidate: Bob Taft,” Box 235, 1948 Campaign Miscellany – Printer Material – Cartoons, TP, LOC.

¹⁵³ Philip J. Hickey, Letter to the *Arizona News*, Phoenix, 20 May 1952, Box 321, States file 1952 Campaign – Arizona, G-P, 1951-52, TP, LOC.

maintain their coalition. Still, one might contend, as Political Science Professor Jerry Hough does, that Goldwater would have benefited from Taft's "cautious" legacy when Johnson's image makers successfully portrayed Goldwater as an extremist warmonger.¹⁵⁴

"In your heart you know he's right," read Goldwater merchandise. "In your guts you know he's nuts," added the Democrats. It was fear mongering at its most effective. Johnson wanted voters to believe that if the Democrats lost, Goldwater would instigate a nuclear holocaust. Yet even if Goldwater was willing to yield on this point, why would he turn to a tenuous Taft legacy and not Eisenhower to moderate his image? The General had an impeccable resume on foreign affairs, was still active in national politics, and had demonstrated great restraint during the Suez Crisis. The one time Taft's foreign policy legacy had any potential political utility in 1964 there was a better positioned legacy in its way. Here again, there was nothing for Goldwater to gain from Taft.

Hierarchies of Power: Platform Making in the GOP

While Taft lacked Goldwater's charm, his bookish disposition earned him the respect of his peers in Congress. His Conservative Coalition stands as one of the great bipartisan efforts in the history of the Senate chamber.¹⁵⁵ The Republican party of the 1930s and 40s needed such strong leadership. As a minority party, power gravitated towards those individuals, like Taft, who could check the progressive gains of an immensely popular four term Democratic administration. Thus, Taftian conservatism was by no means a failure. It won pitched battles against a political juggernaut. Republican victories, however, often lacked flair and style. It was a bitter ideological fight with many of the earliest struggles waged in back rooms. Still, this gave Taft something Goldwater would have to wait decades for: intra-party power. Goldwater,

¹⁵⁴ Jerry F. Hough, *Changing Party Coalitions: The Mystery of the Red State-Blue State Alignment* (New York: Agathon Press, 2006), 162.

¹⁵⁵ Taft's anti New Deal Conservative Coalition recruited Southern Democrats as well as Northern and Midwestern conservatives. See James T. Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal: The Growth of the Conservative Coalition in Congress, 1933-1939* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981) and John W. Malsberger *From Obstruction to Moderation: The Transformation of Senate Conservatism 1938-1952* (Mississauga, Ontario: Associated University Press, 2000).

a habitual campaigner, chaired the Senate Campaign Committee, but never sat on the influential policy committees.¹⁵⁶ Ironically, the ideologue with national sway had little formal power within his own party.

A memo circulated among Rockefeller's inner-circle of campaign advisers spoke directly to this issue. "The results of the attached analysis," the report began, "are not merely revealing. They are astonishing. They show, simply but clearly, that far from being 'the new Mr. Republican', Barry Goldwater is THE MR. ANTI-REPUBLICAN."¹⁵⁷ It was a hefty but justifiable accusation. The analysis reviewed voting trends on "25 major issues specifically favored by the Republican National Platform of 1960."¹⁵⁸ Rockefeller's adviser contrasted Goldwater's vote with that of Everett M. Dirksen (R-NJ), Senate Republican Leader; Thomas H. Kuchel (R-CA), assistant Senate Republican Leader; Bourke Hickenlooper (R-IA), Chairman of the Senate Republican Policy Committee; Leverett Saltonstall (R-MA), Chairman of the Senate Republican Conference, and the "Republican Majority" vote. On every single issue from the United Nations to the Antarctic Treaty to Veterans Medical Research, Barry Goldwater voted "against" the Republican platform. The Republican Majority voted with the platform on all but one occasion (minimum wage) while Senator Kuchel voted "pro platform" in all twenty-five votes.¹⁵⁹ "If the Republican National Platform of 1960 means anything at all," the report's opening commentary concludes, "Barry Goldwater is not even a Republican. He is, if anything, simply Mr. No."¹⁶⁰ Goldwater submitted a minority platform, but it had greater symbolic than practical consequence. He would have to wait until 1964 to influence official Republican policy.

In contrast, the 1944 Republican Platform begins with an administrative aside: "Platform as submitted by the Resolutions Committee headed by Senator Robert A. Taft of

¹⁵⁶ As Goldwater recalled in the late 1960s, "During the years that I held that job, I made over 2,000 speeches and traveled over 200,000 miles in this country, in every state in the union. I made over 200 speeches in New York City, for example, over 200 speeches in Los Angeles and San Francisco." For the full interview please see The Reminiscences of Barry Goldwater, interview by Ed Edwin, The Eisenhower Administration Project, 15 June 1967, 21.

¹⁵⁷ Memorandum from Stephen Horn to George Hinman and Rod Perkins, "Barry Goldwater, the U.S. Senate -- And the 1960 Republican Platform," 13 April 1964, GLHF, Goldwater, Barry III 4 J.2 Box 20 Folder 117, PNAR, RA. [Original emphasis]

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

Ohio and unanimously adopted by the Convention. No minority report was submitted.”¹⁶¹ On the morning of Tuesday June 27th Senator Taft delivered his full “Report of Resolutions” to the attendees of the 23rd Republican National Convention.¹⁶² Taft, then a freshman Senator, had determined the official campaign platform of the entire Republican Party.¹⁶³ As befitting his personality, Taft quietly used his power and influence to keep conservative ideals relevant in the Republican Party. He would not soon relinquish this power.¹⁶⁴

Without beltway influence the new Mr. Conservative had to follow a fresh course. To that end Goldwater rallied a base of likeminded individuals. *The Sunday News* noted that “conservatives of all stripes rally around Goldwater. But he is more than another Taft. He has the personal magnetism Taft lacked, and this new ‘Mr. Republican’ attracts youth, anti-liberals dubbed ‘young fogies.’”¹⁶⁵ Walter Trohan of the *Chicago Tribune* agreed. “Goldwater,” he wrote, “is left wearing the mantle of the late Sen. Robert A. Taft of Ohio as the leader of the conservative wing of the party [but] the mantle wasn’t being worn loosely. The senator, who can and does fly jets, has stretched at its seams in the Space Age.” In short, this extreme insider/outsider dichotomy further devalued Taft’s importance to Goldwater during years of Republican infighting.

The Curious Conservatism of Robert Taft

Neither Taft’s foreign policy nor his position in intra-party struggles benefited Goldwater in any meaningful way. There is, however, an important issue left to be discussed: domestic affairs and social programs. Faced with the Great Society, an ambitious progressive program that rivaled FDR’s new Deal, one might expect Goldwater to embrace Taft’s principled stance against big government. That too never happened. Goldwater and Taft held dissimilar, often

¹⁶¹ Pamphlet, “National Political Campaign of 1944: Part I. Proceedings from the RNC,” Personal Politics V, Goldwater Papers, AHF.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ This was a strategic position that usually went to important and well positioned senators.

¹⁶⁴ In 1948 Taft fought Lodge, a “candidate of the liberal Republicans in the Senate” for chairmanship of the Senate Republican Committee. Taft won a 28 to 14 vote, leaving Lodge with “a number of enemies” in the Senate. For the full implications of this power struggle please see Kessel, *Coalition*, 74.

¹⁶⁵ Newspaper clipping, “The New ‘Mr. Republican’: Liberalism Is a Four-Letter Word to Tough-Talking Barry Goldwater,” Goldwater Papers, AHF.

conflicting, visions of the role of the federal government in civil society. In their short time together in the Senate, Goldwater admitted to stirring up a “little tempest” against Taft for certain big government tendencies.¹⁶⁶ Biographer Jack Bell quotes Goldwater in depth: “We accused Mr. Republican of me-tooism. We criticized Taft’s backing of a ‘little’ federal subsidy for housing, healthcare, and education.”¹⁶⁷ “Taft,” Goldwater continued, “was quite a liberal if you study his legislation and his debates,” but he was not one trying to “set up an octopus in Washington.”¹⁶⁸

Clearly Goldwater was far more libertarian in his thinking. He respected Taft’s principled stance, but disagreed with his fundamental assumptions.¹⁶⁹ Whereas Goldwater wanted to dismantle the state, Taft wanted to strengthen and streamline it as he thought it constitutionally permissible. This included support for programs widely accepted by the citizens and integrated in society. Bob Taft Jr., running for Congress in 1964, articulated this ideological discrepancy when describing Goldwater’s campaign trip to Ohio. “I indicated some things [Goldwater] ought to talk about,” Taft Jr. told the interviewer, “but mentioned specifically that he should *not* talk about Social Security and his doubts about the current system.”¹⁷⁰ Not surprisingly, “the one thing he *did* talk about was Social Security – even when I was with him on a campaign trail.”¹⁷¹ By and large, Ohio’s Midwestern conservatives were Taft Republicans. They didn’t share the Arizonan’s libertarian zeal. Goldwater’s worldview, however, was on the rise. It had an expanding constituency with a solid electoral base in the Sunbelt. Thus, there was no reason for Goldwater to invoke Taft’s nuanced Constitutionalism against LBJ’s Great Society when his trademark cowboy banter would do just fine. In short, not only did Goldwater

¹⁶⁶ Of all the biographers Jack Bell delves deepest into the Taft-Goldwater relationship. See Bell, *Mr. Conservative*, 76-79.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 77-78

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 78

¹⁶⁹ Charles P. Taft, Robert’s son, was “annoyed that people like Clarence Brown or others of that extremely conservative end, like Goldwater, claim that they are the successors of Robert A. Taft.” “This,” he said, “is damned nonsense. They would all of them have voted against both his education bill and his health bill, and certainly his attitude that the government had an obligation to provide a floor under those in poverty, below which you wouldn’t let their general standard go.” For more please see the interviews of the Columbia Oral History Research Office, specifically The Reminiscences of Charles P. Taft, interview by James T. Patterson, The Taft Project, 9 August 1968, 28.

¹⁷⁰ The Reminiscences of Robert Taft Jr., interview by Charles T. Morrissey, The Taft Project, 1982, 7.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

disagree with key aspects of Taft's Midwestern conservatism, but invoking it would not have significantly helped his cause among key constituencies.

A Resourceful Past

Asked why there was no official mention of Taft at the 1964 convention, conservative women's activist Phyllis Schlafly replied, "There was no reason to refer back to Taft. Every one of the delegates had read my book, *A Choice, Not an Echo*, which gives the Taft story. We had too many controversies to deal with [and] there was no reason to bring up Taft."¹⁷² *A Choice, Not an Echo* charted the growing influence of the "secret kingmakers" of the Eastern Establishment.¹⁷³ In it she accused Eisenhower supporters in 1952 for unfairly branding Taft as a "R.A.T" and a "thief" for trying to "steal" convention delegates.¹⁷⁴ Interestingly, it was Schlafly, not Goldwater, who most strongly invoked the Taft legacy in '64. Few, Schlafly included, recognized the irony. Goldwater was one such critic. In 1952 the Arizonan publicly denounced Taft's Arizona campaign supporters when they attempted to "railroad" through the Taft nomination. Goldwater was guilty of the very thing Schlafly criticizes Eisenhower and the Establishment for. Unbeknownst to Schlafly, her attempt to include the Taft legacy in 1964 showcased the political and transformative power of usable pasts. She fashioned her historical narrative for short-term political ends and it worked. Not even the conservative tradition is above politics.

¹⁷² Phyllis Schlafly, e-mail correspondence with the author, 3 February 2008.

¹⁷³ Phyllis Schlafly, *A Choice Not an Echo* (Alton, IL: Pere Marquette Press, 1964), 102.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 52-61.

IX. Looking Forward: A Movement in Crisis

Moderate maverick John McCain (R-AZ) defeated conservatives of all stripes for the 2008 Republican presidential nomination. With no new conservative standard-bearer, McCain won on the strength of his moderate and centrist appeal. His victory was a blow to an already weakened conservative cause. The new nominee is not the liberal Eastern Establishment incarnate, but a new obstacle to conservative ascendancy. Of all the people in the Senate it is Barry Goldwater's replacement that threatens to lead the party away from the '64 tradition. As it was in '52 and '60, a fight looms on the Republican horizon.

Conservatism, although better situated now than in 1964, lacks viable leadership. Conservative senators, governors, and congressmen carry on the ideological fight, but they command only a marginal influence in national affairs. Equally ominous for conservatives, there few domestic or foreign policy issues to sustain the tripartite alliance of libertarians, anti-Communists, and traditionalists fashioned during the 1950s.

The fall of the Soviet Union in 1989 was both the triumph and the end of the great conservative alliance.¹⁷⁵ The loss of a common unifying enemy prompted conservative Republicans to find new issues and policies to sustain their base. The first proactive attempt came in 1994 with Speaker Newt Gingrich's Contract with America. The plan energized the base, prompted electoral success and pushed incumbent Democrats further to the Right. It was a legislative triumph with popular and wide reaching repercussions. In 2000 they supported "Compassionate Conservative" George W. Bush against John McCain. Bush won.

¹⁷⁵ Francis Fukuyama, a conservative Hegelian scholar and professor of political science, went so far as to proclaim it the "end of history." Others were a bit more cynical. See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Avon Books, 1992).

Conservatives, like the Eastern Establishment in 1960 and 1963, had not yet lost their influence.

The terrorist attacks of September 11th led to a major Republican refocusing along issues of foreign policy and national defense. Traditionalists, moderates, libertarians and the Religious Right found a new enemy in “Islamofascism” to rally against. A mismanaged war, however, encouraged dissent among conservative ranks. Movement figures like Pat Buchanan and Congressman Ron Paul (R-TX) argued against interventionism. The Republican Party, they argued, had long been the party of cautious and reserved foreign policy. It is not an unfounded claim. Buchanan’s magazine, *The American Conservative*, purports to “turn a critical eye on those who want to cast aside every relevant American foreign policy tradition – from Robert Taft-style isolationism to prudent Dwight Eisenhower-style internationalism.”¹⁷⁶ Americans, they add, voted for Richard Nixon, a Quaker, to end a war, not start one.¹⁷⁷

For Buchanan and Paul to make inroads against liberal “neoconservative” foreign policy they had to first ground their arguments in the Republican tradition. It took half a century, but the “isolationist” revival imbibed the Taft legacy with new relevance and meaning. Both men have espoused their admiration for Taft, but this is no revival of Taft Republicanism. In selectively invoking his legacy for political ends they’ve created a new foundational narrative, a usable past that skips over Goldwater and hawkish Republicans to the more moderating voices of Taft, Vandenberg and Eisenhower. It’s a gusty move, but will it pay off for this revitalized conservative constituency?

In the hectic months before the Iowa caucus Congressman Paul spoke at a meeting of the newly formed Robert A. Taft Club. There were over 300 people in attendance. “The club,” wrote *Washington Times* reporter Rob Gutierrez, “has only 35 members.”¹⁷⁸ While the movement has an audience, it is not going to revolutionize the GOP; Paul won just 21 of the

¹⁷⁶ Publisher’s Statement/About Us. *The American Conservative*. <http://www.amconmag.com/aboutus.html> (accessed 3 March 2008). Note the use of “isolationist.”

¹⁷⁷ In the words of Nixon apologist, Ben Stein, “[Nixon] was a peacemaker. He was a lying, conniving, covering up peacemaker. He was not a lying, conniving drug addict like JFK, a lying, conniving war starter like LBJ, a lying, conniving seducer like Clinton -- a lying, conniving peacemaker.” Ben Stein, “Special Report: Deep Throat and Genocide,” *The American Spectator*, June 2005.

¹⁷⁸ Rob Gutierrez, “GOP Hopeful Paul Says Youth ‘Responding to Message,’” *The Washington Times*, 12 October 2007.

2057 total Republican primary delegates. Rather, this counter-movement threatens the unity of a vote-rich conservative base. Weakened, heavily factionalized and without a coherent plan, a sharp schism among non-interventionists and neoconservatives, young libertarians and the Religious Right, or rich economic conservatives and MARs would set the movement back decades.¹⁷⁹

There's no way to predict the outcome. External forces and unexplored causal mechanisms could resolve the building tension in one of many ways. Regardless, observers may rest assured that in the coming months and years political leaders will adapt usable histories and legacies to aid their cause. We know this because over half a century later the Republican Party, a *conservative* party, is struggling with the same contentious issues of legacy and narrative. And so long as there is political utility in controlling the conservative moniker pundits and politicians will first struggle with their past to define a vision for the future. In this respect, the Taft-Goldwater transition is as much a case study in the processes of history as it is an engaging narrative unto itself.

¹⁷⁹ MAR, or Middle American Radicals, is a term coined by sociologist Donald I. Warren that popularly refers to the disenfranchised white voters of Pat Buchanan and Ross Perot's base. For greater detail please see Samuel Francis, *Beautiful Losers: Essays on the Failure of American Conservatism* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1993), 60-78.

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