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The Rise and Fall of Modern American Conservatism

A Short History

DAVID FARBER



PRINCETON

THE
Rise and Fall
OF
MODERN AMERICAN
CONSERVATISM



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WHEN I WAS FIFTEEN YEARS OLD, I went door to door canvassing for George McGovern. The regular Democratic precinct captain had decided to sit out the presidential election. A good many of my Chicago neighbors took pity on me and tried to explain to me why I was an idiot. I've been thinking about what they told me ever since. So, first of all, thanks to the good people of Chicago who were willing to talk politics with an unformed youth; this book provides a few of the snappy answers I wished I had back in the day.

A more immediate thanks to friends and colleagues around the world with whom I have discussed American conservatism. I am particularly grateful to Professor Jun Furuya, director of the Center for Pacific and American Studies at the University of Tokyo, who invited me several times to Japan where I was able to try out aspects of this book before a very generous crew of international scholars. I met Desmond King at one of Professor Furuya's Tokyo seminars, and between beers he allowed that I might not be completely wrong about American conservatism. My thanks for his continued and generous support.

Like political conservatives (and liberals), historians have an institutional culture that allows them to work out their projects in a collegial, yet cutthroat, fashion. I gave talks on the subject of this book at many venues; particular thanks for allowing me to hold forth to the Modern America Workshop at Princeton University, the Huntington Library and Roy Ritchie, the Université Lyon II, IEP de Lyon, and Vincent Michelot, the Teaching American History federal grant program, the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association, the American Historical Association, the Political History Conference (with special thanks to the dean of conservative historians, Don Critchlow), and the Organization of American Historians. For help in getting this project off the ground and supporting me in the process I am grateful to Bruce Schulman and Rick Perlstein. Fulbright scholar and friend Masaru Nishikawa made critical contributions to the success of this project; I am in his debt. Without Brigitta van Rheinberg, editor-in-chief at Princeton University Press, this book would not have existed; she inspired the project and guided it over the years. She is an extraordinary reader and critic, and her support and encouragement were essential to my work. Thanks, as well, to editor Clara Platter and the entire editorial and production team at Princeton University Press.

Several colleagues read all or part of the manuscript. Will Hitchcock, who can write like an avenging angel, gave generously of his time and tried to save me from fuzzy thinking. Todd Shepard shared his extraordinary knowledge of modern politics and helped me think through the narrative as we hung out at Bottle Beach and Had Khom. Michelle Nickerson, whose own work on conservatism inspired me, sharpened my analysis and kept readers from seeing a few of my blind spots. Jeff Rochelle, whose work on cowboy conservatives influenced this work, signed off on key sections. I am indebted to my dear friend Richard Immerman for his careful reading of the manuscript. He is a man of extraordinary energy and intellectual depth. The publisher arranged for a couple of expert anonymous reviewers. One gave me a genial kick in the pants and the other provided a brilliant and detailed critique; I am fairly sure I know who they are, but the rules of the game require that I simply say: well played and thank you. Thanks, too, to my many students who have heard versions of this material in diverse forms; based on your reactions, I tried to keep the boring parts to a minimum.

Beth Bailey once again read the daily word count, and then each draft of each chapter, and then each draft of the entire manuscript. Here we sit, writing away, thirty feet apart in a refurbished shoe factory overlooking Pearl Street, which is an elegant name for a messed-up alley. How wonderful.

predictable.

THE
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IN EARLY 1936, Robert A. Taft, a president's son and almost always the smartest person in any room, thought that he was a liberal. Then he heard President Franklin Roosevelt explain to the American people that he and his administration were redefining liberalism. In 1776, the president said, liberals had "sought freedom from the tyranny of a political autocracy." Now, Roosevelt continued, liberals demanded not freedom from political tyranny but "against economic tyranny"—and in this fight, "the American citizen could appeal only to the organized power of government."¹

"The President has sought to appropriate to the New Deal," Taft fumed, "all the ideals of liberalism, and to brand his opponents as Tories, and tools of entrenched greed."² Taft clung for a brief period to the L-word, but by 1938, running for the Senate, he used, for the first time, another word to describe his politics: *conservative*. (The term had been used episodically before, but never regularly by American politicians of note.) Taft, modern conservatism's first major figure, understood that the New Deal had forced a new divide in American politics, one that pushed the political world to ponder two new disciplinary political orders, master categories that would for decades transcend party or region. In the late 1930s, politicians and their constituents began to sort themselves out as liberals or conservatives. What follows is a short history of political conservatives' evolving and contingent disciplinary order and the constituencies who embraced it, from the time of Robert Taft through the presidency of George W. Bush.

My central argument is that modern American conservatism is a disciplinary order generated by hostility to market restraints and fueled by religious faith, devotion to social order, and an individualized conception of political liberty. New Deal liberalism, in its most enduring form, insisted that the state needed to discipline the capitalist system in order to ensure that working people (broadly defined) and their families could maintain their dignity and their buying power. It was, Franklin Roosevelt memorably said, the "hazards and vicissitudes" of the market economy from which the New Deal would protect the American people.³ Political conservatives responded to liberal claims by arguing that it was not the market that needed disciplining but individuals.

In the 1930s and 1940s, conservatives looked for that discipline primarily in the workings of capitalism, which they argued rewarded the worthy and punished the unworthy. They believed that government protection robbed individuals of their self-respect and autonomy. They also saw a moral hazard in liberal schemes to protect individuals from the discipline of the market: if irresponsible behavior carried no risk, too many people would behave irresponsibly. Many of these economically minded disciplinarians, including Taft, knew very well that a market-based economic system was a harsh master. Thus they argued that a certain kind of religious faith, a respect for enduring and time-tested social hierarchies, and a trust in cultural orthodoxy were necessary to enable individuals—well as their families, communities, and the nation—to stay strong and to maintain a salutary moral stability in the face of the economic challenges and cultural risks a market economy would surely bring. These early conservatives did not clearly articulate all aspects of this emergent political field, nor did they all agree on the relationship between economic success, religious faith, and respect for long-standing social forms. Others would spell out those connections in the following decades, though not without serious disagreements and always in response to changing circumstances, their own particular talents, political opportunities, and the shifting political stands of their liberal opponents.

Over time, post-New Deal liberals insisted that market relations—as well as other major institutional structures in American life—needed further disciplining to promote not only economic

equity but social and political equality as well. In embracing policies and positions that challenge traditional racial and gender inequalities, they also argued that cultural heterodoxy and social innovation were beneficial to the United States. Conservatives continued to insist that economic liberty was the bedrock on which American prosperity, individual rights, and morality were based. Most conservatives, however, in claiming to protect economic liberty for individuals, proved willing to sacrifice civil liberties and to restrain rights-claims in order to maintain religious, moral, and social order. As William Buckley wrote, the liberal is “bewitched ... with the value of [social] innovation” whereas a conservative “urges conformity [to] ‘institutions’ of society.”⁴ Without such conformity, Buckley and many other conservatives believed, society becomes vulnerable to the undisciplined forces of consumer desire, modernist (atheistic) cultural relativism, and foreign threats to the American way of life. From the 1930s forward, liberals and conservatives reframed issues of equality and liberty within their respective disciplinary orders. Their efforts were most intense as they struggled with the challenges of civil rights, national security, and national identity.

In making this argument, I emphasize both the contingent nature of change and the role of individuals. I also feature the major role conservatives have played in politicizing civil society on behalf of their cause. Characteristically working outside the political party system, conservatives have been dedicated to forging new institutions capable of spreading their political message, organizing activists, and mobilizing voters. Liberals have worked a similar democratic vein but in part because conservatives for so long—even into contemporary times—have believed themselves to be shut out of mainstream institutions such as the mass media and universities, they have been particularly invested and inventive in creating a politically potent counterpublic.

I am also emphasizing, in a fashion rare among American historians, the centrality of the search for order in American politics. While an older generation of American historians used this rubric to explore the age of industrialization and progressivism, the notion that the desire for order and security have played a vital role in American political life, generally, has fallen out of fashion, at least among American historians. Instead, American historians have framed the national narrative more specifically around the struggle for equality. I agree that the struggle for equality is central to American history. But to understand the power and pull of political conservatism, I argue, a counternarrative built on many Americans’—liberals and moderates, as well as conservatives—desire for order and stability needs to be constructed, as well. As I will relate, the struggle for equality and economic equity often stands in direct counterpoint to conservative or conservative-leaning Americans’ political demand for order and stability. Americans’ belief, half-hearted and conflicted as it often is, in equality; their ambivalent faith in individual economic liberty; and their desire for order, security, and stability create an inexorable political tension. The conservative politicians, social activists, and intellectuals I write about in this book have struggled to master those sometimes contradictory desires. These heroes of the conservative order have done their best to convince Americans that conservatism provides the American people with a just and tested way to keep their families safe, their dreams alive, and their nation strong.

Each of the following six chapters is anchored by a well-known conservative actor: Robert Taft, William Buckley, Barry Goldwater, Phyllis Schlafly, Ronald Reagan, and George W. Bush. I use each figure to emphasize a particular theme in the development of modern conservatism and to explain how and why conservatives crafted a disciplinary order that captured a segment of the American political imagination by claiming moral superiority, critiquing economic egalitarianism, relishing bellicosity, and embracing cultural nationalism.

This work differs from other recent interpretations of modern political conservatism because I link

economic conservatives and social conservatives into the larger disciplinary political order I have sketched above. Rather than arguing that a majority of conservatives act in irrational opposition to their own best economic interest, or defining conservatism as a highly intellectual enterprise led by a small band of erudite figures, I am offering another explanation built on a larger, historical, and contingent framework. In so doing, I have the advantage of learning from the many dissertations and monographs produced in the past few years that effectively connect conservative grassroots political organizing to national political developments.

In [chapter 1](#), I present the estimable Senator Robert A. Taft, whose historical legacy has only grown since his death in 1953. While giving Taft his due as a progenitor of modern conservatism, this chapter also traces the formation of modern liberalism. My claim throughout the book is that conservatives define themselves in relationship to liberalism. Taft set the conservative political agenda for a generation and anchored labor-intensive industries, free market enthusiasts, and many small-business owners to the conservative cause. Taft feared that liberals did not understand what made America great. “Before our system can claim success,” he wrote, “it must not only create a people with a higher standard of living, but a people with a higher standard of character—character that must include religious faith, morality, educated intelligence, self-restraint, and an ingrained demand for justice and unselfishness.”⁵ Taft, a man before his time, set conservatism on its virtuous claiming course.

In [chapter 2](#), I introduce the wit and wisdom of William Buckley. Through Buckley I explore the creation of a conservative counter-public in the 1950s. Buckley created that counterpublic by linking intellectually oriented, devoutly religious Americans to the conservative political cause. He explicitly targeted liberals for opprobrium and articulated an overarching liberal-conservative divide in American political culture. In politics, individuals matter, and Buckley personified a new sort of American conservative: he was witty, free of conspiratorial zealotry, and always ready to joust with any liberal brave enough to engage him intellectually. Buckley made political conservatism fun, dashing, and intellectually respectable, even as he built the movement’s political culture around ideas of religious faith and deference to capitalist success and white men.

[Chapter 3](#) brings us to Senator Barry Goldwater and his brand of cowboy conservatism. Here, I use Goldwater’s road to the 1964 Republican presidential nomination to explain how the senator taught millions of Americans—white southern voters, in particular—how and why they were conservative Republicans. Further, I examine how the Goldwater campaign produced movement conservatives who would become so central to the conservative takeover of the Republican Party and the institutionalization of conservatism in American public life. The Goldwater network, built from a multitude of single-issue organizations, nonpartisan conservative groups, and populist grassroots activists, became the “other” sixties movement.

In [chapter 4](#), I explain how Phyllis Schlafly expanded the conservative movement by building new activist cadres and linking religious traditionalists both to the conservative cause and to the Republican Party. Building on a loose network of grassroots conservative women who had been active in the anticommunist cause, the antiprogressive education movement, and the National Federation of Republican Women, Schlafly organized conservatives’ attack on feminism, in general, and the Equal Rights Amendment, in particular. Put bluntly, Schlafly gave new life to a flagging conservative movement in the early 1970s by energizing a new base of activists: women who disapproved of the feminist agenda. These antifeminist women activists emboldened politicians who were worried about a “gender gap” to make “traditional values” (understood as keeping the “traditional” family safe from feminism and homosexuality) a key component of the conservative movement of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

[Chapter 5](#) focuses on the singular contributions of Ronald Reagan to modern American

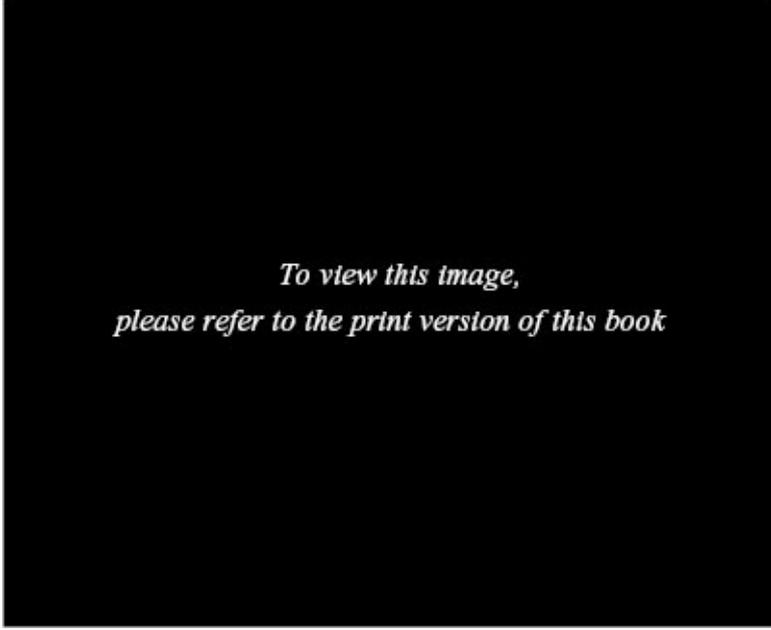
conservatism. Reagan made conservatism popular and conservatives nationally electable. In the face of sixties leftist activists and then the hard times of the late 1970s, Reagan convincingly portrayed conservatism as a forward-looking, optimistic faith in the American way of life (as he defined it). His sunny, good-natured faith infuriated liberals who believed Reagan to be either a mean-spirited cynic or a dunderheaded fool who did not know what he did not know. But Americans made him the first two-term president since Eisenhower. By 1988, at the end of his second term, for the first time since such polling data existed, more Americans identified themselves as conservatives than as liberals.

Chapter 6, the story of George W. Bush, marks the end of the conservative ascendancy. Bush took power backed by a strong and diverse conservative political movement. As political candidate and then president, George Bush, the Christian Texas businessman who was saved from his Ivy League “sixties lifestyle” when he found his personal savior, embodied the contradictions and the vibrancy of modern political conservatives. His administration, in its zealous war on “evildoers,” its tax cuts for the wealthy, its embrace of a “culture of life,” and its disregard for ecological stewardship, offered Americans a vision in which success was measured by dominion on earth and heavenly salvation. Bush’s muscular use of state power marked the apogee of conservatism as practical politics but its failure, in his hands, as a governing ideology.

The rise and fall of modern American conservatism does not run along a straight line. Robert Taft rejected free trade and the aggressive use of American military power abroad; later conservatives insisted on the centrality of free trade to their cause and the necessity of using American might to make the world more secure and more just. William Buckley worried that some economic conservatives failed to pay obeisance to the Christian verities, whereas Barry Goldwater was uncomfortable mixing religion and politics. Ronald Reagan insisted that the federal government needed to be systemically dismantled but did not seem to have the will or, finally, the inclination, to actually take on the power of the state. A dozen and more years later, Phyllis Schlafly and other prominent conservatives were sometimes mortified by President George Bush’s vigorous use of state power both at home and abroad. And in the aftermath of the economic meltdown of 2008 and the presidential victory of Barack Obama, some conservatives even seemed uncertain about the absolutist faith in the free market.

Still, over the course of some seventy-five years, conservatives have adhered to a consistent belief in the need for a disciplined, well-ordered society. While liberals have insisted on the primacy of equality in the pursuit of justice and continue to argue that economic liberty and the free market must be restrained in order to assure that equality, conservatives have argued that a disciplined, well-ordered society can and must be built on the proven economic power of the free market, a firm, resolved patriotism, traditional religious faith, and long-standing cultural precepts. To repeat, in stark terms, what I have argued above: liberals believe in disciplining the free market; conservatives believe in disciplining the individual. American conservatives have done their best to win elections and strengthen American society by offering the American people that core political vision. In the historical account that follows, I trace the rise and fall of that conservative political order.

ROBERT TAFT

The Gray Men of Modern Conservatism and the Rights of Property

*To view this image,
please refer to the print version of this book*

THE EARLY YEARS OF MODERN AMERICAN CONSERVATISM are often portrayed, at least by sympathizers and advocates, as a heroic and idiosyncratic tale of marginal intellectuals and writers hammering against an iron cage of liberal folly that had captured the American mass mind. In the face of New Deal certitudes about the moral necessity of government planning led by hordes of government bureaucrats, a cast of iconoclasts, we are told, began a guerrilla war of ideas that would eventually break the bars of conventional wisdom and bend the social order to their truths: for example, Friedrich von Hayek, the solitary Austrian émigré economist, in *The Road to Serfdom* taught those with the good sense to listen that collectivism, however it is garbed, is an attack against both the human spirit and economic growth; and Ayn Rand, the best-selling Russian émigré novelist, romanced the young and the idealistic with stories of supremely talented individualists who would rather destroy society than participate in its pathetic, government-sponsored attempts to give succor to the downtrodden, the ineffectual, and the weak.

Godfrey Hodgson, the marvelous British chronicler of modern America, goes so far in his witty history of conservatism as to portray Albert Jay Nock, a cranky, misanthropic intellectual who dismissed the masses as an uneducable bunch of cretins, as a cornerstone of the rising conservative countermovement that would eventually conquer the American polity through the force of its ideas. Intellectual history, especially for those of us who still find stimulation in books and ideas, is never unwelcome. But as the scholar Clinton Rossiter wrote in a 1953 review of Russell Kirk's *The Conservative Mind*, "The historian of ideas has a deep obligation not to put too much faith in the power of ideas."¹ Intellectual history is not the most direct approach to explaining the power of conservatism in America.

Not surprisingly, conservative politics and policies in the 1930s and 1940s were championed by

conservative politicians who were supported by conservative constituencies. Men of good fortune—rich, privileged, and often enough talented and accomplished—dominated the conservative cause. The age of Roosevelt ended. The political Hector of this corps at the dawn of the post-New Deal era was Senator Robert Alphonso Taft, son of President and Supreme Court Justice William Howard Taft and nephew of the Cincinnati business tycoon Charles P. Taft. During the Great Depression and World War II, Taft castigated the New Deal for its big-government, welfare-state, market-regulating way. Economic liberty, he insisted, was Americans' constitutional birthright. Strong men, not a strong state, made America great.

At first, the people, by and large, did not listen. They voted again and again for Franklin Roosevelt, who promised to use the power of government to safeguard them from the vicissitudes of the capitalist system and to fight against America's enemies abroad. But after the war, with Americans anxious to rebuild their lives after years of economic travail and national sacrifice, Taft found his moment in the political sun. As labor unions launched thousands of disruptive strikes that embroiled the American people in class conflict, Taft called for social order and unity. He insisted that the free enterprise system and a self-disciplined, moral citizenry provided the United States with the tools needed to achieve prosperity, maintain liberty, assure domestic tranquillity, and pursue national greatness. Taft fought successfully against a slew of state-sponsored and collectivist solutions to Americans' political and economic challenges. In the years right after World War II, he led the effort to stop the expansion of the New Deal state and to forge a forthrightly conservative, antiliberal Republican Party.

Senator Taft was no eccentric (though he was his own man) and no intellectual (though he was very smart). He was a cold, confident man of tested views who had marched through the institutions of the American establishment. Like the Tafts before him, he was educated at Yale, where he had been tapped for Skull and Bones (grandfather Alphonso Taft had helped establish the secret society for Yale's favorite sons in 1832). Unlike some who came to Yale as legacies of prior Yale men, Robert Taft was an extraordinarily diligent and capable student. He graduated first in his class and entered Harvard Law School on his merits; in his final year there he was named president of the *Harvard Law Review* editorial board. While such an establishment path, even when bolstered by birth to one of America's preeminently successful families, is no guarantee that an individual will emerge as a conservative defender of the system that has produced such a path and such a family, it does tilt the game board in that direction.

Taft had a rigorous mind that generally ran in straight lines and in earnest directions. At seventeen, stymied by a lack of hand-eye coordination but aware that athletics were an expected part of a man's mien, he had tried to teach himself the art of hitting a baseball by crafting his own instruction manual: "Take back with right hand. Right hand loose, left gripped. Avoid pendulum swing. Left elbow down. Right elbow down. Left wrist straight. Grip left hand as baseball is hit. Follow thru. Pivot body. Eye on ball."² Here was a youthful intellect marvelously if joylessly concentrated on the task at hand. While Taft's rigor, in this case, produced poor results, his logical and disciplined approach to life's problems stayed remarkably constant throughout his life.

His father assured that he stayed that way. When Taft was offered a position as secretary to Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, President Taft interceded, writing that such rarified work was not the thing for a young man who had already spent too many years in the academic sin of mulling over abstractions and general principles. The time had come, the president wrote, to go back to Cincinnati, join a law firm, and get on with "the actual drudgery of the practice and procedure of Ohio."³ Taft did as his father commanded. With skill and discipline, surrounded by men of accomplishment and assisted by his family name, he became a powerful man in his own right.

Senator Taft and the like-minded men in gray business suits who stood at the center of America

conservatism in the immediate post–World War II years did not need an Austrian to tell them that capitalism was good and communistic state economic planning was bad. Nor did they need a novelist to explain to them that businessmen, real estate developers, large landholders, professional men, and inventive manufacturers were the engine of the good life in a free society and therefore had earned their status and their wealth. They never thought differently, and millions of Americans agreed with them. Robert Taft conservatives were dedicated to the ordered preserve of the institutions and traditions that, they believed, made America rich, powerful, and morally sound. As much as they trusted in the corporations, limited partnerships, and sole proprietorships that structured the economic order, so too did they believe in the fraternal and spiritual organizations that gave stable form to American community life. They were united by their fight against FDR’s New Deal and Truman’s Fair Deal, and less passionately and consistently by their fear of the moderate, go-along-to-get-along Republicanism championed by Dwight D. Eisenhower. Political conservatives in the 1940s and early 1950s were dedicated to preserving individual economic liberty. For money and for leadership, American conservatism counted on such men in the immediate postwar years. It still does. Men (and women) of good fortune are one of the bases on which American conservatism stands.

While twenty-first-century chroniclers of modern conservatism have downplayed the role of the propertied and the privileged in their accounts, preferring to portray colorful intellectual antecedents or—when they discuss its latest iterations—to focus on the voting record of white church-goers and NASCAR fans, scholars with an eye for the long view of American conservatism have not. The grand daddy of historical revisionism, Charles A. Beard, argued in the first years of the twentieth century that the American Constitution was a conservative counterattack on the populist Articles of Confederation. According to Beard, “... the solid conservative interests of the country were weary of talk about the ‘rights of the people’ and bent upon establishing firm guarantees for the rights of property.”⁴ Men of property, capital, and entrepreneurial energy, he argues, crafted the constitution to create a government that protected wealth against the shifting desires of backwoodsmen, redneck farmers, and other have-nots who clamored for economic redistribution, debt relief, and easy money. The United States government, Beard tells us (and a chorus of “original intent”—espousing conservative constitutional law scholars echo) was born conservative.

Beard’s Founding conservatives, with Alexander Hamilton standing front and center, established centralized federal power to protect and promote the good fortunes of America’s economic elite. Because they overwhelmingly assumed that the national government would be directed by men of wealth and high status, essentially unchallenged by the respectful and deferential masses, they were confident that national governmental power would not be used to restrict economic elites but rather to promote economic development led by the nation’s most capable citizens.

Several generations of historians have taken issue with the elegant simplicity of Beard’s economic interpretation of the Constitution as a power grab by the self-interested wealthy merchant elite, noting that the pro-Constitution forces were composed of disparate elements motivated by myriad concerns. Still, his Progressive Era critique of America’s foundational story has been defended, even as it has been greatly refined. A twenty-first-century Beardian, the historian Robin Einhorn, amplifies even as she revises Beard’s economic interpretation, giving it a solidly southern twist. In her account of America’s conservative, anti-statist tradition, *American Taxation, American Slavery* (2006), she argues that Americans in the years between the War of Independence and the Civil War, rather than being innate Lockeians, raised on a frontier altar of liberty “where virtually everyone has the mentality of an independent entrepreneur” (as the Harvard political scientists Louis Hartz wrote in his 1954 Cold War classic, *The Liberal Tradition in America*), were a people of many minds on questions relating to social provision, government services, and the protection of property. But, she writes, America’s southern slaveholders were not. It is an awkward statement to make, given our

understanding of slavery as a moral abomination, but the nation's most vocal proponents of slavery were among the leading conservatives of the nineteenth century.

The large-slaveholding class worked single-mindedly to keep government power and majority rule weak in order to assure that no powerful federal authority capable of exercising a national, democratic will could arise and destroy slavery, whether through outright abolition or through the indirect policy of placing burdensome taxes on slave "property." These slaveholders were well aware that, state by state, northerners had ended slavery in their region during the two decades after the Revolutionary War. And slaveholders did have a great deal to protect: in 1860 the capital value of slaves constituted 20 percent of all American wealth, which was more than the combined worth of the entire nation's railroad and manufacturing assets.⁵ These anti-statist and antidemocratic slaveholders were a new kind of conservative faction. Hamilton and his allies developed the power of the national government to protect and develop America's system of credit and finance to benefit most directly the capitalist elite. In contrast, wealthy slaveholders were, so to speak, the New Right of their era. They rounded up support from their less-well-to-do white neighbors by denouncing the Hamiltonians as antidemocratic elitists, who meant to control society and government through "the pageantry of rank, the influence of money and emoluments, and the terror of military force."⁶ They (a group that includes Jefferson, Madison, and later John C. Calhoun of South Carolina) championed and institutionalized anti-statist, antitaxation, and pro-property rights policies to ensure that their fundamental economic asset—enslaved people—was not taken away by the power of national authority.

This anti-statist stance became integral to American political culture and to the policy claims of a broad range of economic elites, all of whom had more to fear from an empowered democratic majority than to gain from an activist federal government. When new manufacturing and financial elites boomed in the late nineteenth century, these men deliberately built on the antebellum slaveholders' political tradition, and structural impositions, to protect their property, their wealth, and their status from feckless majorities who might use their electoral power to take them away. Ironically, these new elites used both the authority of the federal courts to keep states from passing pro-labor laws and the power of Congress and the president to raise tariffs against imported manufactured goods. Federal power in the late nineteenth century (the Gilded Age) served the antiregulatory, anti-domestic tax, pro-property needs of the well-to-do. Men of good fortune did the best to use a Hamiltonian probusiness national government and Jeffersonian anti-statist rhetoric to protect their assets and their economic prerogatives from any class-based, majoritarian political foray.⁷ Self-interested as they were, it need be said that the economic policy tilt engineered by men of wealth paid off: the United States economy boomed during the Gilded Age, creating great fortunes as well as the highest wage scale in the world.

Robert Taft, like many young, well-born, and ambitious men coming of age in the early twentieth century, especially after the economic reforms of the Progressive Era had played out, inherited the political orientation. Taft would have rejected any claim that he was, politically speaking, following the footsteps of the slaveholding class of the antebellum South. He was, after all, a Republican, and he hailed Abraham Lincoln, champion of free labor, northern manufacturers, and the North's expanding middle class—not the Confederacy's patrician slavemaster Jefferson Davis—as his personal and political hero. Slaveholding and slaveholders were anathema to him, and he saw no need for linking his principles to southern antebellum stratagems. But if the senator from Ohio rejected the Lost Cause, he did revere those constitutional principles that protected private property from the grasping hands of those who wanted something for nothing; and if it had taken rich men of all kinds, representing quite different factions, to create and preserve those principles, so what? Successful politics—liberal or conservative—depend on adding, not subtracting, constituencies.

Taft had already graduated from Yale (class of '10) when Charles Beard's *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution* was published in 1913, and it is unlikely he ever read it. Beard's thesis, however—that the Constitution aimed above all to protect property from the machinations of economic levelers or financial manipulators—was Taft's own. In a 1938 speech before a sympathetic audience of Cleveland-area Republicans gathered at the Tippecanoe Club, made while he was running for the Senate, Taft blasted New Dealers for disregarding the Constitution in their reckless pursuit of socialistic measures: "... more and more the [Roosevelt] Administration has become enamored of its policy of planned economy.... The professors in Washington are obsessed with the belief that by passing laws and issuing thousands of regulations they can produce an automatic prosperity. For that purpose they were prepared to cast aside every constitutional principle which the Anglo-Saxon race had established in centuries of struggle. They have scant regard for individual rights to life, liberty, and property established by the Constitution."⁸ Taft, here and elsewhere, spoke for many (though too few to bring any of his three bids for the Republican presidential nomination to a happy conclusion). And in his speech he did more than defend property holders against what he considered government theft. In a few short sentences he intertwined three critical themes of modern conservatism: fealty to the property-preserving original intent of the Constitution, contempt for social-experiment-loving tradition-disregarding intellectual elites, and a reverence for the "Anglo-Saxon race" (over time conservatives would replace this racially loaded phrase with the more inclusive "Western civilization" or the religiously uplifting "Judeo-Christian tradition"). But it was the protection of economic liberty—at least on the domestic side of politics, that most moved Taft and so many other self-proclaimed conservatives during the age of Roosevelt and its immediate aftermath.

The Taftian persuasion, by the late 1930s and early 1940s, was primarily but not solely a Republican one. Both major political parties in those years were still internally debating the reach of the federal government in the American economy. But the Democrats—excepting a few old-school types, mostly from the one-party South, whom FDR had failed to purge in the memorable midterm election of 1938—had broadly agreed that Washington should play a major role in safeguarding Americans' economic security and prosperity. To do so, the liberal majority of the Democratic Party argued, taxes on the well-to-do should be raised so that an economic safety net could be woven into the fabric of the free enterprise system. And to ensure that the economic security of the majority was maintained, business owners would have to abide by a series of rules that included workers' rights to organize collective bargaining units, a national minimum wage, and government restrictions on banking and other financial practices. The capitalist free market, New Dealers averred, had to be disciplined by the federal government to protect Americans from its predations and periodic downswings.

This particular divide between Republicans and Democrats was relatively new. As late as 1920 many observers were hard pressed to discern which presidential candidate, Democrat Al Smith or Republican Herbert Hoover, was the greater protector of the perquisites of capital and capitalism. Economic conservatism in those pre-Great Depression, Roaring Twenties days had ruled both parties at the highest levels. But Roosevelt and his "professors" ended that particular consensus by inventing a new kind of political liberalism. That reinvention and the New Dealers' very claiming of the liberal tradition changed the game of American politics.

Robert Taft's first foray into national politics came hard on the heels of the invention of New Deal liberalism. When Franklin Roosevelt first ran for the presidency in 1932, his ideological orientation was unclear, even to him. In fact, Roosevelt never embraced a strong ideological position; in the middle of the New Deal years a reporter badgered him about his political "philosophy" until a bemused Roosevelt finally replied, "Philosophy? Philosophy? I am a Christian and a Democrat—that's all."⁹ FDR had come of political age in the years before World War I as a progressive. But

progressivism was a term that had long lost clear political meaning and purpose (in 1912, all three major candidates for the presidency—President William Howard Taft, former President Theodore Roosevelt, and soon-to-be President Woodrow Wilson—called themselves progressives, as did FDR's 1932 opponent, Herbert Hoover). Moreover, by 1932, progressivism had become too linked, for Roosevelt's taste and purpose, with the crusading spirit of individual moral reform, most extravagantly displayed in the national temperance movement that had resulted in the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment, which banned the sale and importation of alcoholic beverages. Roosevelt was not much interested in individual moral reform; at a time when the Great Depression had left 25 percent of Americans unemployed and tens of millions facing homelessness and hunger, he wanted to use public policy to bring economic security to the American people. To provide that security he was willing to reinvent the role and reach of government in the United States.

Roosevelt was, in his own heart and in the eyes of his followers, hardly a radical. He saw no need to change, let alone overthrow, Americans' constitutional principles or the capitalist system. In his first inaugural address, he would casually assure the citizenry: "Our Constitution is so simple and practical that it is possible always to meet extraordinary needs by changes in emphasis and arrangement without loss of essential form."¹⁰ So, to explain his policies and his principles to the American people, he adapted an older language to new circumstances. He told them that he was, in accord with long-standing American tradition, a liberal. But, he stated in his acceptance speech at the June 1936 Democratic Party convention in Philadelphia, unlike liberals of an older time, who had in 1776 "sought freedom from the tyranny of a political autocracy—from the eighteenth century royalists who held special privileges from the crown," New Deal liberals would fight for American economic freedom from the "economic royalists" who had "created a new despotism and wrapped it in the robes of legal sanction." He explained: "A small group had concentrated into their own hands an almost complete control over other people's money, other people's labor—other people's lives. For too many of us life was no longer free; liberty no longer real; men could no longer follow the pursuit of happiness." The new liberalism of the industrial age, Roosevelt argued, demanded not freedom from political tyranny but "against economic tyranny" and in this fight "the American citizen could appeal only to the organized power of government.... Government in a modern civilization has certain inescapable obligations to its citizens, among which are protection of the family and the home, the establishment of a democracy of opportunity, and aid to those overtaken by disaster."¹¹ Twentieth-century liberalism, unlike the liberalism of the nineteenth century, said President Franklin Roosevelt, had to confront the brutal inequities and terrifying insecurities produced not by concentrated political power but by concentrated wealth.

Robert Taft, never an easy-going fellow, was disgusted by Roosevelt's presumption. As Taft said in it, Roosevelt had stolen liberalism from the real liberals. In an April 30, 1936, speech to the Women's Republican Club of New Hampshire, made just before the forty-six-year-old stepped forward as Ohio's "favorite son" candidate for the Republican Party presidential nomination, Taft let loose on FDR. "The President has sought to appropriate to the New Deal," Taft fumed, "all the ideals of liberalism.... But the general ideal expressed by the President, that every worker may be able to live a better and more prosperous life," he continued, "is not one from which anyone wishes to dissent. [T]he question is whether the methods of the New Deal are attaining those ideals, or destroying an opportunity.... [T]he truly liberal platform will be that platform which proposes policies which in the light of experience and common sense will attain that result."¹² Liberalism, as Taft understood it, was a political philosophy that championed individual liberty, and he and his followers were the rightful guardians of that Anglo-American tradition.

When Taft spoke of liberty, he did not mean libertarianism or any other sort of individualist

permissiveness. He was a practical man not given to abstract flights of fancy; ergo, the phrase “in the light of experience and common sense.” He simply meant that government should give broad freedom to individuals, whether worker or employer, to pursue their economic interests so that they *might* become more prosperous if they were *able* enough to take advantage of free market opportunities. Taft did not believe that individuals’ right to pursue economic opportunity should be understood to mean that the government had the duty to assure that everyone was treated equally in the job market.

So, even as Taft publicly argued that African Americans, too, should be able to enjoy the American dream, he consistently fought against government enforcement of equal employment practices. In 1939, he told a black audience composed of Howard University graduates—men and women struggling against an entrenched, legally sanctioned racism that had systemically denied them employment opportunities commensurate with their talents and achievements—that if they just tried hard enough they would reap the rewards the American way offered its citizens: “On a firm foundation of constitutional freedom, you can build an economic security.... [B]ut you can only do it by your own efforts, and the efforts of your group, without leaning on the white people or on the government, but with their willing assistance.”¹³ Be strong, Taft told his black audience; compete with fortitude and you will reap the fruits of the free market. Taft was not blind. He knew that racism restricted black Americans’ opportunities. But he believed that protecting government-guaranteed individual economic liberty was more important than using government power to enforce equal opportunity. Modern liberals would argue that Taft believed that property rights trumped human rights. Taft would have insisted on a different formulation: property rights are the foundation on which human rights are built.

Taft’s faith in the virtues of economic liberty and his disgust over FDR’s expropriation of liberalism from the old liberals placed him in rich company. In the mid-1930s, a small group of wealthy men, joined by the Democrats’ 1928 presidential candidate, Al Smith, had come together to block Roosevelt’s bid for a second term. Alfred P. Sloan, the spectacularly wealthy president of General Motors, urged the men to call their group the Association Asserting the Rights of Property and to rally the American people to their cause with the slogan “Rights of Property Is the Foundation of All Social Order.”¹⁴ Another GM executive, S. M. DuBrul, not overwhelmed by his boss’s political instincts, tried to explain that the Great Depression made property rights a tough sell: “[A]n organization which was known to be directly interested primarily in the protection of established property rights would be most undesirable and largely ineffective at this juncture.... Our job is to rebuild an appreciation of the dangers to individual liberty which are implicit in so many of the current trends ... [government] doles, benefits, payment, and so on.”¹⁵ DuBrul believed that electoral battles could not be won by asking Americans to respect the rights of the propertied, especially at a time when so many had so little. Americans had to be shown that the New Deal was not securing the way of life but was instead endangering it by destroying the wealth-producing system of free enterprise. Against Roosevelt’s cry that “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself,” DuBrul wanted to teach Americans to fear the New Deal.

Agreeing with DuBrul was another prominent member of the group, John W. Davis, the 1924 Democratic Party presidential candidate and one of the nation’s most esteemed corporate counsel. The courtly Davis, a Wall Street lawyer raised by a pro-slavery Virginian, was his era’s most perfect embodiment of the Hamiltonian-Jeffersonian hybrid conservative persuasion. Legal scourge of the New Deal, Davis made headlines in the 1930s (and occasionally won major court cases) castigating the expansive reach of the federal government on behalf of his clients, a who’s who of corporate America. In the early 1950s, Davis would cap his brilliant career by enthusiastically defending the state of South Carolina’s right to segregate its schools in the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme

Court case. A first-rate wordsmith who could recite from memory long quotations from Shakespeare, the Bible, and even the Koran, Davis offered up a list of names for the nascent association of the rich and their supporters, including the League for American Rights, League for Constitutional Rights, and then the winner, the Liberty League. By late 1934, the American Liberty League was established to stop the New Deal.

In 1936, the league, spearheaded by many of America's corporate and financial leaders, enrolled more than 125,000 members and spent more than a million dollars trying to defeat Roosevelt. Avowedly nonpartisan (that is, they were allied neither with Republicans nor Democrats; they wanted both parties to champion the rights of property holders), the league distributed millions of anti-New Deal pamphlets and at its peak had a staff almost three times the size of the national Republican Party. Key members and funders of the organization included Sloan, Pierre and Irénée du Pont, Howard P. Love of Sun Oil, Sewell Avery of Montgomery Ward, Colby Chester of General Foods, financier E. I. du Pont, Hutton, Frank Rand of International Shoe Company, and many other leading businessmen, a number of whom would continue to be major financial backers of conservative political causes, foundations, and institutes of all kinds in the years ahead. Their election-year offensive began with a national broadcast address by Al Smith, the former governor of New York and the 1928 Democratic presidential candidate. Smith went after the New Deal with everything he had. In a spectacular display of vitriolic hyperbole, he lambasted it as a communistic, class-dividing spawn of the Soviet Union. His rhetoric would become a standard conservative trope in the years ahead: "There can be only one capital, Washington or Moscow. There can be only the clear, pure, fresh air of free America, or the foul breath of communistic Russia. There can be only one flag, the Stars and Stripes, or the flag of the godless Union of the Soviets."¹⁷

Smith and other Liberty Leaguers, with money to burn, hit hard and hit often. But the group, DuBrul feared, was operating in an extremely challenging political environment. Red-baiting lacked political traction in 1936, and the patrician yet folksy and church-going Roosevelt made for an unlikely agent of godless communism. Master politician that he was, Roosevelt turned the Liberty League's attacks to his own purposes. Just days before the 1936 election, Roosevelt stood, steel braces holding him up, before thousands of supporters in New York City's Madison Square Garden. "We now know that Government by organized money is just as dangerous as Government by organized mob. Never before in all our history have these forces been so united against one candidate as they stand today. They are unanimous in their hate for me—and I welcome their hatred. I should like to have it said of my first Administration that in it the forces of selfishness and of lust for power met their match. I should like to have it said of my second administration that in it these forces met their master."¹⁸ FDR rarely focused his campaign rhetoric against his actual Republican opponent, Kansas Governor Alf Landon, a reform-minded, moderate progressive from the Theodore Roosevelt wing of the GOP (TR, in his 1912 presidential battle with Robert Taft's dad, had told a Chicago audience, "This country will not be a permanently good place for any of us to live in unless we make it a reasonably good place for all of us to live in").¹⁹ Instead, FDR ran against Herbert Hoover (against the Liberty League, and all the malefactors of great wealth that had, he said, unleashed the Great Depression on the American people. Roosevelt won nearly 61 percent of the vote and every state except Maine and Vermont. Working-class white ethnics, Jews, African Americans, and southern whites, believers all (though for different reasons and with conflicting understandings) in economic security and a sense of fair play, formed the unstable base of a New Deal electoral coalition. Joining them were many farmers, small-business operators, and even a small minority of big business-people—property owners of all kinds who believed that Roosevelt, while too generous to unionists, too lenient to the unemployed, and the irresponsible, was fighting to save the free enterprise system by reforming it.

the 1936 election, nineteenth-century liberalism went down in flames, and New Deal liberalism ruled the land.

New Deal liberals' total domination of the political landscape was short-lived. In 1938, a storm of bad economic news, Roosevelt's failed effort to purge the Democratic Party of its conservative wing (mostly southern and sometimes labeled "Jeffersonian Democrats" for their states-rights approach to governance), and his ill-advised attempt to "pack" the Supreme Court with additional appointees (to help elderly judges, FDR claimed, but really to provide a judicial majority for pro-New Deal decisions) played perfectly into the hands of liberals' political enemies. The recession of 1938 demonstrated the fragility of New Deal economic measures; the failed party purge showed politicians that Roosevelt's political clout was limited; and the negative public response to FDR's manipulative court plan told conservatives that Americans were anxious about the power of unchecked big government. Many liberals, including President Roosevelt, took stock in 1938 and began to scale back and rethink their plans for further big government programs. By the end of the 1930s, many key New Deal liberals had turned away from big government policies of public jobs programs, broad-scale economic planning, and direct intervention in the affairs of business and emphasized Keynesian fiscal policy—using the government's power to tax and spend, especially deficit spending during recession—to smooth out the free market boom-bust cycle and promote national economic growth.²⁰ As the Roosevelt administration regrouped, conservatives went on the offensive.

In 1938, Robert Taft, who had lost his last elected office in the Roosevelt landslide of 1932, ran for the U.S. Senate in Ohio. With major financial backing from Ohio's wealthiest families, he first defeated a moderate Republican for his party's nomination and then went on to trounce the pro-New Deal Democratic incumbent. Taft was one of eight new Senate Republicans. On the House side, the Republican minority jumped from 89 members to 169. Conservatives, mostly Republican but also well represented in the southern wing of the Democratic Party, were back in business. Robert Taft, a smart, principled conservative who began his Senate career with national name recognition, thanks to his father, was seen by pundits, party professionals, and himself as a strong contender for the 1940 Republican presidential nomination.

Despite the electoral surge, conservatives were still a decided minority at the end of 1930s. And like most out-of-power minorities, they knew best what they opposed. The New Deal remained the punching bag. While Republican moderates and most conservative Democrats accommodated themselves to the major New Deal reforms, especially Social Security and most of the economic regulations that seemed to safeguard the nation's financial system, Taft and his allies, with only a few exceptions, fought to roll back the New Deal. Throughout Taft's nearly fifteen years in the Senate, he would continue to fight liberal, big government domestic policy—though he could also be a pragmatist and sympathetic statesman who recognized that sometimes for some people private enterprise failed. So, for example, Taft actually championed public housing for the destitute; a policy position that surprised many of the senator's business supporters. Taft was principled but not dogmatic.

But immediately after taking office in January 1939, Taft—and the nation—had to face a new and very different kind of challenge: the outbreak of global war. As the Nazis swept across Europe and the Japanese slashed away at China, Taft took center stage as an articulate advocate of keeping America out of the conflagration. Taft was no defender of the Nazis, nor was he any kind of pacifist; as the Germans expanded their reach, he fought to build America's military defense. But as long as the country remained strong, Taft was certain that Germany would not attack the United States. And Japanese expansion in Asia rarely concerned him; like most of his congressional colleagues, as well as most of the American people, he paid it little heed before the events of December 7, 1941. As Taft said it, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill was barking up the wrong tree when he urged "the New World, with all its power and might, [to] step ... forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old."

The United States, Taft believed, need only look after its own defense and keep the belligerents out of the western hemisphere. Nothing had sufficiently changed to negate the wisdom of George Washington's Farewell Address: "Why quit our own to stand upon foreign ground? Why, by interweaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe, entangle our peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition, rivalry, interest, humor, or caprice?"²² Taft loved America and wished, above all, that its fate be tied to no other nation and no other cause.

Such a position in 1939 identified Taft as a unilateralist opposed to Wilsonian internationalism. Taft believed that the United States did not need to defend other people's freedom nor did it need to spread democracy abroad. "[W]e should not undertake to defend the ideals of democracy in foreign countries," he declared, "... no one has ever suggested before that a single nation should range over the world, like a knight-errant ... and tilt, like Don Quixote, against the windmills of fascism."²³ Opposing entanglement in the war, Taft was with the vast majority of his countryfolk, and he was joined by midwestern conservatives, prairie state populists, old-school progressives, prominent socialists, and many others.²⁴ Taft did, however, make his specific case against Roosevelt's aggressive struggle to intervene against the Axis powers in a manner befitting his conservative political stance.

"War is the health of the State," wrote the leftist social critic Randolph Bourne in 1918, as he watched Americans, aflame with war fever, give away their liberties in the name of wartime solidarity.²⁵ Bourne was primarily concerned about the wartime government's destruction of freedoms of speech, press, and assembly. Taft feared what another war would do to Americans' economic liberty. American intervention in Europe's new war, he believed, would give President Roosevelt the power to turn his rapacious New Deal into an unprecedented government behemoth. Roosevelt and his warhawks, he warned, want to "give arbitrary power to the President to tell every citizen what he shall do, in manufacture, in commerce, in agriculture; to draft man power and capital to fix all wages and prices."²⁶ Taft was right. As the United States went to war, government power reached deeply and profoundly into every American's life.

Taft also argued that the internationalists were wrong when they claimed that America's global economic interests mandated intervention against Germany and Japan, even if neither nation directly attacked the United States. Taft insisted that the United States could, and essentially should, go it alone economically. Fighting a global war to assure that Americans could invest and trade in Europe and Asia was too high a price to pay for such a limited and uncertain return. Like most Republicans, Taft had always strongly supported high-tariff walls against imported goods in order to keep U.S. manufacturers well-protected from foreign competition, and he expected foreigners to practice the same policy. Protectionism was economic common sense among Ohio industrialists, who were Taft's key constituents. In May 1940, the senator wrote to one of his close political supporters, "If a nation of 130,000,000 people with all the natural resources they need, can't maintain a free economy among themselves, then I don't see why they can maintain that economy any better by exporting and importing a limited amount of goods.... I can't think of anything more destructive to American prosperity than the abandonment of protective policy."²⁷ Taft, like most self-identified conservatives in the late 1930s, opposed free trade. An economic unilateralist by inclination and political consideration, he also feared that economic interdependence would force the United States into devastating foreign wars. Taft had worked under Herbert Hoover during World War I to provide food and aid to a devastated Europe, and he believed that the United States had been pushed into the horrors of the Great War by just such international economic interests.

Many big businesspeople, particularly international financiers and large exporters, found this stance backward looking. John Cowles, a Minneapolis newspaper publisher and prominent

Republican, dismissed Taft's defense of protectionism, arguing that future American prosperity would depend on global trade: "It seems to me his tariff philosophy must be inherited, and he has failed to realize that policies that may have been advantageous when the United States was a debtor nation will, if continued, prove disastrous now that America is a creditor nation."²⁸ Roosevelt and liberal Democrats, more generally, attracted the support of a number of export-driven and international investment-oriented businesspeople and financiers (many of them located on or around Wall Street) by fighting against Republican tariff policy and pushing the United States toward a more open, reciprocal foreign trade policy. Freer trade, FDR believed, would benefit American consumers through lower prices and allow the nation's most economic and productive industries to grow by expanding their international sales and investments. Because Main Street and Wall Street were not reading from the same economic hymnal, trade policy, in the 1930s and 1940s, did not fit easily into a conservative liberal framework.

Generally, Taft and political conservatives were stymied by the war. It took the focus off domestic politics, the area in which conservatives had strong feelings and, they believed, winning political arguments. The war also gave Roosevelt a unique opportunity to keep the power of incumbency, yet again, on the side of the liberals. Motivated at least in part by the fall of Europe to the Nazis, FDR broke the tradition set by George Washington in 1796 and ran for a third term in 1940.

Though respectful of Roosevelt's formidable political skills, Taft desperately wanted to take his place on. He could, he believed, give the American people a genuine chance to choose between more business government and a return to the older ways of limited, property-protecting government. But it was not to be. After a heated convention battle that forced six roll-call votes, the Republican Party cast Taft aside and selected a more liberal, far more internationalist-leaning, New York City-based candidate as its champion: the genial Wall Street lawyer and utilities executive, Wendell Willkie, a man unstained by prior elected office. The moderate, internationally oriented East Coast Republicans had won the day. In large part, the Republicans rejected Taft because a majority in his own party believed that his outspoken anti-interventionist rhetoric would kill his presidential chances. Many also believed that Taft's frontal assault on the New Deal remained unpopular and that a more carefully couched critique of New Deal excesses would win back the Republican majorities of the 1920s.

Taft offered another explanation. There was nothing wrong with his message. Americans, he believed, could be convinced to accept his fierce anti-New Deal opinions, and many still supported his out-spoken, unilateralist views on the war. The problem, he wrote a colleague, was that presidential politics had become the kind of game in which he had too few skills. "[T]he public sentiment of the day, fostered and promoted by the newspapers, magazines and columnists," he bitterly noted, is "to regard politics as a show in which only an actor can be promoted."²⁹ (That same year, Ronald Reagan, the man who would become conservatives' favorite actor, appeared in one of his greatest roles, as George Gipp in the gridiron classic *Knute Rockne All American*.) Taft knew he lacked both charisma and a winning personality. And he understood that the growing importance of the mass media in American national politics made cold-blooded, analytically minded, professional politicians like himself an ever-harder sell in the electoral marketplace, whatever their political ideology. Policies and principles mattered, but when it came to presidential politics, personality and packaging could easily sway a nomination and, even more, an election. A gray man in a suit who had been first in his class at Yale was tough to market.

Roosevelt's victory in 1940 and the subsequent entanglement of the United States in the war left little room for conservative attacks on the liberal state. The war was everything; as President Roosevelt himself told the press corps less than a year before the 1944 election, "Dr. New Deal" had to give way to "Dr. Win-the-War."³⁰ And "Dr. Win-the-War" was not going to bow out from the fight.

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