

THE REPUBLICANS' CIVIL WAR:
DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER AND THE FIGHT TO HALT CONSERVATISM, 1952–1969

by

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Abstract

In the years immediately after World War II, Dwight D. Eisenhower insisted that he did not want to run for office. However, the general, persuaded by the efforts of Citizens for Eisenhower groups, reversed his decision before the 1952 election. The new politician did not take an easy path to the White House, however, as Senator Robert Taft of Ohio, the leading conservative Republican, fought to represent the GOP. Eisenhower aligned with the moderate faction, the party's traditional source of power, and joined the Republicans during the early stages of a civil war in the party. From the time Eisenhower received the presidential nomination in 1952 until his death in 1969, he committed himself to leading the GOP and establishing moderate, not conservative, Republicanism as the party's ideology. However, this aspect of Eisenhower's political career has largely been ignored by historians. The analyses of Eisenhower that focus on his presidency, rather than his military career, concentrate on policy decisions, omitting the president's role as party leader during a transformative era. This oversight not only skews Eisenhower's legacy but also renders analyses of the conservative revolution in American politics incomplete. Before conservative Senator Barry Goldwater secured the Republican nomination in 1964, a very important moment that augured — but did not guarantee — the future triumph of the conservative wing, Eisenhower worked to stop his campaign. Had Eisenhower succeeded, the GOP and American politics could have followed a much different trajectory in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Utilizing documents from throughout Eisenhower's political career, this study argues that although Eisenhower failed to halt conservatism, he influenced the course of the GOP. During the 1950s and 1960s, Eisenhower helped revitalize the party, improved the party's organization, and contributed to conservatism's delayed ascendancy. Furthermore, Eisenhower merits recognition as a party leader who worked tirelessly on behalf of moderate Republicanism, not just as a man with impressive coattails for Republicans to cling to during elections.

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Dedication

For my parents,
Sharon and Richard Cantone.

Introduction

On the evening of May 3, 2007, the ten men vying for the 2008 Republican presidential nomination gathered in Simi Valley, California. As the politicians discussed topics ranging from the war in Iraq to stem cell research, a decommissioned Air Force One served as their backdrop. More so than the large aircraft, one man loomed over the event — Ronald Reagan. During the first debate at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, candidates invoked the ex-president's legacy in their quest to lead the GOP.¹ Just a few years later, the Reagan Library hosted the Republicans' candidates for the 2012 election, demonstrating the continued influence of the ex-president.

Long before Reagan served as the standard bearer for the GOP, he actually was a registered Democrat. Then, partly influenced by his employer, General Electric, Reagan started to move right on the political spectrum, eventually settling on the opposite end with the conservative Republicans.² This shift toward the GOP coincided with the candidacy of Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1952 and 1956, and the former actor campaigned for the moderate Republican. However, Reagan continued to move further right and emerged as a new leader of the right when he spoke on behalf of the very conservative Senator Barry Goldwater during the 1964 campaign. Reagan's popular "A Time for Choosing" speech resonated with conservatives and sparked discussion of the former actor running for office. After Goldwater's crushing defeat in 1964, Reagan's victory in California's 1966 gubernatorial race provided conservatives with a new

¹ Adam Nagourney and Marc Santora, "Republican Candidates Hold First Debate, Differing on Defining Party's Future," *The New York Times*, May 4, 2007.

² David Farber, *The Rise and Fall of Modern American Conservatism: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 169.

leader for their movement.³ The nomination of Goldwater in 1964 demonstrated the growing power of the right within the GOP and national politics, but only when Reagan won the presidency in 1980 did the conservatives successfully stage a political revolution.

Before Eisenhower won the 1952 presidential election, the Democrats were the dominant political party. After four failed attempts to defeat Franklin D. Roosevelt, the popular wartime president, members of the GOP hoped another war leader, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, could defeat Roosevelt's successor, Harry S. Truman, in 1948. Although inexperienced with elective politics, Eisenhower's notoriety and knowledge of international affairs made him an attractive candidate for both parties. Neither party knew Eisenhower's political affiliation because he insisted on remaining apolitical during his military career. The Republicans, however, unknowingly possessed the advantage in the pursuit of Eisenhower, as the ex-general registered and voted Republican in 1948. Eisenhower did not reveal that information, and despite his refusals, both parties continued to pursue him.⁴ Eventually, Eisenhower reversed his decision, and during the early, speculation-heavy stages of the 1952 campaign, declared his candidacy for the Republican presidential nomination.⁵ The party that the ex-general joined tested him from the start, as two factions — moderates and conservatives — vied for control of the GOP.

Historians trace the escalation of the split within the Republican Party to the post–World War II era, precisely when Eisenhower entered the world of elective politics. The GOP's primary candidates for 1952, Eisenhower and Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio, represented the two factions, and their policy positions highlighted the differences between the sides. At the crux of the divide was whether to maintain the strong federal government created by the New Deal and

³ Ibid, 170–72.

⁴ Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change, 1953–1956: The White House Years* (New York: Doubleday, 1963), 20.

⁵ Ibid, 8.

World War II. Taft's opposition to international commitments and federal social welfare and regulatory programs represented key tenets of the conservative philosophy. Moderates, on the other hand, did not seek a complete reversal of the New Deal or the destruction of America's modest welfare state. Furthermore, Eisenhower and other moderates supported internationalism, including the alliances forged after the war.⁶ Twenty years of Democratic leadership forged a new political identity for the United States, and although conservatives sought to revert to past policies, moderates focused on altering, not eliminating, America's domestic and international commitments.

Eisenhower's decision to challenge Taft for the Republican nomination in 1952 sparked intense fighting within the party. However, Eisenhower's alignment with the moderate wing, which controlled the GOP due to its strength in the electorally and financially strong Northeast, provided him with an advantage over Taft.⁷ Once Eisenhower secured the Republican nomination, he sought to unite the conflicted party. To attract conservatives and younger voters, Senator Richard M. Nixon of California received the call to serve as Eisenhower's running mate. Respected for his participation in the prosecution of Soviet spy Alger Hiss, Nixon's reputation as a communist hunter appealed to conservatives. Nixon, though, would go on to have what historians deemed an "ambiguous" place in the GOP.⁸ Despite his conservative record in Congress, Nixon supported Eisenhower's policies and by the time of his own presidency, pursued moderate and liberal initiatives. Eight years of working with Eisenhower led Nixon to drift away from the right. By the time Nixon needed to stand on his own, his ties to both wings of

⁶ Michael Bowen, *Roots of Modern Conservatism: Dewey, Taft, and the Battle for the Soul of the Republican Party* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 1–9, 130–36.

⁷ Steven Wagner, *Eisenhower Republicanism: Pursuing the Middle Way* (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006), 3.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

the GOP led many Republicans to question his political alignment.⁹ The gesture of picking Nixon did little to minimize the conservatives' criticism of Eisenhower.

To garner support from conservative Republicans in Congress, Eisenhower reached out to his former opponent Taft. The two managed to develop a positive working relationship, but Taft's death early in Eisenhower's administration robbed the president of his strongest link to conservatives.¹⁰ Vice President Nixon's experience with Congress and party politics did help Eisenhower, but he failed to serve as the link that Eisenhower needed to gain the support of all Republicans.¹¹ When Taft died, so did one of Eisenhower's greatest chances for uniting Republicans. This setback did not deter Eisenhower from advocating moderate Republicanism or seeking to unite the GOP. From his nomination in 1952 until his death in 1969, Eisenhower embraced his role as party leader, and continuously worked to halt the polarizing and strengthening conservative movement.

Historians of Eisenhower's political career have focused on his policy decisions, not his work as a leader of the Republican Party. This oversight, however, ignores a significant element of Eisenhower's life in politics and a key chapter in the history of the GOP. In 1952, the future of the Republican Party was especially uncertain. Eisenhower sought to establish the party as a moderate one that embraced what he termed "the middle way," also referred to as "middle of the road," "modern Republicanism," or "Eisenhower Republicanism." By balancing the extremes of

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Arthur Eisenhower, September 11, 1953, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas (hereafter Eisenhower Library), Eisenhower, Dwight D.: Papers as President of the United States, 1953-61 (Ann Whitman File), Name Series, (hereafter Whitman Name Series), Box 11, Folder: "Eisenhower, Arthur (3)."

¹¹ Chester J. Pach, Jr. and Elmo Richardson, *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower*, rev. ed. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991), 51.

the right and left, Eisenhower hoped to enact policies with broad appeal that neither restricted nor inflated the power of the federal government.¹²

Historical approaches to Eisenhower’s presidency and his post-presidential political legacy have evolved since he left office in 1961. Initially, historians doubted the efficacy of his leadership, often describing him as a genial old man who preferred the golf course to the Oval Office. Then, political scientist Fred I. Greenstein researched the general’s administration and argued that Eisenhower quietly led America through the 1950s. Greenstein’s “hidden-hand” thesis, published in 1982, ushered in a wave of new scholarship that recognized Eisenhower as a leader who, though he delegated tasks to others, remained in control of and closely monitored domestic and international affairs.¹³

Scholarship on the other half of Eisenhower’s political career — his role as party leader — follows the same trajectory. Historians and political scientists long overlooked Eisenhower’s work with the Republicans, partly due to the widely accepted belief that he could have won representing either party. But recent scholarship has started to acknowledge that Eisenhower did act as a leader of the GOP. The small advances Eisenhower made, such as daring to campaign in the supposedly solidly Democratic South, have earned recognition.¹⁴ Gradually, Eisenhower’s political reputation has improved, though aspects of his career remain unexplored. Existing accounts tend to conclude with Eisenhower leaving office, omitting his work as an ex-president.¹⁵ Focused on the future of the GOP, the former president communicated regularly with

¹² Wagner, *Eisenhower Republicanism*, 5.

¹³ Fred I. Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader* (New York: Basic Books, 1982).

¹⁴ Daniel J. Galvin, *Presidential Party Building: Dwight D. Eisenhower to George W. Bush* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 69.

¹⁵ See Galvin, *Presidential Party Building*, Bowen, *The Roots of Modern Conservatism*, Jim Newton, *Eisenhower: The White House Years* (New York: Doubleday, 2011), and Geoffrey Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin: The Downfall of Moderation and the Destruction of the Republican Party, From Eisenhower to the Tea Party* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

fellow Republicans, all in the hope of setting the GOP on a moderate path. However, in histories of the Republican Party, the first half of the 1960s are mostly remembered for the Goldwater candidacy. Eisenhower's attempts to establish a moderate leadership for the GOP during the 1960s are overshadowed, even though Nixon won the 1968 election. Even though Eisenhower did not accomplish all of his goals for the Republicans, he did influence the party, and he merits recognition for his work on behalf of the GOP during the presidential and post-presidential years.

Eisenhower occupies a complex spot in the history of the Republican Party and American politics. Although regarded as one of America's top presidents when pundits or historians rank past leaders, Eisenhower nonetheless remains in the background of the story of the GOP and the conservative ascendancy of the late twentieth century. The party that exists today extols Reagan, and Eisenhower represents a more liberal perspective. Regardless of where he falls on the spectrum of the current Republican Party, Eisenhower played a greater role in the history of the party than usually recognized. The GOP's shift to the right was hardly predetermined when Eisenhower took office in 1953, and Eisenhower was crucial in staving off the conservative takeover for a significant period of time.

This study analyzes Eisenhower's seventeen years of fighting the rise of conservatism. The first chapter focuses on the pre-Eisenhower GOP and his transition from general to president and party leader. Eisenhower's alignment with the moderates and his "middle way" perspective is analyzed, along with his efforts to build a strong intellectual foundation for the party. Then, shifting to Eisenhower's time as elder statesman, the second chapter covers Nixon's failed presidential run in 1960, and Eisenhower's efforts to rally the moderates once the GOP lost the White House after the election of John F. Kennedy. Eisenhower's primary concern between 1961 and 1964 was securing the 1964 presidential nomination for a moderate, which meant exploring

options to halt Barry Goldwater's candidacy. Committed to his party, however, Eisenhower begrudgingly worked with Goldwater once the Arizonan received the nomination. Finally, this study concludes with Eisenhower's efforts to rally the GOP after Goldwater's defeat — while seeking to prevent its movement to the right. Governor George Romney of Michigan and Nixon emerged as the party's top candidates, and both received support from Eisenhower. The final years of Eisenhower's life coincided with Nixon finally moving into the White House in 1969.

Throughout Eisenhower's professional life, first in the military and then in politics, he preferred to act in the shadows. By appointing individuals he believed to be the best qualified for their positions, Eisenhower had faith his subordinates could handle affairs and react similar to him. However, this did not mean an abdication of responsibility. The misunderstanding of Eisenhower's political career can be traced directly back to the incorrect contemporary notion that Eisenhower remained disengaged from affairs, particularly in regards to the GOP. Instead, for example, Eisenhower called upon Nixon's experience and shrewdness when working with Congress, and he consulted other top Republicans when striving to develop the ranks of Republican voters. By not publicly expressing doubts about Goldwater, moreover, Eisenhower opted to respect the decision made by his party's members, not influence the outcome of the nomination process. This thesis will demonstrate that by utilizing his "hidden hand" leadership style, Eisenhower worked to guide the GOP along the "middle way" and prevent the rise of conservatism. For this reason, Eisenhower merits recognition as a key participant in the conservative revolution. Ultimately, the right won the war for control of the GOP, but as long as he was alive, Eisenhower remained committed to leading the moderates to victory.

Chapter 1 - Commander of the Moderate Republicans: Eisenhower's Emergence as a GOP Leader

In February 1952, a group of Republican congressmen collaborated on a letter to General Dwight D. Eisenhower, then commander of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), seeking to convince him to run for office. “Prompted by the messages we are receiving daily,” the congressmen wrote, voters “want you to come home, they want you to declare yourself on the pressing issues of the day, they want the inspiration of your dynamic honesty and the forthrightness of your statesmanship. The demands of these patriotic Americans have a right to be heard, and we beg you to listen to them because we agree with them.”¹⁶ Why, despite Eisenhower's inexperience with elective politics, did these congressmen, appeal to the general to run for office? What Eisenhower lacked in experience, he made up for with his reputation. “We feel deeply that those basic convictions for which you have stood,” the congressmen wrote, “and which are shared by millions of people deserve your personal leadership in this crucial hour. Your return home will unite our people as never before.”¹⁷ Ultimately, the congressmen's appeal claimed that voters wanted Eisenhower to run because of a widespread perception that only he could be the leader that America needed in 1952.

¹⁶ The complete list of Congressmen to sign the letter asking Eisenhower to run for office is: Clifford R. Hope (R-Kans.), Hugh D. Scott, Jr. (R-Pa.), Winston L. Prouty (R-Vt.), Claude I. Bakewell (R-Mo.), Jacob K. Javits (R-N.Y.), Edward L. Sittler, Jr. (R-Pa.), Albert M. Cole (R-Kans.), Clifford P. Case (R-N.J.), John W. Heselton (R-Mass.), Harmar D. Denny, Jr. (R-Pa.), Norris H. Cotton (R-N.H.), Christian A. Herter (R-Mass.), James C. Auchincloss (R-N.J.), Thruston B. Morton (R-Ky.), Gerald R. Ford, Jr. (R-Mich.), Thor C. Tollefson (R-Wash.), R. Walter Riehlman (R-N.Y.), W. Sterling Cole (R-N.Y.), and Robert W. Kean (R-N.J.). Clifford R. Hope, et al. to Dwight D. Eisenhower, February 22, 1952, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas (hereafter Eisenhower Library), Eisenhower, Dwight D.: Papers as President of the United States, 1953-61 (Ann Whitman File), Name Series, (hereafter Whitman Name Series), Box 14, Folder: “Famous Letters.”

¹⁷ Ibid.

In Eisenhower, the Republicans saw a popular candidate who could lead them back into the White House for the first time in twenty years. Indeed, coattails, not ideas, attracted politicians to Eisenhower. Both primary parties expressed interest in Eisenhower, and he could have run on either ticket in 1952. Political scientist Daniel Galvin explained that because of the impression that “Eisenhower was uninterested in party politics and disengaged from the Republican Party,” historians have considered him as a “president above party.”¹⁸ Many scholarly accounts, therefore, barely mention Eisenhower’s role as GOP leader, even when in the White House.¹⁹ This oversight is particularly surprising given the past generation of Eisenhower scholarship, which, led by the work of political scientist Fred Greenstein, has reassessed Eisenhower’s political career. Immediately after Eisenhower left office, historians questioned his efficacy as a politician, but, according to Greenstein’s “hidden hand” thesis, Eisenhower preferred to handle policy decisions quietly and to delegate affairs to others, but he was hardly detached from his office.²⁰ Eisenhower applied a similar approach to his party-centric work, but Eisenhower the party leader remains an overlooked aspect of his political career.

Overall, this study examines Eisenhower’s role in post–World War II politics and in the Republican Party during the formative stages of the party’s move to the right. For years, Republicans upset by the GOP’s move to the center during the 1930s and 1940s fought to reclaim control of their party. The conservatives eventually celebrated their first major victory in 1964 when Senator Barry Goldwater received the GOP’s presidential nomination. I argue that Eisenhower, the leading advocate of moderate Republicanism, tried to stop the conservative

¹⁸ Daniel J. Galvin, *Presidential Party Building: Dwight D. Eisenhower to George W. Bush* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 41.

¹⁹ Analyses of Eisenhower often focus on just one aspect of his life, e.g. his military career or presidential years. The wealth of information on Eisenhower limits the content of comprehensive works to key details about his life and work from World War II through the end of the presidency.

²⁰ Fred I. Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader* (New York: Basic Books, 1982).

revolution before control of the GOP shifted to the right. Eisenhower not only brought the GOP back to the White House but also tried to construct a moderate party that could thrive without him. President during a transitional period for the GOP, Eisenhower oversaw one of the moderates' last major efforts to retain control of the Republican Party.

This chapter begins by analyzing the GOP's era of turmoil that started after Franklin D. Roosevelt won the 1932 election. Ex-president Herbert Hoover's handling, or lack thereof, of the Great Depression crippled the Republicans. Then, in response to the expansive policies of Roosevelt and the Democrats, members of the GOP split into moderate and conservative factions. Conflicting interpretations of Republican ideology led conservatives, who believed that Eisenhower did not represent Republican values, to reject his candidacy and to support Senator Robert A. Taft for the 1952 nomination.²¹ But in 1952, moderates, who exerted much of the power within the GOP, wanted Eisenhower. A willingness to accommodate parts of the New Deal contributed to moderates garnering support from the business community and other residents of the well-populated and wealthy East Coast.²² With money and votes on their side, moderates agreed with the widely held view that few individuals could defeat the respected Eisenhower, thus making him an ideal candidate for the embattled GOP.²³ Conservatives built up their support base in the 1950s and 1960s, but in office, Eisenhower worked with fellow moderates to strengthen their faction and to limit the rise of the right.²⁴

Even before Eisenhower moved into the White House, he advocated a "middle way" in politics, thereby tying him to the moderates. After analyzing Eisenhower's decision to run for

²¹ Michael Bowen, *The Roots of Modern Conservatism: Dewey, Taft, and the Battle for the Soul of the Republican Party* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 117.

²² Steven Wagner, *Eisenhower Republicanism: Pursuing the Middle Way* (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006), 3.

²³ Robert Mason, *The Republican Party and American Politics from Hoover to Reagan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 142–51.

²⁴ Galvin, *Presidential Party Building*, chap. 3.

office, this chapter will delve into his political philosophy, particularly its application to policy and party matters. Caught between what he considered the extremes of conservatism and liberalism at mid century, Eisenhower believed that America's interests were best served by sticking to a middle of the road approach. This led to Eisenhower's moderate "middle way" perspective, also referred to as "Eisenhower Republicanism" or "modern Republicanism," because the new president wanted Republicans to keep looking forward, not revert to old policies.²⁵ A self-described political novice, Eisenhower did not waver from his perspective throughout his political career.²⁶

The same cannot be said for his vice president — Senator Richard Nixon. Eisenhower remained committed to the moderate Republican philosophy, but Nixon's place on the spectrum of GOP politics fluctuated. Due to his reputation as a communist hunter, based partly on the successful prosecution of Alger Hiss, Nixon had the respect of the right wing as he joined Eisenhower on the ticket in 1952. Continued association with Eisenhower, however, led Nixon toward the middle, especially as the 1960 presidential campaign loomed. Nixon tried to maintain his ties to the right, however, even after he lost to Kennedy in 1960. Nixon campaigned for staunch conservative Goldwater in 1964 and received support from the right wing during his second run for the White House in 1968. Once Nixon took office, though, conservatives realized that while Nixon remained a Republican, he had moved to the moderate, if not liberal, side of the

²⁵ Modern Republicanism is also called the middle way and Eisenhower Republicanism. Eisenhower often used the first two terms. He resisted the term Eisenhower Republicanism because he did not want the moderate perspective to depend upon him. See Wagner, *Eisenhower Republicanism*.

²⁶ Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change, 1953–1956: The White House Years* (New York: Doubleday, 1963), 28.

party.²⁷ As a result of this change, Eisenhower would consider Nixon's win in 1968 as a victory for moderate Republicanism.

Nixon's place on the ticket helped Eisenhower appeal to conservatives in 1952, but he also brought political experience. Due to Eisenhower's military career, he was familiar with diplomatic politics, but not party politics or congressional affairs. Nixon's skills in those arenas complimented the new politician's shortcomings, and would lead to him acting on Eisenhower's behalf on different occasions. Eisenhower, though, quickly learned how to play the game of politics while remaining loyal to the "middle way." This game would ultimately be lost by the moderates, but not without Eisenhower's best efforts to establish the GOP as the party of moderation.

The Elephant before Eisenhower

Two men traveled to Chicago, Illinois in July 1952 with a strong possibility of receiving the Republican Party's nomination for president. Senator Robert Taft, son of the ex-president and leader of the party's conservative wing, sought the nomination that he had lost in 1948 to New York Governor Thomas Dewey. Former general Dwight D. Eisenhower competed for the nomination on behalf of the moderates. With tensions high, a group of attendees pushed for a "fair play" amendment to prohibit the ability of contested delegates to participate in the nominating process.²⁸ By the time the GOP left Chicago, Eisenhower and the conservative-leaning Senator Richard Nixon received the nominations for president and vice president,

²⁷ Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 202–10.

²⁸ James A. Hagerty, "Lodge Cites Plans: Says Eisenhower Camp Will Push 'Fair Play' Delegate Proposal," *New York Times*, July 7, 1952.

respectively. The moderates achieved victory in July, and in a few months the GOP followed Eisenhower to Washington, D.C.

Eisenhower's first two years in office marked the first period in twenty years that the Republicans controlled the White House and Congress at the same time. Despite periods of uncertainty in the GOP's history, the Republicans had developed into a thriving party by the beginning of the twentieth century.²⁹ However, when ex-president Theodore Roosevelt, dissatisfied with the performance of his replacement, William Howard Taft, left the party in 1912, the positive momentum the GOP had developed was shattered. Roosevelt's failed reelection bid in 1912 on the Progressive Party's ticket, which robbed Republicans of votes, weakened the new party.³⁰ Gradually the elephants rebuilt the GOP, and by the time Herbert Hoover won the 1928 election, the Republicans appeared to be on a positive trajectory.³¹ However, the Great Depression, which began in 1929, disrupted the GOP's plans. After 1930, the Republicans struggled to overcome Hoover's legacy of failing to end the Depression. And then, Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt enjoyed an unparalleled four-term presidency.

Under Roosevelt, the Democrats aimed to accomplish much more than economic recovery. They oversaw a redefinition of the federal government's role in America's domestic and foreign affairs. At home, New Deal programs expanded the reach of the federal government and created the modern American welfare state. The daily activities of individuals and state governments faced greater involvement by federal authorities courtesy of different economic policies. The march toward a world war, including the establishment of a wartime economy,

²⁹ Geoffrey Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin: The Downfall of Moderation and the Destruction of the Republican Party, From Eisenhower to the Tea Party* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), xvii.

³⁰ Lewis L. Gould, *Grand Old Party: A History of the Republicans* (New York: Random House, 2003), 153–92.

³¹ Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin*, 4.

further extended the authority of those in Washington, D.C. Republicans, meanwhile, faced a wave of popular changes that flatly rejected the GOP's principle of favoring small government.³²

Although even a united Republican Party would have faced an uphill battle undermining Roosevelt and the New Deal, the party suffered from fractious in-fighting. At the root of the factions' differences lay whether or not the New Deal should be completely rejected or partly accepted. Since the party had moved away from its roots in antislavery politics and become the party of big business in the final third of the nineteenth century, the GOP had espoused the rights of individuals. In the twentieth century, Republicans continued to advocate this perspective, but some started to question strict adherence to the party's anti-statist ideology. Moderates, rather than completely rejecting Roosevelt's policies, opted to accept elements of the New Deal. Even though some New Deal initiatives failed, others offered much-needed financial assistance, made capitalist arrangement more predictable, and helped support wartime industries. And Americans of the time generally supported them. The moderates' decision to make peace with much of the New Deal promised an opportunity to regain support from voters who believed that Hoover and the GOP failed them during the Depression. Torn apart by those who clung to tradition and those willing to adapt, however, the Republican Party further complicated its post-Hoover recovery by struggling to cooperate and agree on a coherent platform.

Historians pinpoint the New Deal era as a key period for the formulation of today's American political identities. In *The Rise and Fall of Modern American Conservatism*, historian

³²The Republicans sought to weaken the New Deal Coalition, which historian Jonathan Schoenwald called "one of the most powerful and seemingly impregnable voting blocs in American history." It consisted of "white southerners; Catholic urban workers, who...were often aligned with urban machines; recent immigrants from eastern and southern Europe; blue collar workers attempting to unionize and adversely affected by the economic downturn; black voters turned away from the party of Lincoln because of their economic plight; and Jews, who were attracted to Roosevelt's opposition to Nazi Germany." (Jonathan M. Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing: The Rise of Modern American Conservatism* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001], 5. Also see, William C. Binning, Larry E. Esterly, and Paul A. Sracic, ed., "New Deal Coalition," *Encyclopedia of American Parties, Campaigns and Elections* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1999), 291.

David Farber wrote that “the New Deal had forced a new divide in American politics, with politicians and their constituents ... sort[ing] themselves out as liberals or conservatives.”³³

Those who supported the New Deal aligned with the former. The conservatives emerged as those who refused to accept any part of the New Deal. Still, some Republicans did fall somewhere in between the two ends of the political spectrum. Caught in the middle, the GOP’s moderate faction, which later included Eisenhower, demonstrated a willingness to accept many elements of the New Deal, but they also sought to limit its further extension. Support for New Deal programs, such as Social Security, was based on a mixture of genuine approval and political necessity. Eisenhower, for example, decided to support, and even expand, Social Security because, according to his “middle way” philosophy, the government should be able to assist individuals when necessary, but he also determined that one could not have a political future without accepting popular elements of the New Deal.³⁴

Before Roosevelt’s administration exposed the Republicans’ inner turmoil in the 1930s and 1940s, the party’s different interests hindered its ability to cooperate in national politics. Even though Hoover turned into the GOP’s scapegoat for the Depression, the real problems went beyond leadership. In his history of the Republicans, Lewis Gould writes that “there were ideological and political reasons that the Republican Party had not moved to enact [reforms] during its years of power; each reform would have threatened a major constituency of the

³³ David Farber, *The Rise and Fall of American Conservatism: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 1.

³⁴ One of Eisenhower’s oft cited quotations is an excerpt from a letter to his brother Edgar that not only states that any party that attempts to abolish popular New Deal initiatives would never be heard from again but also gives Eisenhower’s assessment of those who supported complete dismissal of the New Deal. He wrote: “Should any political party attempt to abolish social security, unemployment insurance, and eliminate labor laws and farm programs, you would not hear of that party again in our political history. There is a tiny splinter group, of course, that believes you can do these things. Among them are H. L. Hunt (you possibly know his background), a few other Texas oil millionaires, and an occasional politician or businessman from other area. Their number is negligible and they are stupid.” See Dwight D. Eisenhower to Edgar Eisenhower, November 8, 1954, Eisenhower Library, Whitman Name Series, Box 11, Folder “Eisenhower, Edgar – 1954 (2).”

Republican constituency.”³⁵ The Republicans were caught between industrial interests in the East and farm interests in the Midwest and West. These perspectives, at times, contradicted one another. During the 1920s and 1930s, some constituents remained faithful to the troubled party; others decided to leave the GOP. And here a geographical division surfaced. Eastern Republicans typically supported the New Deal, whereas Western Republicans very often opposed it. In the 1930s, the power within the party lay with the eastern contingent. Industry had the funds and cities provided larger voting blocs than the rural West. Upset with their marginalization, conservatives viewed the moderates’ willingness to support the New Deal as a betrayal. The bitter sentiment haunted the party and would intensify during the 1940s.³⁶

During the 1930s, and especially with their victory in the midterm elections of 1938, Republicans slowly recovered from their 1932 nadir, but Roosevelt’s resilient popularity hindered efforts to take back the White House. In 1944, the GOP hoped that former Democrat Wendell Willkie could unseat the incumbent president. Without a cohesive and appealing platform to challenge the wartime president, however, the moderate Willkie lost decisively. In *The Roots of Modern Conservatism*, historian Michael Bowen identified the 1940s as a decade when “the Republicans were leaderless and adrift with nothing to offer the people while the Democrats appeared to have all the answers.”³⁷ Leaders existed within the party, but no one figure linked the factions. Ohio Senator Robert Taft led the conservative “Old Guard,” while New York Governor Thomas E. Dewey led the moderates.³⁸ The wings, Bowen notes, “developed incompatible campaign strategies and platforms,” partly because “the severity of the Republican plight ... prompted a sense of urgency and caused both factions to aggressively seek

³⁵ Gould, *Grand Old Party*, 263.

³⁶ Wagner, *Eisenhower Republicanism*, 3.

³⁷ Bowen, *Roots of Modern Conservatism*, 2.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

control of the GOP.”³⁹ The intra-party conflict intensified during the 1940s, with the GOP caught between the conservatives and moderates’ increasingly irreconcilable views.

As America moved into the postwar period, the conservative element within the GOP started to emerge as a cohesive movement. The three primary tenets of the conservative movement were economic libertarianism, cultural traditionalism (which strove to protect existing social structures), and anti-communism, which sprang from the development of the Cold War with the Soviet Union in the late 1940s.⁴⁰ With this platform, conservatives strove to restore the old Republican Party to power and alter the course that America was on after the establishment of the New Deal and the welfare state. Some historians of conservatism, such as Kim Phillips-Fein, focus on the economic motives for conservatism’s development, specifically the rejection of New Deal policies and the emergence of corporate-sponsored laissez-faire interest groups and think tanks.⁴¹ Other historians, however, offer a more comprehensive account of the formation of the conservative movement during the postwar era. In *The Republican Right since 1945*, for example, David W. Reinhard credits opposition to Democrats’ domestic and foreign policies as key factors in the creation of the conservative platform. Wary of a strong federal government, the right-wing supported limited federal involvement in domestic affairs and a minimal presence in foreign affairs.

Both moderates and conservatives viewed the 1948 elections as an opportunity to finally unseat the Democrats. Support for President Truman had waned, and, in a test of conservatism’s strength, the right hoped to nominate Taft, “Mr. Republican.”⁴² Yet the moderate Dewey

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), xiii.

⁴¹ Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009).

⁴² Bowen, *Roots of Modern Conservatism*, 2.

prevailed in the contest for the nomination. Amid the battle between the GOP's two leading figures, other names circulated as potential candidates. Following America's triumph in World War II, prominent participants emerged as attractive options for public office. George C. Marshall, Dwight D. Eisenhower, George S. Patton, and Douglas MacArthur topped the wish lists of politicians and voters alike. But none of these generals entered the 1948 contest, and Truman won one of the most dramatic elections in U.S. history. The speculation about the political futures of America's military leaders did not end in 1948, and Eisenhower moved to the forefront of desired candidates.⁴³

Recruiting the General

Disconnected from the bitter state of domestic affairs and well-versed in international relations, Eisenhower received overtures from the Republicans and Democrats to run in 1948. Both parties encountered a problem — no one knew Eisenhower's personal politics. But this ignorance did not hinder recruiting efforts. One newspaper, for example, noted that "in the opinion of experienced political observers, the general would have been a shoo-in as the nominee of either party. He would have drawn support from both extremes and the middle of the political spectrum."⁴⁴ With such broad appeal, politicians could not have created a more attractive and electable candidate. Eisenhower, familiar with balancing international politics with military strategy, did not want to enter a different realm of the political game by running for office.

Earnest efforts to lure Eisenhower into national politics first started while he relocated to Washington, D.C. in 1945 to serve as the Chief of Staff of the Army. Previously, Eisenhower

⁴³ See Arthur Krock, "Taboo against Soldiers May Die in the '48 Race: Eisenhower, Marshall and MacArthur Loom Large in Speculations among Men of Both Parties," *New York Times*, September 29, 1946.

⁴⁴ "The Eisenhower Problem," *The Portsmouth Times*, November 25, 1949.

dismissed any remarks about his potential future as a politician as a joke.⁴⁵ As the discussions of turning the general into a candidate persisted, Eisenhower's childhood friend, Captain E. E. "Swede" Hazlett, asked about the subject in an exchange of letters. On March 13, 1946, Eisenhower confided in Hazlett that the speculation about his political future upset him. In response to Hazlett's political questions, the general admitted, "When trying to express my sentiments myself I merely get so vehement that I grow speechless, if not hysterical."⁴⁶ Upset that his disavowals of political ambition went ignored, Eisenhower went on to reveal to Hazlett that "I cannot conceive of any set of circumstances that could ever drag out of me permission to consider me for any political post from Dog Catcher to 'Grand High Supreme King of the Universe.'"⁴⁷ Eisenhower went so far as to release public remarks that clearly expressed his wish to remain out of politics, but the speculation about his future persisted.⁴⁸

Even though Eisenhower expressed a disinterest in politics, he demonstrated a deep concern and affection for the American political system. The Hazlett-Eisenhower correspondence reveals the general's worries about American affairs. Eisenhower's letter to Hazlett on August 25, 1947, opens with another disavowal of political ambitions, confessing that he and Mamie craved little more than a quiet, private life. However, the focus soon becomes political affairs, with Eisenhower remarking that "my own deepest concern involves America's situation in the world today. Her security position and her international leadership I regard as matters of the gravest to all of us and to our national future."⁴⁹ Eisenhower immediately follows

⁴⁵ Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 5.

⁴⁶ Eisenhower to Hazlett, March 13, 1946, Eisenhower Library, Whitman Name Series, Box 17, Folder: "Captain Swede Hazlett, 1941 to 1949 (3)."

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 7.

⁴⁹ Eisenhower to Hazlett, August 25, 1947, Eisenhower Library, Whitman Name Series, Box 17, Folder: "Captain Swede Hazlett, 1941 to 1949 (4)."

with the confession that “there may be little that I can do about such matters.”⁵⁰ Eisenhower’s declarative comments do not initially appear to reveal a conflicted national figure, but consideration of this letter and others demonstrate how Eisenhower, despite statements to the contrary, never completely turned his back on American politics.

Politicians and voters did not give up on the possibility of an Eisenhower candidacy following 1948. Not long after that election, Eisenhower’s name surfaced in discussions about the 1952 contest. In November 1949, *The Portsmouth Times* reported:

Since 1948, Gen. Eisenhower’s political character has jelled. Though he still is not officially either a Republican or a Democrat, he has adopted a political position that might be described as progressive conservatism; i.e., in favor of holding fast to that which is good and being alert to opportunities to make things better according to American principles of liberty and self-reliance.⁵¹

For many Republicans, Eisenhower’s change shifted the battle to woo Eisenhower in their favor. Eisenhower aligned with basic party values, and his “progressive conservatism” stance appealed to both factions.⁵² If Eisenhower agreed to run in 1952, the GOP could not only nominate a popular figure but also one with the potential to unite the party.

The early weeks of 1952 served as a turning point for Eisenhower, the moment in which he decided to run for president. Two major appeals in February of 1952 contributed to Eisenhower’s reversal of his stance on politics. While in Europe to lead the newly formed North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Eisenhower received a letter from Congressmen Jacob Javits (R-N.Y.), Christian Herter (R-Mass.), Gerald Ford (R-Mich.), and other prominent Republicans. The carefully worded letter appealed to Eisenhower on behalf of all American voters. With a clause disavowing any hopes for a position in the Eisenhower administration, the

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ “The Eisenhower Problem,” *The Portsmouth Times*, November 25, 1949.

⁵² Ibid.

congressmen hoped that Eisenhower's sense of duty to his country would determine his political future.⁵³

The Republican congressmen's letter to Eisenhower conveyed the desires of their constituents for an Eisenhower candidacy, but the actions of those constituents proved to be the most effective means of recruiting Eisenhower. Just a few days before the letter from congressional leaders reached Eisenhower, aviatrix Jacqueline Cochran traveled to Europe to deliver footage of a pro-Eisenhower rally held in Madison Square Garden. Cochran, who had served as director of the Women Airforce Service Pilots during World War II and was co-chair of the rally, brought a video of thousands of people crowded into the famous arena to demonstrate their support for Eisenhower.⁵⁴ Organized by several citizens' groups that emerged to support an Eisenhower candidacy — for example, Eisenhower Bandwagon Committee, Youth for Eisenhower, and Veterans for Eisenhower — the "Serenade for Eisenhower" rally gathered 15,000 to 20,000 people in Madison Square Garden on February 8, 1952. The evening's events ranged from musical performances to speeches to a celebration of Eisenhower's recent victory over Senator Taft in a primary-like poll organized by a Republican group in West Hartford, Connecticut.⁵⁵ Officially, Eisenhower was not yet a candidate, but that fact did not stop voters and potential voters from demonstrating that they liked Ike.

The grassroots efforts of the various "Draft Eisenhower" groups resonated with the general more than any other overture. After watching the rally footage, Eisenhower wrote to Hazlett that "the two hour film brought home to me for the first time something of the depth of the longing America today for change—a change that would bring, they hope, some confidence

⁵³ Clifford R. Hope, et al. to Dwight D. Eisenhower, February 22, 1952, Eisenhower Library, Whitman Name Series, Box 14, Folder: "Famous Letters."

⁵⁴ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Swede Hazlett, February 12, 1952, Eisenhower Library, Whitman Name Series, Box 17, Folder: "Captain Swede Hazlett, 1952 [Jan. – May]."

⁵⁵ "20,000 Whoop It Up for Ike at Madison Square Garden," *The Pittsburgh Press*, February 9, 1952, 3.

that the disturbing problems of our country will be sensibly attacked and progress made toward solving them.”⁵⁶ Deeply affected by the voters’ call to action, Eisenhower confessed: “I can’t tell you what an emotional upset it is for one to realize suddenly that he himself may become the symbol of that longing and hope.”⁵⁷ Once Eisenhower realized how much citizens, not politicians, wanted him to be president, he reconsidered his political future. Early primary results, including a write-in campaign in Minnesota that featured varied spellings of the general’s name and a New Hampshire contest where Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. (Mass.) had to personally vouch for Eisenhower’s Republican affiliation, further proved to Eisenhower that voters, not just power-hungry politicians, wanted him to run for office.⁵⁸

Following the “Middle Way”

Before Eisenhower decided to run for the presidency, he delivered a speech as President of Columbia University that hinted at his political philosophy. On September 5, 1949, Eisenhower addressed a meeting of the American Bar Association in St. Louis, Missouri. During his speech, Eisenhower discussed Americans’ fundamental rights and freedoms, and stated that they “express the common faith of loyal Americans — the shining guide that, for the vast majority, points always the straight path to America’s future. In the industrialized economy of the twentieth century, that path lies down the middle of the road between the unfettered power of concentrated wealth on one flank, and the unbridled power of statism, or partisan interest, on the other.”⁵⁹ This perspective, coupled with his assessment of the current state of politics, led

⁵⁶ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Swede Hazlett, February 12, 1952, Eisenhower Library, Whitman Name Series, Box 17, Folder: “Captain Swede Hazlett, 1952 [Jan. – May].”

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 20.

⁵⁹ Eisenhower told the crowd: “If you are true to your profession and to the responsibilities of your citizenship, you view them within a framework of three fundamental principles of American life. First, that individual freedom is our

Eisenhower toward the moderate Republicans. Eisenhower's familiarity with international affairs prevented him from supporting the right-wing of the Republican Party's isolationist perspective. Senator Taft, the leading conservative candidate for the GOP's nomination in 1952, "favored a foreign policy that placed the needs of the United States over any external commitments," Michael Bowen reported.⁶⁰ Eisenhower sought to convince Taft to endorse NATO, the North American-European alliance organized for collective defense purposes, but Taft withheld support of the group Eisenhower once led.⁶¹ In response, Eisenhower joined the race partially to keep "Taft from bringing on World War III," as historian Geoffrey Kabaservice wrote.⁶² Concerned with the GOP's international policies, Eisenhower also worried about the Democrats. Although supportive of elements of the New Deal, Eisenhower believed that Democrats' plans to expand it would further restrict individual enterprise, and, ultimately, according to Kabaservice, he "mistrusted what he considered to be the fiscal incontinence of Truman's Fair Deal."⁶³ With voters calling for Eisenhower to run and the general troubled by Taft and Truman's policies, Eisenhower formally entered politics in 1952.

Why did Eisenhower ultimately join the GOP? Almost immediately after Truman's election in 1948, Republicans pleaded with Eisenhower for him to help unseat the Democrats.

most precious possession. It is to be guarded as the chief heritage of our people, the wellspring of our spiritual and material greatness, and the central target of all enemies — internal and external — who seek to weaken and destroy the American Republic. Second, that all our freedoms — personal, economic, social, political — freedom to buy, to work, to hire, to bargain, to save, to vote, to worship, to gather in a convention or join in mutual association; all these freedoms are a single bundle. Each is an indispensable part of a single whole. Destruction of any inevitably leads to the destruction of all. Third, that freedom to compete vigorously among ourselves, accompanied by a readiness to cooperate wholeheartedly for the performance of community and national functions, together make our system the most productive on earth." Dwight D. Eisenhower, Address to the American Bar Association, Kiel Auditorium, St. Louis, Missouri, September 5, 1949. <http://www.eisenhowermemorial.org/pages.php?pid=209>

⁶⁰ Bowen, *Roots of Modern Conservatism*, 6.

⁶¹ In the first volume of his presidential memoirs, *Mandate for Change*, Eisenhower addresses the resistance to NATO, particularly among top Republicans. Eisenhower recounts one meeting with a prominent, though unnamed, Senator who he believed cared more about restricting the federal government's powers than an organization formed for collective security purposes. In a footnote, the two men named as leading Republican opponents to NATO are Senator Taft and Nebraska's Senator Kenneth Wherry (Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 12–14).

⁶² Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin*, 10.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

“In 1948, ’49, ’50, ’51 and early ’52, many hundreds of people were urging me to go into politics,” Eisenhower wrote to his brother Edgar.⁶⁴ He continued:

Scores of different reasons were advanced as to why I should do so, but in general they all boiled down to something as follows: ‘The country is going socialistic so rapidly that, unless Republicans can get in immediately and defeat this trend, our country is gone. Four more years of New Dealism and there will be no turning back. This is our last chance.’⁶⁵

Elements of this argument appealed to Eisenhower, who agreed that politics should not follow an extreme path. However, opposition to extremism meant that Eisenhower agreed with aspects of both the Democrats and Republicans’ platforms. Caught between two sides, the general at least partially credited his friends for the decision to align with the GOP. Eisenhower recounted his entry into politics in a September 1952 letter to Edward M. Earle of Princeton’s Institute of Higher Studies, writing: “having yielded to the importunities and arguments of my friends [to run], I see no recourse for me except to hang on firmly to my own ideals and standards, and to remember that the friends who persuaded me agreed that, with my convictions I’d have to declare as a Republican.”⁶⁶ Written just two months before the 1952 election, these remarks depict Eisenhower as a politician with little say in his career.

Yet, contrary to historians’ initial assessments of Eisenhower as an inexperienced political puppet, he based his decision to align with moderate Republicans on a thorough understanding of domestic and international issues. This understanding shaped Eisenhower’s political philosophy, the “middle way,” which he first publicly addressed in 1949 and subsequently followed throughout his administration. Eisenhower had registered and voted Republican in 1948, but he did not completely embrace his party’s traditional platform, and, as

⁶⁴ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Edgar Eisenhower, May 2, 1956, Eisenhower Library, Whitman Name Series, Box 11, Folder: “Eisenhower, Edgar – 1956 (2).”

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Dr. Edward Meade Earle, September 1952, Eisenhower Library, Whitman Name Series, Box 8, Folder: “Earle, Dr. Edward Meade.”

mentioned, supported aspects of the Democrats' platform.⁶⁷ Personal involvement with international affairs, particularly America's membership in NATO, helped shape Eisenhower's perspective on foreign policy.

For domestic policies, Eisenhower supported a strong federal government, which at first glance seemed to align more with the Democrats than the Republicans, but overall he favored a combination of the two perspectives.⁶⁸ In a letter to his sister-in-law Lucy, Eisenhower described his moderate position:

I have come to the conclusion that the true middle-of-the-road position is about as follows: Demand from the individual the maximum effort that he can make to take care of himself. The government at the city, state and Federal levels should participate in helping the individual over and above what he himself can do in providing adequate insurance policies.⁶⁹

The Republican ideal of emphasizing the power of the individual is at the heart of Eisenhower's belief, but he also recognized that the government needed to be prepared to intervene when necessary. Rather than placing faith entirely in the individual or in the state, Eisenhower favored a system in which the state would assist an individual in times of crisis, and, in the case of Social Security, also act as an insurer of last resort. Eisenhower explained to Lucy "that as a result of social and industrial revolutions and the breakdown of the so-called 'laissez-faire' in industrial life, people are going to demand that the government do something to give them an opportunity to live out a satisfactory life."⁷⁰ Historian Robert Griffith elaborated on this perspective, explaining that Eisenhower favored an economy based on cooperation between individuals and the state because, as Eisenhower said, "in our tightly knit economy, all professions and callings — no matter how widely separated they may be in purpose and technique — all have points of

⁶⁷ Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 20.

⁶⁸ Wagner, *Eisenhower Republicanism*, 4-5.

⁶⁹ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Edgar Eisenhower, May 2, 1956, Eisenhower Library, Whitman Name Series, Box 12, Folder "Eisenhower, Edgar – 1959–60 (2)."

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

contact and areas of common interest. Banker or housewife, farmer, carpenter, soldier — no one of us can live and act without effect on all the others.”⁷¹ For Eisenhower, the socio-economic conditions caused by the new relationship between the federal government and citizens necessitated a modification of the Republican perspective. The moderate, “middle way” approach — what came to be called Eisenhower or modern Republicanism — accepted a larger, more powerful government, but it demanded that “the great effort must be to place the maximum amount of responsibility on the individual.”⁷²

For Eisenhower, the “middle way” offered a pragmatic approach to politics, especially domestic affairs, but extreme views from the right and left overshadowed the moderate perspective. Retired Brigadier General B. G. Chynoweth, who once served in Panama with Eisenhower, challenged the “middle way” philosophy, primarily its adherence to Republican ideology. Eisenhower’s lengthy response demonstrated how he agreed and disagreed with opinions from the right and the left. “Coming down to our own day,” Eisenhower wrote on July 13, 1954:

We have those individuals who believe that the federal government should enter into every phase and facet of our individual lives, controlling agriculture, industry and education, as well as the development of every natural resource in our country. These people, knowingly or unknowingly, are trying to put us on the path toward socialism. At the other extreme we have the people — and I know quite a number of them — who want to eliminate everything that the federal government has ever done that, in one way or another, represents what is generally classified as social advance. For example, all of the regulatory commissions established in Washington are anathema to these people. They want to abolish them completely. They believe that there should be no trade union laws and the government should do nothing even to encourage pension plans and other forms of social security in our industry. When I refer to the Middle Way, I merely mean the middle way as it represents a practical working basis between extremists, both of whose doctrines I

⁷¹ Quoted in Robert Griffith, “Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Corporate Commonwealth,” *American Historical Review* 87 (Feb. 1982): 90–1. It should be noted that, according to Griffith, Eisenhower believed that corporate leaders would have the lion’s share of power in the society — hence the “corporate commonwealth.”

⁷² Dwight D. Eisenhower to Edgar Eisenhower, May 2, 1956, Eisenhower Library, Whitman Name Series, Box 12, Folder: “Eisenhower, Edgar – 1959–60 (2).”

flatly reject. It seems to me that no great intelligence is required in order to discern the practical necessity of establishing some kind of security for individuals in a specialized and highly industrialized age.⁷³

This perspective placed Eisenhower just to the right of moderate on the political spectrum. First, Eisenhower flatly rejects the left's wishes to further expand the welfare state and amass even more power for the federal government. However, he then admonishes the antiquated views of those on the far right, arguing that elements of the conservative platform would entail removing progressive policies necessary to support the new socio-economic conditions in America. With this philosophy, Eisenhower aligned with the moderate Republicans, who sought to update traditional Republicanism to fit current political and social demands.

In addition to his political philosophy, Eisenhower's assessment of the New Deal's political legacy helped define his moderate place in the political spectrum. Expanding upon his argument that no party could win with a platform based on reversing the New Deal, Eisenhower told his brother Edgar in 1956 that "it is silly to believe that any individual in the world — or, indeed, any party — can actually turn a whole population back from a course it has pursued in the belief that that course is assisting the majority of the population."⁷⁴ As the Republicans' fight over the New Deal intensified, Eisenhower recognized the futility of taking a strong stance against programs "that are generally believed to help the social or economic welfare of vast portions of our population."⁷⁵ Despite later labels as an old, out-of-touch leader, Eisenhower correctly described the conservatives as out of sync with politics and the electorate. Eisenhower wrote in 1956 that the right needed to "devote their effort to helping stabilize the situation rather

⁷³ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Brig. Gen. B. G. Chynoweth, July 13, 1954, Eisenhower Library, Whitman Name Series, Box 5, Folder: "Chynoweth, Brig. Gen., B.G."

⁷⁴ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Edgar Eisenhower, May 2, 1956, Eisenhower Library, Whitman Name Series, Box 11, Folder: "Eisenhower, Edgar – 1956 (2)."

⁷⁵ Ibid.

than criticizing efforts which recognize that you cannot return to the days of 1860.”⁷⁶ For Eisenhower and the moderates, the conservatives’ refusal to adapt to the changes that had taken root in politics served as the basis for the GOP’s conflict.

The dueling opinions of the right and left posed a challenge for Eisenhower once he committed to politics. Each side labeled the other as radical, to which Eisenhower remarked, “I believe that the true radical is the fellow who is standing in the middle and battling both extremes.”⁷⁷ Pragmatism and experience influenced Eisenhower’s domestic and foreign policy decisions, not what one perspective dictated. Unwilling to strictly adhere to the party line, Eisenhower encountered resistance when he tried to work with fellow Republicans, which ultimately limited the party’s success, even when the GOP controlled Congress between 1953 and 1955. Although Eisenhower’s “middle way” strained his intra-party relationships, he viewed this method as the best response to the major political problems gripping America. Detached from the political fights until 1952, Eisenhower sought to have reason, not emotion, guide his political career. This approach would, he believed, balance the varying opinions in order to pursue the best policies.

Pushing an Elephant to the Middle of the Road

Despite Republicans’ varied opinions, Eisenhower considered himself the party’s — and not just the moderates’ — leader. As a result, Eisenhower strove to build a GOP that, while conflicted, managed to work cooperatively. In a letter to lifelong friend Captain “Swede” Hazlett, Eisenhower wrote, “The Republicans ... have what I like to call Progressive Moderates

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Brig. Gen. B. G. Chynoweth, July 20, 1954, Eisenhower Library, Whitman Name Series, Box 5, Folder: “Chynoweth, Brig. Gen., B. G.”

and the Conservative Rightists. However, these two groups often work in unison on important matters, notably national security, taxes, and farm legislation, and so on.”⁷⁸ This ability to move past differences, however, was “overshadowed” by public intra-party conflicts that plagued Eisenhower during the 1952 campaign and throughout his administration.⁷⁹ One of Eisenhower’s early tests as party leader came as Senator Joseph McCarthy’s efforts to root out communists, or sympathizers, in the government and Army. Eisenhower planned a public defense of George C. Marshall, former Chief of Staff and his mentor, during a 1952 campaign stop in Wisconsin, but cut it at the suggestion of advisers. McCarthy’s actions continued, and moderate Republicans grew tired of McCarthy’s tactics, but conservatives remained committed to the communist hunter. Members of the GOP wanted Eisenhower to intervene, utilizing the power of his office to silence McCarthy, but he did not want to diminish his office by stooping to McCarthy’s level. The president decided to let events unfold, with Senate Republicans eventually censuring McCarthy in 1954. Eisenhower lamented the fact that the party’s clashes “have come to mean ‘Republicanism’ to far too many people.”⁸⁰ Eisenhower knew that as president he represented the GOP and that he, first and foremost, could alter perceptions of the party.

Even before Eisenhower made it into the White House he sought to correct the fractured state of his party. After receiving word that he would represent the GOP in the 1952 election, Eisenhower paid a brief visit to his former opponent, Senator Taft.⁸¹ Despite representing different wings of their party and continuing to disagree on certain policies, particularly

⁷⁸ Dwight D. Eisenhower to E. E. Hazlett, December 8, 1954, Eisenhower Library, Whitman Name Series, Box 17, Folder: “Hazlett, Swede 1954 (1).”

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 45.

international affairs, the foes became friends.⁸² Eisenhower once described Taft as his “principal adviser on all matters affecting labor.”⁸³ Before Taft died in July 1953, the senator proved especially helpful in rallying Republicans to support legislation. Taft’s assistance gave Eisenhower the chance to use the slim congressional majority the GOP secured in 1952 — by one vote in the Senate and six in the House.⁸⁴

Members of the right and left resisted many of the legislative proposals that Eisenhower supported, but he did make inroads with Congress. On October 26, 1953, Bryce Harlow, congressional liaison, prepared a memo for Eisenhower that evaluated the president’s performance to date. In less than a year, Eisenhower endured only a few defeats, and Harlow noted that

Congress approved, without destructive compromises, almost everything you asked, including such historic Republican abominations as foreign aid, admission of aliens, extension of excess profits tax, public housing, extension of [R]eciprocal [T]rade [A]greements Act, and increased authority for the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff. Many Republican Congressmen who for years have voted against such programs supported them — and you — this year.⁸⁵

Harlow’s report may appear to spin matters for Eisenhower, but he followed up the positive report with a frank discussion of the persistence of the voters’ negative view of Republicans. To remedy this problem, Harlow suggested that Eisenhower and the GOP pursue popular economic initiatives, including the expansion of social security, and “publicize such actions far and wide so Mr. John Q. Public will lose his fear of being despoiled by the Republican Party.”⁸⁶ And indeed,

⁸² Chester J. Pach, Jr. and Elmo Richardson, *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower*, rev. ed. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991), 51.

⁸³ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Arthur Eisenhower, September 11, 1953, Eisenhower Library, Whitman Name Series, Box 11, Folder: “Eisenhower, Arthur (3).”

⁸⁴ Pach and Richardson, *Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower*, 51; Gary W. Reichard, *The Reaffirmation of Republicanism: Eisenhower and the Eighty-Third Congress* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975), 14.

⁸⁵ Bryce Harlow, Memorandum for the President, October 26, 1953, Eisenhower Library, Whitman Name Series, Box 12, Folder: “Eisenhower, Milton 1952 thru 1953 (2).”

⁸⁶ Bryce Harlow’s complete remarks on the voters’ distrust of the Republicans, primarily in regards to economics, are: “Millions still believe that ‘Republican’ is synonymous with ‘economic royalists,’ ‘Wall Street,’ ‘Big Business,’

millions would benefit from a piece of legislation that passed during the next session of Congress — the Social Security Amendments Act. When Eisenhower signed the bill on September 1, 1954, nearly ten million Americans became newly eligible for Social Security benefits.⁸⁷ Citizens celebrated the expansion of the popular program, but the positive reaction did not translate to votes for Republicans a few weeks later in the November 1954 midterm elections. When the votes were tallied, Republicans went from a six seat edge in the House to a thirty vote disadvantage, and the one vote controlling the Senate switched from the GOP to the Democrats.⁸⁸

The returns in the 1954 midterm elections served as a major indicator that the electorate's support for Eisenhower diverged from support for other Republicans. On the surface, the wins in the 1952 presidential and congressional elections marked progress for the GOP. However, analysis of the numbers of how many voters supported Eisenhower versus other Republicans demonstrated a clear gap between the two. Across the country, Eisenhower enjoyed a greater margin of victory than other members of the GOP.⁸⁹ Although voters expressed a willingness to cross party lines and vote for Eisenhower, this did not translate to support for other Republicans. Concerned about how the party would fare when his name did not appear on the ballot, Eisenhower crisscrossed the nation and delivered nearly forty speeches to support fellow

'monopolies,' 'depression.' This is the psychological residue of 20 years of skillful political propaganda of the New and Fair Deals. The Administration has yet to persuade the American people to the contrary, and some issues have been effectively exploited by Democrats in recent months to keep that belief active — such as rural electrification, public power, increases in interest rates, hard money, the 'millionaire Cabinet,' tidelands, decline in farm income, and lack of Federal domination in the drought crisis. The unhappy truth is that the country will readily buy these arguments, because the Republican Party is still relatively unpopular as plainly shown by the Congressional results in the last election. Mainly this unpopularity stems from the belief of the average citizen that the Party doesn't give a tinker's dam about him and will sacrifice him on the altar of the almighty dollar. If this belief is not eradicated before November 1954, I think the Republican Party will be decisively repudiated at the polls, and many in the country may tend to agree with the writer of the enclosed letter that you have been captured by forces of reaction." See *ibid.*

⁸⁷ Wagner, *Eisenhower Republicanism*, 12.

⁸⁸ Pach and Richardson, *Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower*, 72.

⁸⁹ Reichard, *Reaffirmation of Republicanism*, 6.

Republicans. Those efforts may have minimized Republican losses, but the fact became clear — a wide swatch of voters hesitated to support the GOP.⁹⁰

What changed from 1952 to 1954 to cause the Republican losses? Above all, a recession prompted voters to carefully monitor the position of each party on fiscal matters. Historians credit voters' faith in Democrats to build a strong economy as a key factor in the 1954 midterm elections. For Eisenhower, the results meant that unfortunately, Harlow's prediction from October 1953 — "the average citizen [believes] that the Party doesn't give a tinker's dam about him and will sacrifice him on the altar of the almighty dollar. If this belief is not eradicated before November 1954, I think the Republican Party will be decisively repudiated at the polls" — came true.⁹¹ After November 1954, the GOP had two sets of election returns that indicated that voters liked Ike, but not necessarily other members of his party.

The outcome of the 1954 midterm elections prompted Eisenhower to change how he handled state and GOP matters. The president's "middle way" philosophy guided him as he shifted from working with his own party to congressional Democrats. Differences between the parties held up legislation, and Eisenhower grew frustrated with the partisan bickering that seemed to supersede protecting the interests of the country.⁹² If Eisenhower needed another reason to strengthen the GOP and help the Republicans win in 1956, he had one. When not pulled in two different directions by Congress, Eisenhower devoted time to his role as leader of the Republican Party.

As the face of a conflicted, long-defeated party, Eisenhower faced an almost insurmountable task when he joined the GOP and determined the Republicans needed to move

⁹⁰ Pach and Richardson, *Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower*, 72.

⁹¹ Harlow, Memorandum for the President, October 26, 1953, Eisenhower Library, Whitman Name Series, Box 12, Folder: "Eisenhower, Milton 1952 thru 1953 (2)."

⁹² Pach and Richardson, *Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower*, 106.

closer to the middle. However, Eisenhower realized that his presidency could serve as a turning point for the party. Before the losses in 1954, Eisenhower received a message from Edward J. Bermingham, a Columbia University trustee and member of the Republican National Committee, which remarked that “the sorry congressional results achieved in 1952, and hardly better in 1950, are convincing that the planning and strategy of the committee must be completely overhauled. We lost consistently for 20 years because we had been working from the same utterly antiquated pattern.”⁹³ Eisenhower concurred with Bermingham’s assessment that the GOP needed to change. As a result, Eisenhower embarked on efforts to realign the party with the “middle way.”

The strategy that Eisenhower developed for the GOP hinged on two factors — ideology and organization. Only when the latter component garnered strength for the former could the Republicans have a coherent party structure that supported a specific perspective. Eisenhower articulated this plan to friend and CBS president William Paley in 1956:

I agree thoroughly with your thesis that if the Republican Party is to establish itself as a dominant influence in American life, it must do two things. First, it must adopt and live by a philosophy of government that I call ‘Modern Republicanism’ and it must convince all America that it does live and act by this philosophy. Secondly, it must organize itself far better than it has in the past, particularly at the precinct, district and county levels.⁹⁴

By following this approach, Eisenhower hoped to begin the reconfiguration of the GOP at its core, not the top of the organization. Given that he was elected with the assistance of Citizens for Eisenhower groups, a network to reach out to voters on the ground level already existed. Turning support for the president into support for the GOP proved difficult, and Eisenhower relied upon the pre-existing support groups. Although separate from the Republican National Committee, pro-Eisenhower associations could supplement the GOP’s official campaign activities.

⁹³ Edward J. Bermingham to Dwight D. Eisenhower, March 27, 1953, Eisenhower Library, Whitman Name Series, Box 2, Folder: “Bermingham, E. J. 1952 thru 1954 (3).”

⁹⁴ Dwight D. Eisenhower to William Paley, November 14, 1956, Eisenhower Library, Whitman Name Series, Box 25, Folder: “Paley, William.”

Strengthening the ranks of the Republicans entailed more than boosting the party's numbers. Leadership, from the local to the national level, needed to be developed. Acutely aware of the limitations imposed on him by the twenty-second amendment's term limits and his own mortality, Eisenhower wanted to clearly identify the next chief representative of moderate Republicanism. Furthermore, the president wanted to cultivate a whole group of leaders, thereby ensuring that the GOP would continue to follow the "middle way" for generations. One key improvement Eisenhower oversaw was training and supporting party leaders. Through different publications and occasional workshops, top Republicans worked to establish a more cohesive identity for the GOP and strengthen connections within the organization.⁹⁵

Despite some progress, Eisenhower's efforts as party leader while president yielded limited results for the Republicans. Democrats remained in control of Congress for the last six years of Eisenhower's presidency, and the right continued to reject the "middle way." The efforts to restructure the Republican Party during the 1950s have received scant attention, largely due to Eisenhower's ultimate failure to establish a moderate party, but that did not mean that his efforts had no effect on the GOP. In *Presidential Party Building*, political scientist Daniel Galvin notes that "while Eisenhower was not 'successful' in the sense that he did not produce the new Modern Republican consensus he sought, his party-building efforts proved to be of real consequence for the Republican Party's organizational development."⁹⁶ Eisenhower may not have accomplished his ultimate goal of a moderate GOP, but he did give his faction a fighting chance against the increasingly powerful conservatives. After all, Nixon's ties to Eisenhower would factor into the 1968 election, and Nixon pledged to win for the ailing Ike. Given the state of the Republican

⁹⁵ Galvin, *Presidential Party Building*, 50–69.

⁹⁶ Galvin, *Presidential Party Building*, 44.

Party when Eisenhower joined in 1952, his ability to leave behind a party with improved organization merits recognition.

The link between Eisenhower and moderate Republicanism during the 1950s proved close, with the thirty-fourth president's name becoming synonymous with the perspective. If Eisenhower had had his way, however, Americans would have considered him merely one of several leading moderates. Certain that the "middle way" was the best path for America, Eisenhower committed to the perspective in 1952. Some followed the president, but other Republicans preferred to stay on the right side of the road during the 1950s. Six years of a Democratic Congress further strained the GOP during the Eisenhower administration. Conservatives' disapproval of Eisenhower only escalated after 1952, and reached the point of frequent public questioning of their party's president by 1960. Undeterred, Eisenhower remained focused on shaping the future of the Republican Party, which he hoped would start with Richard Nixon winning the 1960 presidential election.

Chapter 2 - Tearing an Elephant Apart: The Fight to Control the Post-Eisenhower GOP

One of President Eisenhower's central motives for encouraging Republicans to follow the "middle way" was the long-term viability of the GOP. Moderate Republicanism, in Eisenhower's mind, would attract new voters to the party. If no one emerged to lead the moderates after Eisenhower, though, his efforts would be in vain. Amid the files Eisenhower left behind is an undated page that features doodles, a drawing of a piece of pie, and three lists. On the left hand side of the page, Eisenhower listed "Possibilities Those I'd support actively." On the right side, three names are written under "Disqualified, by family, religion or [unintelligible] or age." And underneath the two lists, Eisenhower included the ideal roster for "Americans for Modern Republicanism A. M. R." Between his drawings, Eisenhower recorded who he wanted to shape the future of the GOP, and Richard Nixon's name appears at the top of the "Possibilities" and "A. M. R." lists.⁹⁷ Because the page is undated, it is unknown at which stage of his presidency Eisenhower jotted down these thoughts. But regardless, the lists demonstrate Eisenhower's faith in Nixon's ability to take the elephant's reins and lead the next generation of Republicans.

The twenty-second amendment, passed after Roosevelt's unprecedented presidency, prohibited Eisenhower from running for a third term, and the 1960 presidential election would test moderate Republicanism and the GOP's ability to win the White House without Eisenhower. The outgoing president believed that his vice president was capable of succeeding him and extending the administration's central policies for at least four more years. Nixon had originally

⁹⁷ Dwight D. Eisenhower, Undated Memo, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas, (hereafter Eisenhower Library), Eisenhower, Dwight D.: Papers as President of the United States, 1953-61 (Ann Whitman File), Name Series, (hereafter Whitman Name Series), Box 9, Folder: "DDE Personal (2)."

landed on Eisenhower's ticket because of his conservative ties, but, by 1960, those had faded. Historian Jonathan Schoenwald described Nixon as "more politician than man, a chameleon eager to please," and David Farber noted that during the 1960 campaign "Nixon did not run as a conservative. He hewed to the moderate Republicanism of President Eisenhower."⁹⁸ Members of the right wing recognized Nixon's shift to the middle and looked to the man who had stepped into Senator Robert Taft's role as the GOP's conservative leader — Senator Barry Goldwater. Aided by the success of his ghostwritten *The Conscience of a Conservative*, Goldwater emerged as a challenger for the 1960 nomination.⁹⁹ After Nixon narrowly lost the election to Senator John F. Kennedy, members of the right sought to build even more support for Goldwater with an eye toward the 1964 nomination. The outcome of Nixon's presidential campaign, according to Michael Bowen, "marked the final turning point in the sixteen-year-old factional conflict and signaled the ascension of the strong conservatives."¹⁰⁰ Moderate Republicanism had failed to take root as Eisenhower hoped, and the ideological future of the GOP appeared uncertain after 1960. If Eisenhower wanted the Republicans to stay with the "middle way," he would have to work on behalf of the GOP throughout his supposed retirement years.

Historians drop Eisenhower from the Republicans' story after he leaves office in January 1961. In most analyses, Eisenhower's political life ended the moment Kennedy took office, thereby ignoring years of work done as the GOP's elder statesman. "With Eisenhower having retreated to the remoteness of Gettysburg," historian Geoffrey Kabaservice wrote, for example,

⁹⁸ Jonathan M. Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing: The Rise of Modern American Conservatism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 5. David Farber, *The Rise and Fall of Modern American Conservatism: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 92.

⁹⁹ Farber, *Rise and Fall of Modern American Conservatism*, 89–93.

¹⁰⁰ Michael Bowen, *The Roots of Modern Conservatism: Dewey, Taft, and the Battle for the Soul of the Republican Party* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 198.

“the party was adrift” when Kennedy moved into the White House.¹⁰¹ At the conclusion of his study of conservatism, Bowen stated: “From late 1960 through November 1964, the conservatives took advantage of Eisenhower’s exit from public life and a general change among the liberal Republicans to take control of the Republican apparatus.”¹⁰² Yet, as this chapter shows, the general may have retired, but he did not stage a retreat. After 1960, as Kabaservice noted, “the stage was set for civil war between the party’s moderate and conservative factions,” but Eisenhower does not receive credit for serving as a leader of the moderates’ fight.¹⁰³ Beneath the radar even to many historians today, Eisenhower settled into the role of elder statesman and quietly worked with the upper levels of the party to encourage potential moderate candidates and continue to push the Republicans toward the “middle way.”

Eisenhower moved into the White House a reluctant politician, but, by the time he left in 1961, the general had turned into a party leader. The ex-president did not want to witness the downfall of moderate Republicanism, and this campaign would define the latter half of his political life. This chapter will first analyze Eisenhower’s role in Nixon’s campaigns, first for president in 1960, and then for Governor of California in 1962. For Eisenhower, a Nixon presidency would have helped the moderates sustain the momentum that they had developed during the 1950s. After Nixon’s failed gubernatorial run in 1962, Eisenhower turned his focus to the 1964 presidential campaign. The chapter will then analyze Eisenhower’s behind the scenes efforts to have a moderate Republican receive the GOP’s nomination. Still, when the conservative Barry Goldwater became the party’s nominee, Eisenhower, whom Goldwater had criticized publicly, tried to assist the candidate for the benefit of the GOP. Even though he

¹⁰¹ Geoffrey Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin: The Downfall of Moderation and the Destruction of the Republican Party, From Eisenhower to the Tea Party* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 56.

¹⁰² Bowen, *Roots of Modern Conservatism*, 199.

¹⁰³ Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin*, 30.

disagreed with Goldwater, Eisenhower, committed to his role as party leader, respected the outcome of the primaries and the nominating convention, and endorsed his party's rightful candidate. Eisenhower recognized the tumultuous nature of this period and sought to keep the GOP together, but ultimately he failed to halt the shift in power to the conservatives.

Eisenhower, Nixon, and the Uncertain Sixties

Eisenhower suffered from a heart attack in September 1955, and although he recovered by the end of the fall, this event signaled the fragility of the president's health and reminded Republicans that he would not always be around to lead them to victory. During the president's recovery, Vice President Nixon stepped in to assist with the president's responsibilities, which included leading meetings of the cabinet and the National Security Council. However, as Republicans looked to the future and Eisenhower's bid for reelection, the fact that Nixon stood just a heartbeat away from the presidency assumed greater significance. The president's chief of staff, Sherman Adams, and the secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, ranked among the top Republicans worried about the prospect of Nixon taking over for Eisenhower. Nixon had cooperated with Eisenhower thus far, but moderate officials remained skeptical of Nixon's conservative reputation. More so than in 1952, Eisenhower's running mate for 1956 needed to be able to quickly and effectively take on the role of president. Moderates' concerns about Nixon lingered after Eisenhower's health crisis, and Eisenhower even considered moving Nixon from the vice presidency to a cabinet position in 1956. For all of Eisenhower's doubts, though, he also had examples of Nixon effectively working with Republicans.¹⁰⁴ When Nixon remained on the ticket, the decision put him on the path to the Oval Office. Either Nixon would take

¹⁰⁴ Chester J. Pach, Jr. and Elmo Richardson, *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower*, rev. ed. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991), 114–19.

Eisenhower's place in an emergency or he would likely receive the GOP's presidential nomination in 1960. Nixon, more so than any other Republican, enjoyed the status of heir apparent as the GOP looked to the future.

Especially after the 1956 election, Nixon himself worked to position himself as the GOP's next presidential candidate. Despite the vice president's history with the conservative wing, he sought to align himself with the popular moderate, Eisenhower.¹⁰⁵ Reporter Lyle Wilson noted Nixon's efforts in May 1957, describing Nixon's repeated use of "we" in a recent speech as "Mr. Nixon deliberately t[ying] himself in that speech to the Eisenhower administration. T[ying] himself and soak[ing] the knot in water so that it will not become untied."¹⁰⁶ Nixon's decision to link himself to Eisenhower "probably has cost him some warmth and friendship among the large body of Republican conservatives," but, according to Wilson, the move helped establish Nixon as "Mr. Eisenhower's boy—provided the President wants him three years hence."¹⁰⁷ Wilson's final comment would prove prophetic, as Eisenhower's efforts to help Nixon win would unravel in 1960 courtesy of an offhand remark about Nixon's contribution to the administration.

Eisenhower approached the Nixon 1960 campaign as an extension of his efforts to strengthen modern Republicanism. A key element of both efforts was attracting new voters and closing the gap between registered Democrats and Republicans. In December 1958, Eisenhower and Nixon collaborated on an action plan not only for the campaign but also for the GOP. The

¹⁰⁵ On the subject of the changes in Richard Nixon's affiliation during his political career, historian Geoffrey Kabaservice wrote: "During his long political career, Richard Nixon inspired countless attempts to determine his ideological and psychological identity. Was Nixon a liberal, a conservative, a moderate, or none — or all — of those things? Were there discernible principles and ideals at his core, or an echoing void, or a writing mass of darkness? There can be no definitive answer to the quest for the 'real' Nixon, but perhaps the best one-word description of him is: Republican. No one better personified the party's varied elements, its internal struggles and contradictions, its noble ideals and sordid impulses, its bright hopes and bitter resentments" (Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin*, 252).

¹⁰⁶ Lyle C. Wilson, "Nixon Chooses Sides among Republicans," *Oxnard Press-Courier*, May 31, 1957.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

duo analyzed “Republican difficulties and failures,” in Eisenhower’s words, and devised a six-point plan for success.¹⁰⁸ Among the priorities listed were initiatives to analyze the results of the 1958 elections to determine the GOP’s weak points, all the way down to the county level. Eisenhower and Nixon also recognized the need to align the views of the president, Republican National Committee, and congressional or senatorial committees, otherwise GOP officials would risk contradicting one another. Ultimately, however, the work hinged upon whether or not the GOP had, in Eisenhower’s opinion, “the finest possible candidates.”¹⁰⁹ For Eisenhower, Nixon was the GOP’s top prospect for the 1960 campaign.

Although Eisenhower believed in Nixon, elements of the GOP — especially conservatives who did not want moderate Republicanism to continue — opposed the vice president’s candidacy. As 1960 neared, Eisenhower sought to limit intra-party conflict before it cost Nixon either the nomination or the election. Not long after Eisenhower and Nixon devised their plans for the campaign, the president wrote to his friend Clifford Roberts about the GOP’s issues. “Dick and I have found that everyone seems to have his own individualistic ideas as to what is the most important thing for the Republican Party now to do,” Eisenhower wrote in December 1958.¹¹⁰ To court fellow Republicans, Eisenhower planned to meet with “a few Party stalwarts” and “a couple professional pollsters” with the ultimate goal of creating “some kind of outside committee to investigate past difficulties and defects and to help develop and design a forward-looking program.”¹¹¹ Rather than fighting to maintain the GOP’s traditional image as

¹⁰⁸ Memorandum for the Record, December 6, 1958, Eisenhower Library, Whitman Name Series, Box 26, Folder: “Political Committee – 1959 (1).”

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Clifford Roberts, December 19, 1958, Eisenhower Library, Whitman Name Series, Box 26, Folder: “Political Committee – 1959 (1).”

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

the party of small government, Eisenhower sought to foster an image of the Republicans as a forward-looking party uninterested in reversing the New Deal.

For conservatives, the platform Eisenhower pursued and encouraged Nixon to adopt clashed with Republican ideology. Faced with the prospect of at least four more years of a moderate Republican president, some conservatives opposed Nixon's candidacy. The differences among Republicans even permeated the Eisenhower family. On May 2, 1960, almost three months before Nixon received the GOP's nomination, the president's sister-in-law, Lucy Eisenhower, wrote to inform him that "we here on the West Coast are extremely concerned and disappointed in Dick Nixon's liberal me-too attitude as compared to that of the Democratic candidates. We are asking ourselves, 'The candidates are all so liberal and alike, what difference does it make which one we vote for?'"¹¹² Mrs. Eisenhower's remarks are representative of conservatism's strength in the West and the right's assessment of Nixon. Conservatives remembered Nixon's anticommunist work during his senatorial career and respected his foreign affairs work, which included challenging Nikita Khrushchev in the famous 1959 "kitchen debate" in Moscow. However, Nixon's support for Social Security, international aid programs, and civil rights (to a moderate degree) kept him distanced from the right.¹¹³ For conservatives, Nixon's actions did more to prove his affiliation with the moderates than their wing of the GOP.

Upset by Nixon's moderate platform, conservatives looked elsewhere for a candidate. After she told Eisenhower about conservatives' issues with Nixon, Lucy Eisenhower proposed Senator Barry Goldwater as an alternative candidate. Even if Goldwater did not receive the presidential nomination, Lucy explained, having him as Nixon's running mate would serve to

¹¹² Lucy Eisenhower to Dwight D. Eisenhower, May 2, 1960, Eisenhower Library, Whitman Name Series, Box 12, Folder: "Eisenhower, Edgar – 1959–60 (2)."

¹¹³ Mary C. Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties: The Conservative Capture of the GOP* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 28.

balance the ticket with a moderate and a conservative.¹¹⁴ Eisenhower prepared an eight-page response to his sister-in-law's comments on the state of the GOP. In regards to Nixon though, Eisenhower kept his remarks brief, stating that "the country must be made to see the difference between Nixon and any one of his prospective opponents and that it should rally to the cause of the policies and philosophies that he espouses."¹¹⁵ By the 1960 election, Nixon had moved far enough away from the right that Eisenhower considered him to be the best candidate for the GOP and the country.

Eisenhower's support for Nixon would be questioned just a few weeks later, though, because with just one news conference, Eisenhower managed to set back the work that he, Nixon, and other moderates had done for years. In August 1960, a reporter asked Eisenhower to "cite one major Nixon idea he had adopted," and the president replied by stating: "If you give me a week, I might think of one. I can't remember."¹¹⁶ Associated Press reporter James Marlow described the moment, noting that Eisenhower "said he alone has made the decisions since becoming president. He did say he considered Nixon a trusted adviser."¹¹⁷ Even though Eisenhower did mention Nixon's advisory role, Marlow concluded that the remarks took away one of Nixon's key campaigning points.¹¹⁸ Nixon used his time as vice president to argue that he, not Kennedy, was prepared for the presidency. When the president struck down the idea that Nixon played a major role in policy decisions, the vice president lost an edge he had against Kennedy. Democrats made sure to repeat Eisenhower's words throughout the rest of the

¹¹⁴ Lucy Eisenhower to Dwight D. Eisenhower, May 2, 1960, Eisenhower Library, Whitman Name Series, Box 12, Folder: "Eisenhower, Edgar – 1959–60 (2)."

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ James Marlow, "Campaign Themes of Two Candidates Much Alike," *Ellensburg Daily Record*, August 29, 1960, 6.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

campaign, including a television spot, and often reminded voters of the president's doubts about Nixon.

Why did the president answer questions about his vice president with those remarks? Historian Lewis Gould writes that the response “may have reflected some of Eisenhower's private doubts about his vice president.”¹¹⁹ In other words, the remark might have been a case of Eisenhower slipping up in public and revealing his lack of full faith in Nixon. Then again, as Jim Newton argues in *Eisenhower: The White House Years*, historians may misinterpret the exchange. In fact, Eisenhower simply may have been joking. Newton notes, “Ike delivered that with a smile and insisted afterward that he'd been joshing, not that he had delivered the withering insult that it appeared.”¹²⁰ Regardless of intention, Eisenhower's words haunted Nixon, particularly after Kennedy won the election.

Rather than severing political ties after 1960, Eisenhower continued to work with Nixon, offering advice and support to his former vice president. The first major test of the altered, post-White House dynamic between the two occurred when Nixon contemplated a gubernatorial run in California. With the future of not only Nixon but also the GOP in mind, Eisenhower offered his thoughts on the subject in a September, 1961 letter to Nixon, writing:

If you run and win, as I believe you can, you offset to a large extent the razor-thin margin by which you lost the Presidential race last November. Finally, I see no reason why, if you are elected Governor, you cannot, if you wish, make the 1964 Presidential race — and I think you would be in a far more powerful position as Governor, controlling a large delegation, than otherwise.¹²¹

As Eisenhower encouraged Nixon to run for governor in 1962, he also pushed Nixon to stay politically active nationally and to remain a viable (and moderate) presidential candidate. If

¹¹⁹ Gould, *Grand Old Party*, 347.

¹²⁰ Jim Newton, *Eisenhower: The White House Years* (New York: Doubleday, 2011), 324.

¹²¹ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Richard M. Nixon, September 11, 1961, Eisenhower Library, Eisenhower, Dwight D.: Papers, Post-Presidential, 1961–69, Special Name Series, (hereafter Post-Presidential Special Name Series), Box 14, Folder: “Nixon, Richard M., 1961.”

Nixon could follow up his narrow defeat in 1960 with a victory in California in 1962, Eisenhower insisted, the former vice president stood a chance of winning the Republican nomination two years later, particularly against the perceived firebrand conservative Goldwater.

Despite having Eisenhower's support, Nixon lost California's gubernatorial election in 1962. The divisions in the GOP and a popular incumbent, Democrat Pat Brown, proved too formidable.¹²² Before the campaign ended, the former president explained that "I am vitally interested in Dick's election and I do wish that there were something more that I could do, but one individual cannot be everywhere at once."¹²³ Restricted by health and other commitments, however, Eisenhower could not engage in the rigorous public campaigning that might have helped Nixon achieve victory. The GOP did gain a few seats in the House in the 1962 midterm elections, but it remained the minority party. In response to these elections, Eisenhower wrote to friend Charles Jones, revealing that "actually I wouldn't be too disappointed with the over-all results of the election except for the defeat of Dick," because he believed Nixon "would have added some vitality and wisdom to the high councils of the Party."¹²⁴ Eisenhower's participation in Nixon's two early-1960s campaigns demonstrated that he considered Nixon important to the Republicans. Even though Nixon once aligned with the conservatives, he had moved to the center just enough to fall in with the top moderate Republicans. Throughout the next few years, Eisenhower's favorable opinion of Nixon persisted, and the ex-president never stopped considering Nixon's future with the GOP.

Eisenhower's Turn as the Man behind the Curtain

¹²² Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties*, 52.

¹²³ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Freeman Gosden, October 22, 1962, Eisenhower Library, Post-Presidential Special Name Series, Box 5, Folder: "Gosden, Freeman, 1962 (2)."

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

Just as Eisenhower retired and moved to Gettysburg, the civil war that Republicans managed to avoid for years finally erupted. Years of resentment and marginalization, including Eisenhower's presidency, prompted conservatives to make a grab for power after 1960. A few weeks into his retirement, Eisenhower wrote to former assistant Bryce Harlow to discuss the GOP's future. Concerned about the labels being applied to the party, Eisenhower wanted the Republicans to move away from the image of the party of the past. "The United States does not want to think of us as a complacent unimaginative and reactionary party," Eisenhower explained.¹²⁵ He then advised, "If we are too much captivated by the word 'conservative,' which in itself is a good word, we will, I fear, create an impression that will be unfortunate every time we go to the polls because of the erroneous meaning that the public is apt to read into it."¹²⁶ Given the stalemate between the moderate and conservative factions, Eisenhower recognized that Republicans needed to refine their image moving forward, or risk solidifying its status as the minority party.

Chances for the GOP's factions to collaborate diminished from 1961 onward. After the attempt to overthrow Fidel Castro's communist government in Cuba in 1961 failed with the Bay of Pigs invasion, many Republicans blamed President Kennedy. Yet Eisenhower did not escape criticism over the matter because initial plans for action against Cuba were drawn up during his presidency. After writing to Major General Wilton "Jerry" Persons about Kennedy and Cuba, Eisenhower added this postscript: "To top it all — I have a clipping of a Goldwater column that refers to the 'inept Eisenhower Administration in Cuba' affair — who is he to be such a

¹²⁵ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Bryce Harlow, February 23, 1961, Eisenhower Library, Post-Presidential Special Name Series, Box 6, Folder: "Harlow, Bryce, 1961 (4)."

¹²⁶ Ibid.

genius??”¹²⁷ Public intra-party attacks weakened the GOP and pitted the moderates against the conservatives. Goldwater did not hesitate to criticize Eisenhower, but such criticisms served to further motivate Eisenhower to halt the rise of conservatism.

Amidst the right’s efforts to build their support base, moderates organized the National Republican Citizens Committee (NRCC). This new group, established in 1962 during a meeting of Republican leaders in Pennsylvania, did not explicitly aim to promote one GOP faction or candidate over another. Rather, the NRCC emphasized recruiting efforts. Historian Kabaservice described the group “as a means of addressing the GOP’s failure to harness the energies of the grassroots citizens’ organizations that had sprouted and then been allowed to wither after the presidential elections from 1952 to 1960.”¹²⁸ Still, the organization’s efforts indicate that it favored the moderates. And yet by 1962, right-wing citizens groups thrived, but the moderate ones struggled. Eisenhower, who acted as the Honorary Chairman of the NRCC, once wrote that “the biggest job I see for the Citizens Committee is to make itself a bridge across which Independents and smart Democrats can eventually get into the Republican sector.”¹²⁹ Conservatives had no interest in adopting a program that catered to recruiting Independents or Democrats, another indication that the NRCC actually supported only certain Republicans.

Important for the present discussion, the NRCC helped Eisenhower work on his plans for the Republicans. Still committed to recruiting and identifying leaders, Eisenhower collaborated with other members of the NRCC to achieve these goals. However, working with the NRCC ultimately proved difficult for Eisenhower. Despite its stated intention of uniting the GOP, the group seemed to achieve the opposite. Conservatives, particularly Goldwater, took issue with the

¹²⁷ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Jerry Persons, September 29, 1961, Eisenhower Library, Post-Presidential Special Name Series, Box 15, Folder: “Persons, Jerry, 1961.”

¹²⁸ Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin*, 58–9.

¹²⁹ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Alfred Gruenther, July 5, 1962, Eisenhower Library, Post-Presidential Special Name Series, Box 5, Folder: “Gruenther, Alfred M., 1962.”

group, labeling it as divisive group and another moderate initiative that would ruin the party. Thus rather than helping the GOP, the NRCC only served to intensify the party's divide.¹³⁰ As a result of the mixed reaction to the NRCC, Eisenhower declined offers to join other Republican groups. In 1965, Eisenhower explained to *The New York Herald Tribune's* Walter Thayer, who helped organize the NRCC, that back in 1962 he "enthusiastically supported the idea of The Republican Citizens organization, but this was because of the complete vacuum that seemed to be developing in analyzing problems of the day and organizing Republican support for resulting conclusions."¹³¹ When the NRCC only further divided the Republicans, Eisenhower lost faith in the organization and distanced himself from other potentially detrimental efforts.

Eisenhower hoped to use initiatives like the NRCC to help the GOP achieve success in 1964, not only on the national level but also in state elections. However, an organization that ultimately favored one faction over another would not help the divided Republican Party mount successful campaigns in 1964. A few months after the founding of the NRCC, Eisenhower discussed the fractious GOP in a letter to Bryce Harlow. Despite favoring the moderate faction, Eisenhower explained his position on the impending campaign. "I would be most unhappy to see a real schism and a virtual civil war eventuate," he wrote, "we simply must remember that the Republican Party has unity on such basic things as integrity, fiscal sanity and responsible progress throughout the nation. To allow ourselves to become divided on smaller things would be bad."¹³² Rather than risk pushing the GOP's wings apart even more, Eisenhower opted to shift strategy in 1963. Stepping away from polarizing public roles, such as his prominent position with the NRCC, Eisenhower opted to work quietly with Republican strategists and candidates.

¹³⁰ Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin*, 59.

¹³¹ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Walter Thayer, July 6, 1965, Eisenhower Library, Post-Presidential Special Name Series, Box 18, Folder: "Thayer, Walter N., 1963-66 (1)."

¹³² Dwight D. Eisenhower to Bryce Harlow, February 6, 1963, Eisenhower Library, Post-Presidential Special Name Series, Box 7, Folder: "Harlow, Bryce, 1963 (3)."

After Nixon lost in 1960, Eisenhower conferred not only with his former vice president but also with other individuals who could potentially lead the GOP. One individual who caught Eisenhower's attention in 1962 was a political newcomer running for governor in Michigan—George Romney. After leaving his post as president of American Motors, Romney did not shy away from controversial projects, including a rewrite of Michigan's state constitution. The mixture of tradition and progressivism that Romney represented made him a dynamic figure within the GOP. Deeply committed to his Mormon faith, Romney acknowledged that religion influenced him, but he emphasized that he did not base decisions solely on Mormon doctrine. Romney's support for civil rights marked one issue where he differed from the church, as Mormons did not permit African Americans to be ministers until the late 1970s. As for the businesspersons who long supported the moderates, they could enjoy the opportunity to work with someone who understood the intricacies of American industry.¹³³ Moderate Republicans celebrated the new politician, and Eisenhower finally had a promising new moderate to work with.

Eisenhower never wanted the burden of leading the GOP to fall on one person's shoulders, whether his or Nixon's. Romney's emergence on the political scene offered Eisenhower the opportunity to share the leadership burden with another Republican. In the early stages of Romney's candidacy, Eisenhower reached out to the former businessman. "I have been trying to read everything you have had to say for public consumption and have been pondering some ideas of a political nature that I would like to bring to your attention," Eisenhower wrote.¹³⁴ Over the course of the letter, Eisenhower briefly discusses matters of business, voter appeal, and

¹³³ Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties*, 73.

¹³⁴ Dwight D. Eisenhower to George Romney, March 2, 1962, Eisenhower Library, Post-Presidential Special Name Series, Box 17, Folder: "Romney, George, 1962."

even religion, all in an effort to help the Republican gubernatorial candidate. On the subject of Romney's Mormon faith, Eisenhower first recalled when Romney explained to him that he was not a "strict" adherent to Mormonism.¹³⁵ The general then expressed respect for Romney's commitment, "deeply so — to the basic tenets of your Church," and did not indicate concern over Romney's electability because of his often maligned religion.¹³⁶ Eisenhower explained to Romney, "I am just so delighted to see a [n]ew face coming on the political scene, the face of a man of obvious vitality, vigor, dedication and integrity — that I have a feeling of wanting to keep in fairly close touch with you and once in a while, if you find them acceptable, send you a note to express thoughts and ideas gleaned from a short but intensive career in politics."¹³⁷

The cordial relationship that developed between Eisenhower and Romney is indicative of the political work that Eisenhower carried out during his retirement years. Even when president, he identified leadership as a potential future weakness for the Republicans. A new generation of leaders was needed for Republicanism, particularly moderate Republicanism, to thrive. Romney emerged as a key part of this effort, and an example of how Eisenhower wanted Republican leaders to have a strong local base before joining the national political scene. A great success story from one state could serve to inspire voters across the country, and that is what Eisenhower hoped would happen to Romney. "Of course you are quite well aware that if you should win by a substantial margin in Michigan you cannot fail to command a great deal of national attention and support."¹³⁸ In addition to leadership potential, Eisenhower recognized Romney as an individual who could help keep the fractured party together. Early in 1964, Eisenhower wrote Romney:

I am interested in the final paragraph of your note in which you propose to try to unite the Republican Party in Michigan. I enthusiastically agree with your last

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

clause, “I can’t see why Republicans should be squabbling and fighting so vigorously, in some instances, among themselves.” The strange thing is that some of these people seem to be unaware of the divisive influence that is inherent in the use of specific labels — liberal, conservative and so on.¹³⁹

In Romney, Eisenhower saw a leader whose goals for a strong, united GOP aligned with his own.

The 1962 midterm elections helped the Republicans identify potential participants who would factor into the 1964 campaign. With the GOP gaining two spots in the House but losing four in the Senate, the results, while not encouraging, at least indicated a competitive political scene.¹⁴⁰ Elements within the GOP even viewed the 1962 elections as a success, particularly conservatives. In the South, conservative Republicans gained seats. Nationwide, many moderates either lost — as seen in Nixon’s gubernatorial run in California — or, in the case of New York’s Governor Nelson Rockefeller, won by a narrow margin.¹⁴¹

With the right gaining momentum and the moderates losing power, Eisenhower, from 1963 onward, regularly conversed with other Republicans and carefully monitored the potential presidential candidates. The general took particular interest in several moderates — Pennsylvania’s Governor William Scranton, Governor Rockefeller of New York, and, of course, Romney. Eisenhower viewed those three men as having the greatest potential to secure a nomination for the moderates in 1964. Even though the general once told his former press secretary Jim Hagerty in mid-1963 that “he could support any of the Republican presidential candidates so far mentioned; any of them would be better than Kennedy,” Eisenhower definitely

¹³⁹ Dwight D. Eisenhower to George Romney, January 18, 1964, Eisenhower Library, Post-Presidential Special Name Series, Box 17, Folder: “Romney, George, 1963–66.”

¹⁴⁰ Gould, *Grand Old Party*, 356.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

avored certain individuals.¹⁴² During meetings with representatives for Rockefeller and Senator Goldwater, for example, Eisenhower “advised them that he is interested in policies, programs and winning.”¹⁴³ Given Rockefeller’s ties to the moderates, there was no contest for Eisenhower’s support when he was pitted against Goldwater. Even though he did not share Eisenhower’s perspective, the Republican with the most momentum as the 1964 campaign neared was Barry Goldwater.

A familiar name surfaced in 1963 and early 1964 as the moderates continued to search for a standard bearer. After a June 1963 Gallup Poll indicated that Goldwater led Rockefeller, a member of Eisenhower’s staff made a note in Eisenhower’s appointment book, “jokingly said he could run for Vice President; in a deadlock convention will turn to Dick.”¹⁴⁴ Nixon remained a part of GOP strategizing, both as a commentator and a potential candidate. Among the individuals with whom Eisenhower discussed the upcoming election, Nixon regularly appears in Eisenhower’s appointment records from this time period. The former vice president formally kept out of the campaign, though Eisenhower regarded him as a potential “dark horse” candidate.¹⁴⁵

Eisenhower and fellow moderate Republicans worked throughout the early 1960s to rally their faction. However, the right ultimately wrested power away from them. Following Goldwater’s concession to Nixon in the 1960 presidential nominating convention, conservatives

¹⁴² According to the finding aid for the Appointment Books Series, Ms. Lillian “Rusty” Brown, who was Eisenhower’s secretary from 1962 until 1967, is believed to have prepared the contents of the appointment books. However, authorship for each entry remains uncertain. Anonymous Memo, July 15, 1963, Eisenhower Library, Eisenhower, Dwight D.: Papers, Post-Presidential, 1961–69, Appointment Books Series, (hereafter Appointment Books) Box 1, Folder: “DDE Appointment Book – 1962–63 (4).”

¹⁴³ Anonymous Memo, August 30, 1963, Eisenhower Library, Appointment Books, Box 1, Folder: “DDE Appointment Book – 1962–63 (6).”

¹⁴⁴ Anonymous Memo, June 28, 1963, Eisenhower Library, Appointment Books, Box 1, Folder: “DDE Appointment Book – 1962–63 (4).”

¹⁴⁵ Anonymous Memo, June 18, 1964, Eisenhower Library, Appointment Books, Box 1, Folder: “Calls and Appointments 1964 (3).”

not only strove to build support from voters but also take control of the party's governing structure. The Republican National Committee, the official leading body of the GOP, changed hands after 1960, and moderates were removed in favor of conservatives. Even though Goldwater lost in 1960, his supporters worked to create a wave of support for the conservative that spanned from the very bottom to the very top of the GOP.¹⁴⁶ These efforts put Goldwater in position to run again in 1964. Moderates, including Eisenhower, monitored these changes within the party. Eisenhower observed the escalation of Goldwater's popularity and endured criticism from him, both while in office and after he left. The former president worked not only to see Romney or another moderate nominated in 1964 but also to prevent Goldwater's candidacy. Eisenhower needed to admit defeat though, and as head of his party embarked upon a tumultuous campaign with Goldwater once he secured the GOP's nomination.

Eisenhower v. Goldwater

Moving toward 1964, the Republican Party faced a battle between its past and present. Eisenhower and the moderates, the GOP's traditional power holders, hoped to stop losing ground to the right. Goldwater and the conservatives, however, wanted years of organizing and recruiting to lead to gaining power within the GOP. Even though Goldwater, among others, won office in 1952 on Eisenhower's coattails, not all Republicans agreed with the new president. By the time Eisenhower left office in 1961, Goldwater publicly criticized him and championed the right's platform. Goldwater's message struck a chord and his advocacy of a smaller government and greater personal choice resonated with a small but growing number of conservative voters.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties*, 105.

¹⁴⁷ Robert Mason, *The Republican Party and American Politics from Hoover to Reagan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 163.

A fresh voice calling for a return to the GOP's roots, Goldwater led the revived conservative element that had spent years fighting for greater influence.

For Eisenhower, Goldwater's ascendancy meant that conservative challenges bookended his career. First Taft and the conservatives fought the Republicans' nomination of Eisenhower in 1952, and, by 1960, Goldwater and the new members of the right rejected Eisenhower's policies. Former Eisenhower advisor Bryce Harlow once said that Goldwater supporters "never accepted Eisenhower as a Republican."¹⁴⁸ The contentious relationship between Goldwater and Eisenhower hindered the Republicans' 1964 presidential campaign. When Eisenhower failed to block Goldwater from receiving the nomination, he worked with the conservative out of obligation to the party. Goldwater's candidacy in 1964 challenged Eisenhower's efforts to strengthen moderate Republicanism and threatened the fragile unity holding the GOP together.

A central component to understanding Eisenhower and Goldwater's tumultuous relationship during the 1960s is the difference between what the two said publicly and privately. Goldwater did not hesitate to criticize Eisenhower and demonstrate to the public that the party's infighting involved leading Republicans. However, in private, Goldwater and Eisenhower attempted to work together. Throughout Eisenhower's appointment books from this era are several notations of meetings, either in person or on the phone, between the two. These meetings were tense, as evidenced by occasional notations on Eisenhower's reactions to such meetings, but the two at least took that step.¹⁴⁹ Eisenhower, meanwhile, supported Goldwater after the senator received the Republican nomination. The general lacked enthusiasm on the campaign

¹⁴⁸ Anonymous Memo, April 14, 1964, Eisenhower Library, Post-Presidential Special Name Series, Box 7, Folder: "Harlow, Bryce, 1963 (3)."

¹⁴⁹ See Eisenhower Library, Appointment Book Series.

trail, particularly when his remarks are compared to the strong comments he privately made in opposition to Goldwater.

After Goldwater's run for the presidential nomination in 1960, moderates, including Eisenhower, knew that Goldwater would be a leading contender in 1964. Eisenhower sought to limit his public efforts to find someone to nominate in 1964 other than Goldwater, but the NRCC complicated that effort. Goldwater did not hesitate to share his disapproval of the group and argue that the NRCC contributed to the intra-party tension.¹⁵⁰ After the founding of the NRCC, Eisenhower used a letter to vent some of his frustration. Upset by the GOP's splintering and criticism of his limited schedule, Eisenhower wrote to friend Charles Jones in July 1962 that "all this is complicated this morning by an outburst from Goldwater."¹⁵¹ "I am getting awfully sick of him," Eisenhower wrote.¹⁵² He continued,

I'm beginning to feel that he is nursing this one ambition — to get the Republican nomination for the Presidency as the crowning achievement of his career. I am quite certain that he has no illusions he could be elected. But regardless of his intentions and motives, what is really annoying is that he wants to set himself up as the single authority and guiding voice for the Republican Party.¹⁵³

After directly criticizing Goldwater, Eisenhower concluded his letter by revealing, "Sometimes I think it is almost hopeless to get Republicans working reasonably well together."¹⁵⁴

Even before the campaign really started, Eisenhower resisted working with Goldwater and the conservatives, let alone entertaining the thought that Goldwater might receive the party's nomination in 1964.

¹⁵⁰ Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties*, 57.

¹⁵¹ Dwight Eisenhower to Charles S. Jones, July 3, 1962, Eisenhower Library, Post-Presidential Special Name Series, Box 10, Folder: "Jones, Charles S., 1962."

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

Despite Eisenhower assisting moderate candidates, Goldwater continued to move toward the nomination as the campaign progressed in 1963 and 1964. Given Goldwater's willingness to criticize Eisenhower, the senator's tough fight with fellow potential Republican nominees only intensified as the primaries approached. The tone of the campaign troubled Eisenhower, and in an October 31, 1963 letter, he confided to Major General Persons, "I am not sure that the early start which the Republicans are getting on the 1964 convention is the best thing for the Party. I'm afraid that they are going to cut each other up so badly that all Mr. Kennedy will have to do is sit on the side lines and laugh."¹⁵⁵ Republicans managed to overcome factional differences in the past presidential campaigns, but even appearing united proved difficult. A major setback occurred when Goldwater managed to win the California primary. Eisenhower reportedly then said: "We have lost a major battle and may be a decisive one. I don't see how with this man we can carry more than ½ the states."¹⁵⁶ With California going to Goldwater, the chaotic field turned decisively in the conservative's favor.

After Goldwater secured the nomination, Eisenhower worked to help his fellow Republican. More willing to communicate with Goldwater once he officially represented the GOP as the presidential candidate, Eisenhower took interest in improving Goldwater's polarizing image. During a candid phone conversation two weeks after Goldwater received the GOP's nomination on July 15th, the general told him that "some people feel that those surrounding you have horns and tails and will cut down everyone who doesn't have the same horns and tails."¹⁵⁷ The imagery, while colorful, does capture the negative image attached to Goldwater and his

¹⁵⁵ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Jerry Persons, October 31, 1963, Eisenhower Library, Post-Presidential Special Name Series, Box 15, Folder: "Persons, Jerry, 1963-66."

¹⁵⁶ Anonymous Memo, June 4, 1964, Eisenhower Library, Appointment Books, Box 1, Folder: "Calls and Appointments 1964 (3)."

¹⁵⁷ Anonymous Memo, July 29, 1964, Eisenhower Library, Appointment Books, Box 1, Folder: "Calls and Appointments 1964 (4)."

campaign. In an effort to seek a remedy to the GOP's public relations problems, Eisenhower consulted his former press secretary Jim Hagerty and William Paley of CBS on August 3, 1964. The primary conclusions Eisenhower reached with Hagerty were that "many people [were] very trouble[d] about voting for Goldwater" and that improvement would only happen after taking "some rather dramatic steps."¹⁵⁸ The conversation with Paley reached similar conclusions. After Eisenhower said, "Can you give me any rationalization? I am bewildered," Paley told the general, "Good deal going on that is disturbing," and ultimately said that Goldwater needed to exercise more caution with his public remarks.¹⁵⁹ Eisenhower's concerns about Goldwater persisted, as reflected by an exchange on August 21, 1964 with Congressman Walter Judd (R-Minn.). "He isn't a very profound man or deep," Eisenhower said, "he is better than what we have got [but] we have to remember that in some things he doesn't think things through."¹⁶⁰ Judd responded to Eisenhower's thoughts on Goldwater by explaining, "I told him 'we have to get to the point of selling you not always defending you.'" ¹⁶¹ The efforts of Eisenhower and other Republicans fell short, as Goldwater's public image remained polarizing and unappealing to some voters. As Nixon told Eisenhower, Goldwater "has not been able to get people excited," and that lack of enthusiasm resulted in a lack of votes in November.¹⁶²

Exchanges between Goldwater and Eisenhower demonstrate that while the two listened to what the other said, and Eisenhower sought to counsel Goldwater on administrative and policy concerns, the latter often did nothing more than listen to the general's advice. On one occasion,

¹⁵⁸ Anonymous Memo, August 3, 1964, Eisenhower Library, Appointment Books, Box 1, Folder: "Calls and Appointments 1964 (5)."

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Anonymous Memo, August 21, 1964, Eisenhower Library, Appointment Books, Box 1, Folder: "Calls and Appointments 1964 (5)."

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Anonymous Memo, September 8, 1964, Eisenhower Library, Appointment Books, Box 1, Folder: "Calls and Appointments 1964 (6)."

the general addressed the subject of Goldwater's running mate in a conversation with Governor Scranton. A member of Eisenhower's staff recorded the exchange, writing in the general's appointment book, "[Goldwater] came to me about the Vice Presidency — I gave him several names — yours, Romney, Judd, Taft, Frelinghuysen. BG said Frelinghuysen was to the left. I always thought of him as a conservative. But it was Miller period."¹⁶³ With the presidential nomination out of the question, Eisenhower at least hoped to have a moderate Republican run with Goldwater, but the head of the Republican National Committee, New York Congressman William E. Miller, got the call instead.¹⁶⁴ As for Goldwater's stance on important issues, Eisenhower wanted the nominee to clarify his position on civil rights and tried to advise him on national security concerns.¹⁶⁵ Even after he realized that Goldwater took little to no action based on his suggestions, Eisenhower continued to offer advice to the GOP's candidate.

In part due to efforts to cooperate with Goldwater, Eisenhower encountered challenges from fellow moderates. Throughout the campaign, Eisenhower heard from individuals unhappy with Goldwater who believed that if the ex-president had wanted to, he could have spoken up and changed who represented the Republicans. Eisenhower resisted and did not interfere with Goldwater's candidacy, despite his personal reservations. One of Eisenhower's advisers wrote that "any overt attempt on General Ike's part to abdicate his neutral position and engage in a stop-Goldwater movement would be sadly deplored."¹⁶⁶ Even though some viewed Eisenhower

¹⁶³ Anonymous Memo, August 3, 1964, Eisenhower Library, Appointment Books, Box 1, Folder: "Calls and Appointments 1964 (5)."

¹⁶⁴ Gould, *Grand Old Party*, 364.

¹⁶⁵ Anonymous Memo, August 4, 1964, Eisenhower Library, Appointment Books, Box 1, Folder: "Calls and Appointments 1964 (5);" Anonymous Memo, September 8, 1964, Eisenhower Library, Appointment Books, Box 1, Folder: "Calls and Appointments 1964 (6)."

¹⁶⁶ William E. Robinson to Ellis D. Slater, June 25, 1964, Eisenhower Library, Post-Presidential Special Name Series, Box 17, Folder: "Robinson, William E. 1963-66 (2)."

as the only Republican who had the power to stop Goldwater, Eisenhower and his advisers knew that he could not utilize that power, regardless of how much they wanted to.

Eisenhower's name did not appear on any ballots in 1964, but the party leader worked hard on behalf of the GOP's candidates. Stuck between the factions, Eisenhower hoped not only to keep the party together but also win back the White House. Kennedy's assassination ultimately shifted the 1964 election in Lyndon Johnson's favor, however, and even these unique circumstances did not spare Eisenhower from criticism. "I have been busy answering letters to many who now — curiously enough," Eisenhower wrote to George Humphrey, "are blaming me for Goldwater's defeat. Some accuse me of supporting Johnson and the Democrats."¹⁶⁷ None of the decisions that Eisenhower made during the campaign could have pleased every Republican, and the retiree could not escape the political game when the GOP lost.

Throughout the 1964 campaign, Eisenhower worked to push aside his personal feelings in the interest of the Republican Party. Eisenhower could be counted among those dissatisfied with the party's huge defeat in this election. Eisenhower first had to work with a politician with whom he disagreed and then he witnessed witness another Republican defeat. Eisenhower's thoughts on the situation were recorded in his appointment book following a conversation with Governor Scranton. A month after the 1964 election, Eisenhower confessed: "I voted for Goldwater but I did not vote for him I voted for the Party," which was revealed after "discussing the fact that Goldwater believes that every vote for him in the election was a vote for conservatives."¹⁶⁸ Eisenhower knew that some Republicans, including a former adviser, defected

¹⁶⁷ Dwight D. Eisenhower to George Humphrey, November 9, 1964, Eisenhower Library, Post-Presidential Special Name Series, Box 10, Folder: "Humphrey, George, 1963–66 (3)."

¹⁶⁸ Anonymous Memo, December 1, 1964, Eisenhower Library, Appointment Books, Box 1, Folder: "Calls and Appointments 1964 (9)."

to the Democrats in 1964, and he used that as motivation to continue working on behalf of moderate Republicanism.¹⁶⁹

Angered by the events of 1964, Eisenhower swore that “if the Lord spares me for 1968 I am going to come out for somebody at least 18 months ahead of time. This year I tried to do what was decent.”¹⁷⁰ Eisenhower believed that one reason why the GOP failed to win the presidency in 1964 was his reluctance to let the public know who he did or did not support. However, the general hoped to overcome the misstep by actively participating in the next presidential contest. Although his failing health limited his ability to campaign, Eisenhower ultimately got his wish to contribute to one last presidential contest. Moderate Republicanism appeared to have a chance for survival when Nixon secured the GOP’s nomination and then won the presidency eight years after Eisenhower hoped to turn power over to his vice president.

¹⁶⁹ Anonymous Memo, August 26, 1964, Eisenhower Library, Appointment Books, Box 1, Folder: “Calls and Appointments 1964 (5).”

¹⁷⁰ Anonymous Memo, December 1, 1964, Eisenhower Library, Appointment Books, Box 1, Folder: “Calls and Appointments 1964 (9).”

Chapter 3 - Eisenhower's Last Stand: The Moderates' Push to Win in 1968

After President Johnson's overwhelming defeat of Senator Barry Goldwater in 1964, the primary Republican factions evaluated how to move forward. The progress the right made by taking control of the Republican National Committee and securing the nomination for Goldwater was halted in November 1964. The right's joy over breaking the string of moderate nominees crashed, demonstrating that it had much work to do before becoming the GOP's ruling faction. Once the right wing's weaknesses were exposed, moderates sought to reclaim lost ground. Publicly, the 1964 loss weakened the Republicans. Privately, top moderates, including ex-president Eisenhower, welcomed the opportunity to orchestrate a move back to the "middle way."

This chapter further demonstrates how Eisenhower remained politically active during his retirement years. However, unlike the period from 1961 to 1964, the 1965 to 1969 timeframe featured a different approach from the ex-president to promoting moderate Republicanism. Eisenhower, who turned 74 in October 1964, suffered from steadily declining health, including multiple heart attacks, from this point onward. Physically restricted from campaigning and public appearances, Eisenhower continued to communicate with fellow Republicans in between trips to the golf course and spending time with his family. One member of the Eisenhower/Nixon administration remained engaged with the public, however. Despite his losses in 1960 and 1962, Nixon settled into the role of a voracious campaigner for fellow Republicans, which allowed him to remain engaged with party and public affairs. Following Goldwater's defeat, Nixon embarked on another run for the White House with Eisenhower's support.

The uncertainty over the Republican Party's future escalated after the 1964 elections. For example, in *The Agony of the G.O.P. 1964*, written in 1965, Republican commentator Robert Novak stated that "rank-and-file Republican moderates and liberals stayed away on election day or voted for Johnson by the millions. The result was one of the great landslides of American political history, raising ominous question marks for the future of the Republican Party."¹⁷¹ Historian Mary Brennan offered similar analysis, writing, "In November 1964, the future viability of the Republican Party seemed in doubt."¹⁷² The Republicans' defeat in the presidential race could have marked a new low point for a party. However, Eisenhower and the moderates looked at the 1964 returns more hopefully. "The most impressive Republican winners were those who kept clear of the Goldwater campaign," Novak noted, and these winners included moderate Governor George Romney.¹⁷³ Among the few bright spots for the GOP in 1964, in other words, was one of Eisenhower's key picks to lead the next generation of moderate Republicans.

Even though conflict and minority party status plagued the GOP, the moderates and conservatives continued to plot the course that they wanted the Republicans to follow. Brennan noted, "Even before the final tallying of votes in the election, Republicans contemplated the future of their party. In fact, many moderates had been planning postelection rehabilitation since August and September. By late October, even Eisenhower was mulling over possibilities for the party after November."¹⁷⁴ As we have seen, Eisenhower hesitated to support Goldwater, ultimately admitting that he voted for the party, and not the candidate in November 1964.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ Robert D. Novak, *The Agony of the G.O.P. 1964* (New York: MacMillan, 1965), 5.

¹⁷² Mary C. Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties: The Conservative Capture of the GOP* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 104.

¹⁷³ Novak, *Agony of the G.O.P.*, 6.

¹⁷⁴ Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties*, 104.

¹⁷⁵ Anonymous Memo, December 1, 1964, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas (hereafter Eisenhower Library), Eisenhower, Dwight D.: Papers, Post-Presidential, 1961-69, Appointment Books Series, (hereafter Appointment Books), Box 1, Folder: "Calls and Appointments 1964 (9)."

Soon after, Eisenhower delved right into his work, calling Romney on December 3, 1964 to discuss the GOP's future.¹⁷⁶ Once again, the general did not retire and retreat to Gettysburg. Aware that the 1968 campaign likely would be his last, Eisenhower communicated extensively with fellow Republican leaders in order to organize a moderate party that could thrive without him.¹⁷⁷

Thus far, this study has shown that, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, moderates and conservatives vied for control of the GOP. Most histories of this era emphasize 1964 as a step forward for the right wing, a vital point in the conservative revolution, despite (and to some degree because of) Goldwater's loss. This chapter brings Eisenhower back into the story of the GOP between 1965 and 1969, analyzing the work he carried out before his death in March 1969. Although Eisenhower curtailed his efforts as party leader after 1964, he maintained his commitment to settling Republicans on the "middle way." The faction united in opposition to Goldwater, and benefitted from the ideological differences between moderates and the polarizing conservatives. These efforts and the overall recovery of the GOP were aided by outside events, particularly the electorate's rejection of President Johnson. The escalation of the increasingly unpopular Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, and the War on Poverty's failures turned different segments of the population against the Democratic administration. The chapter begins by analyzing the post-1964 recovery efforts, including the reorganization of the Republican National Committee. Then, the focus shifts to the 1968 presidential campaign, beginning with an analysis of the top candidates — George Romney and Richard Nixon. Finally, the chapter overviews the final year of Eisenhower's life, which overlapped with Nixon's successful

¹⁷⁶ Anonymous Memo, December 3, 1964, Eisenhower Library, Appointment Books, Box 1, Folder: "Calls and Appointments 1964 (9)."

¹⁷⁷ Anonymous Memo, December 1, 1964, Eisenhower Library, Appointment Books, Box 1, Folder: "Calls and Appointments 1964 (9)."

campaign. Eisenhower may not have actively participated in Nixon's campaign, but his legacy influenced the campaign, thereby demonstrating his political power.

The Wounded Elephant's Recovery

The 1964 election, in Eisenhower's opinion, marked an "over-all debacle" for the Republican Party, an assessment shared by politicians, journalists, and voters across the country.¹⁷⁸ In the immediate aftermath of the election, journalist Arthur Krock reviewed the state of America's main political parties. As he saw it, the greatest question facing the Democrats was what President Johnson would do with the mandate that his overwhelming victory provided him. Regarding the GOP, he wrote, "in the two years before the next Congressional elections the Republicans must evolve the answer to another question posed by yesterday's Democratic landslide: How to regain identity as a coherent and responsible party of Opposition?"¹⁷⁹ Despite a bleak future, the Republicans did possess the ability to recover, Krock noted. The fate of the party ultimately rested with two groups — "leaders who were not candidates for office in 1964," particularly Eisenhower and Nixon, and "leaders of the so-called liberal wing," including Rockefeller and Romney.¹⁸⁰ In other words, Krock considered the conservatives a marginalized faction by this point. And, for the time being, he was correct. This section shows that the party, led by the moderates, would heal and rebuild substantially from 1964 to 1966, even as Johnson enjoyed several major policy victories launching the War on Poverty and the Great Society.

After the 1964 debacle, many Republicans turned to Eisenhower, the party's elder statesman, for guidance. Aware of his responsibility to help Republicans, Eisenhower needed to

¹⁷⁸ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Ellis D. Slater, December 3, 1964, Eisenhower Library, Eisenhower, Dwight D.: Papers, Post-Presidential, 1961–69, Special Name Series, (hereafter Post-Presidential Special Name Series), Box 18, Folder: "Slater, Ellis D., 1963–66"

¹⁷⁹ Arthur Krock, "Two Questions," *New York Times*, November 5, 1964, 44.

¹⁸⁰ Krock, "Two Questions," 44.

determine what role he would take in the party's recovery. In a letter to his former treasury secretary, George M. Humphrey, Eisenhower wrote on November 21, 1964:

As you can well imagine I am badgered to death by people that want me to 'do something' about the Republican Party. A great many people seem to be in a sort of shock, or at least bewilderment. As a result they are calling on me as a 'consulting doctor.' None of this, however, has come from National Committee sources — rather it has come from a variety of citizens who are genuinely concerned with our Party.¹⁸¹

Conservatives had little incentive to consult Eisenhower after the election. Because the right now held many key spots within the Republican National Committee (RNC), the party's official leaders remained distant. The disconnect among top GOP officials soon led to the first significant post-1964 change — reorganizing the RNC.

According to most moderate Republicans and outside observers, if the GOP wanted to recover from 1964, it needed to distance itself from Goldwater. However, as historian Mary Brennan noted, Republicans “could not excommunicate Goldwater without risking destruction of the party.”¹⁸² As an alternative to dropping Goldwater, moderates focused on removing conservative RNC officials tied to the ill-fated campaign. In particular, if moderates could not get rid of Goldwater, the closest alternative would be the man he designated as RNC Chairman, Dean Burch.¹⁸³ On this matter, Eisenhower consulted Meade Alcorn, former Chairman of the RNC. A member of Eisenhower's staff summarized a conversation the two had on November 25, 1964. Eisenhower, the entry in the general's appointment book begins, “doesn't think our major

¹⁸¹ Dwight D. Eisenhower to George M. Humphrey, November 21, 1964, Eisenhower Library, Post-Presidential Special Name Series, Box 10, Folder: “Humphrey, George, 1963–66 (2).”

¹⁸² Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties*, 105.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

difficulty is a chairman but Burch associated with Goldwater and he failed to disassociate himself from far right.”¹⁸⁴

The composition of the RNC would never satisfy all Republicans, but in early 1965 party leaders, including a few conservatives, agreed that the organization needed new leadership.¹⁸⁵ A change in power would aid the party in moving on from the 1964 results. The attention of party leaders, including Eisenhower, focused on Ray Bliss as a candidate to replace Burch.¹⁸⁶ The former chair of the Ohio Republican Party, Bliss made a name for himself as a successful organizer in Ohio.¹⁸⁷ One program that Bliss implemented in Ohio, which was then adopted by the GOP on a national level, was the “Big Cities” initiative, which sought to improve local party organizations in cities.¹⁸⁸ Similar to Eisenhower, Bliss strictly opposed extremism in the party. By the time he became chairman, Bliss was determined to take “conservative ideologues” out of top RNC spots.¹⁸⁹ Surprisingly, Bliss received support for the Chairmanship from across the GOP, including Goldwater.¹⁹⁰ In an important step forward, then, Republicans managed to work together to reorganize the RNC and to select a qualified chairman with a history of strengthening the party.

After Bliss became RNC Chairman, he enjoyed success in his efforts to fund Republican campaigns and attract new supporters. Historians credit Bliss with helping the Republicans win the elections of 1966. Lewis Gould wrote that Bliss “brought efficient fund-raising and ideological tolerance to his duties,” two strengths invaluable to a party torn apart by factions and

¹⁸⁴ Anonymous Memo, November 25, 1964, Eisenhower Library, Appointment Books, Box 1, Folder: “Calls and Appointments 1964 (8).”

¹⁸⁵ Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties*, 105–6.

¹⁸⁶ Dwight D. Eisenhower to George M. Humphrey, July 6, 1965, Eisenhower Library, Post-Presidential Special Name Series, Box 10, Folder: “Humphrey, George, 1963–66 (1).”

¹⁸⁷ Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman’s Crusade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 137.

¹⁸⁸ Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties*, 55.

¹⁸⁹ Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*, 137.

¹⁹⁰ Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties*, 106–7.

crushed by defeat. Echoing Eisenhower's ideas, Bliss emphasized developing the GOP at the local level. For example, he instituted workshops and distributed materials on effective campaigning.¹⁹¹ At a time when the GOP desperately needed help, Bliss stepped in and turned the RNC into the leading organization that the Republicans needed.

The GOP's success in the 1966 elections depended upon more than Bliss' programs, of course, and Republicans benefitted from mounting dissatisfaction with Johnson's domestic and foreign policies. Escalating disapproval of the war in Vietnam coupled with an inevitable backlash against Great Society social programs also set the stage for Republicans to gain ground.¹⁹² During the 1954 midterm elections, voters had believed that a Democratic Congress would remedy the nation's economic problems. These attitudes reversed in the second half of the 1960s. Historian Jonathan Schoenwald explained that elements of the Great Society "succeeded in antagonizing enough Americans who paid for but believed they did not benefit from its programs," and that escalating racial tensions, including the riots in Watts, California in August 1965, provided the Republicans with the opportunity to wrest power from the Democrats.¹⁹³ In this case, conservatism's emphasis on dismantling the welfare state proved to attract voters.

Republicans did not gain control of Congress after the 1966 midterm elections, but they did narrow the gap. Overall, the GOP gained forty-seven seats in the House and three in the Senate. At the state level, Republicans took eight governorships away from the Democrats.¹⁹⁴ The results did not mark a complete rejection of the Democrats, but they did indicate the pending decline of American liberalism and provided the GOP with ample hope for the future. Gould

¹⁹¹ Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties*, 107.

¹⁹² Robert Mason, *The Republican Party and American Politics from Hoover to Reagan*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 210–1.

¹⁹³ Jonathan M. Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing: The Rise of Modern American Conservatism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 156.

¹⁹⁴ Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties*, 119.

noted that, “the natural balances of American politics were reasserting themselves after the one-sided 1964 race.”¹⁹⁵ The party not only showed it could recover from a major setback but also saw new figures win in the 1966 election who would reenergize the organization. One person who took office in 1966, Governor Ronald Reagan of California, would obviously prove especially important to the GOP.¹⁹⁶

After the 1966 elections, Eisenhower sought to build on the GOP’s momentum in order to unite and strengthen the Republican Party. Once again, the greatest obstacles to Eisenhower’s vision were Republicans. In an effort to avoid a repeat of the 1964 debacle, Eisenhower told Nixon that he “hope[d] that no Republican would be calling any other Republicans bad names this year. They should think of the party and not themselves.”¹⁹⁷ Furthermore, Eisenhower “hoped that no one would start building a personal party” in 1967, as he put it to Romney.¹⁹⁸

Eisenhower’s wishes for intraparty harmony went unfulfilled in 1967. The ex-president expressed dismay when he learned that Republicans had already started to organize campaign committees. In February 1967, Eisenhower discussed the situation with Romney, and in the general’s appointment book, a staff member wrote that Eisenhower was “disappointed that candidates are starting activities,” because he believed early action left candidates vulnerable to criticism from inside and outside of the GOP sooner than necessary.¹⁹⁹ The question of who started to campaign first led to a game of pointing fingers. Eisenhower explained the situation to Fred Seaton, his former secretary of the interior:

¹⁹⁵ Lewis L. Gould, *Grand Old Party: A History of the Republicans* (New York: Random House, 2003), 372

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ Anonymous Memo, January 19, 1967, Eisenhower Library, Appointment Books, Box 2, Folder: “Calls and Appointments 1967 (1).”

¹⁹⁸ Anonymous Memo, January 20, 1967, Eisenhower Library, Appointment Books, Box 2, Folder: “Calls and Appointments 1967 (1).”

¹⁹⁹ Anonymous Memo, February 3, 1967, Eisenhower Library, Appointment Books, Box 2, Folder: “Calls and Appointments 1967 (1).”

I truly enjoyed your letter of the eighteenth. One sentence gave me a real chuckle. You said, ‘However, the running start which the Romney supporters undertook simply forced our hand.’ This is exactly the reverse of what a Romney supporter wrote to me! In any event, I think nothing has been hurt; I am confident none of the aspirants for the nomination will do anything to destroy what is undoubtedly a growing unity in our Party. For this I am grateful.²⁰⁰

Just two months into 1967, Eisenhower needed to adjust his expectations for the party’s actions. But when the early campaigning proved cordial, at least when compared to the 1964 election, Eisenhower’s worries about the party lessened. Instead of opposing the frontrunner, Eisenhower found himself in the pleasant position of supporting the GOP’s top two candidates, both of whom were moderate. Satisfied with both Romney and Nixon, Eisenhower settled into an advisory role during the early portion of the campaign. By doing so, the general could work with the different candidates and serve as an example for party unity by not openly favoring one candidate.

Romney and Nixon Try on Eisenhower’s Shoes

The Republicans approached the 1968 presidential election uncertain of who would represent the party and with a physically weakened leader incapable of hitting the campaign trail, as he had promised to do after the 1964 debacle. In November 1965, Eisenhower suffered two heart attacks. He recovered, but from that time onward his physical health declined further. Eisenhower did not stop working, however. Limited by doctors and Mamie to brief meetings and correspondence, Eisenhower could only quietly exert his influence to ensure that the Republicans nominated a moderate for the next presidential contest.

In the beginning of 1967, the Republican nomination could have easily gone to different candidates, but the two clear favorites were men who enjoyed support from Eisenhower —

²⁰⁰ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Fred Seaton, February 23, 1967, Eisenhower Library, Post-Presidential Special Name Series, Box 14, Folder: “Nixon, Richard M., 1967 (2).”

Governor George Romney and former vice president Richard Nixon. In the shadows stood Ronald Reagan, who enjoyed great support from conservatives. The turmoil of the 1960s, at home and abroad, caused Reagan's message of individual responsibility and a small government resonated with the discontent.²⁰¹ His hopes for a quiet 1967 dashed, Eisenhower wrote to George Humphrey on July 21, 1967, that "the political pot is beginning to boil early for the coming elections. Yesterday I saw a Volkswagen running about with a 'Reagan for '68' on its back window, while Nixon and Romney have their names in the papers almost daily."²⁰² For his part, Eisenhower focused on working with the two main declared candidates, Nixon and Romney.

After Michigan's voters reelected him to a third term in 1966, Romney moved toward the 1968 campaign with momentum on his side. Potential voters across the country knew Romney as a moderate who refused to support Goldwater in 1964.²⁰³ Despite these advantages, Romney quickly encountered trouble attracting national support. One of Romney's greatest obstacles proved to be himself, particularly his public speaking style. A lack of confidence and propensity to misspeak or fail to clarify key points generally left a poor impression, and he sometimes lacked a full grasp of the issues.²⁰⁴ On March 24, 1967, Eisenhower wrote his friend Barry Leithead about Romney's campaign. Concerned by reports that Romney failed to impress at public events, including one where, reportedly, "Reagan stole the show and Romney did just the

²⁰¹ David Farber, *The Rise and Fall of American Conservatism: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 161.

²⁰² Dwight D. Eisenhower to George Humphrey, July 21, 1967, Eisenhower Library, Post-Presidential Special Name Series, Box 10, Folder: "Humphrey, George, 1967."

²⁰³ Geoffrey Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin: The Downfall of Moderation and the Destruction of the Republican Party, from Eisenhower to the Tea Party*, 208–10.

²⁰⁴ Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties*, 121.

opposite,” Eisenhower confessed that he did not understand Romney’s struggles.²⁰⁵ Upset by Romney’s tendency to instill “doubt and bewilderment” in his audiences, Eisenhower tried to assist the Republican, telling Leithead: “I wish I knew what to tell him because I just think he is too good a man to be ignored this early in the contest.”²⁰⁶

As much as Romney jumbled up speaking engagements, those issues did not compare to his troubles mastering foreign affairs. Simply put, international politics were outside of Romney’s comfort zone. Jonathan Moore, who served as a foreign policy advisor to Romney, once remarked that even though Romney was an intelligent person, he failed to process issues larger than the ones he handled as governor. Kabaservice summarized Romney’s trouble discussing foreign affairs when he wrote that “the main flaw of Romney’s shifting perspectives on Vietnam ... was not that he didn’t have a solution to the conflict, but that he was not politically sophisticated enough to pretend that he did.”²⁰⁷ In July 1966, Eisenhower broached the subject of Vietnam in a letter to Romney. At first, Eisenhower agreed with Romney’s remarks that, as a governor, the events in Vietnam fell outside of his traditional purview. But then, Eisenhower almost scolded, “no public figure today can avoid being questioned closely about the matter.”²⁰⁸ Eisenhower offered Romney the following advice, “I think you should develop for yourself a fairly comprehensive answer that will express accurately your personal views and use it every time you are questioned.”²⁰⁹ Briefly, Eisenhower then sketched out his own thoughts on the situation. Despite this assistance, Romney continued to fail to offer confident and competent sounding responses on foreign affairs. The general knew that Romney

²⁰⁵ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Barry Leithead, March 24, 1967, Eisenhower Library, Post-Presidential Special Name Series, Box 18, Folder: “Romney, George, 1967 (4).”

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin*, 219.

²⁰⁸ Dwight D. Eisenhower to George Romney, July 25, 1966, Eisenhower Library, Post-Presidential Special Name Series, Box 17, Folder: “Romney, George, 1963–66.”

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

needed help addressing Vietnam, and Eisenhower tried to clearly articulate his thoughts on the conflict in various letters to Romney. Despite this assistance, Vietnam continued to plague the Romney campaign.

Although Eisenhower sought to help Romney with Vietnam, the former soon realized that the war was a losing issue for the latter. In fact, before the summer ended, Eisenhower veritably encouraged Romney to avoid discussing Vietnam whenever possible. Eisenhower wrote, “I noticed that you have found it necessary to comment on the Vietnam war. Personally, I think this is a bit risky; I think that none of us know enough about the entire affair to have any confidence in our own opinions.”²¹⁰ Vietnam would plague Romney throughout his campaign, especially after the governor remarked that his initial support for the war could be attributed to brainwashing by military and government officials. Romney’s confusion on Vietnam and reference to brainwashing has been described as a “colossal political misstep,” and historians agree that Romney’s campaign only deteriorated as he moved into the fall of 1967.²¹¹

In contrast to Romney, Nixon had already spent years learning from Eisenhower and required little guidance. Furthermore, Nixon had long established a reputation as a Cold Warrior and had mastered how to sound like he had a solution for the Vietnam War.²¹² Eisenhower privately expressed his strong support for Nixon’s candidacy to former secretary of the interior Fred Seaton, who helped with the former vice president’s campaign, in a January 1967 letter. “I agree with you about the qualification of Dick Nixon for political office,” Eisenhower wrote, “I cannot think of anyone better prepared than he is to undertake the responsibilities of the

²¹⁰ Dwight D. Eisenhower to George Romney, August 19, 1967, Eisenhower Library, Post-Presidential Special Name Series, Box 17, Folder: “Romney, George, 1967 (2).”

²¹¹ Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin*, 221.

²¹² *Ibid*, 219.

Presidency.”²¹³ Nixon may have been out of office for a few years by this point, but he had not ceased working in politics. In addition to hitting the campaign trail for fellow Republicans, Nixon also remained engaged with events at home and abroad.

In 1960, Eisenhower had wanted his vice president to carry on his policies for at least another term. Even though Nixon’s anticommunist activities endeared him to conservatives, he possessed distinctly moderate, if not liberal, views on domestic and international affairs. This perspective developed throughout the 1950s, and, by the 1960s, Nixon occupied a rare place in Republican politics. Conservatives held on to Nixon’s early years in politics, which did lean a little to the right. However, as society changed, so did Nixon’s views. A strong advocate of civil rights, supportive of Social Security, and an internationalist, Nixon would carefully play the perception game in order to court conservatives even though his platform often disagreed with theirs.²¹⁴

To a degree, Nixon filled roles that Eisenhower could not once the two were out of office, for example that of roving diplomat. With his military background, Eisenhower would have expertly fulfilled this role. However, it was the younger, fitter Nixon who, for example, traveled to the Middle East in 1967 and then reported on his experiences to the State Department.²¹⁵ Such trips, even if details remained secret, allowed Nixon to demonstrate skill in handling international politics and remind voters of his travels as Eisenhower’s vice president.

Despite Nixon’s experience and relative familiarity with important subjects, he still consulted Eisenhower regularly. Whether it was submitting a speech to the general for review or

²¹³ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Fred Seaton, January 31, 1967, Eisenhower Library, Post-Presidential Special Name Series, Box 14, Folder: “Nixon, Richard M., 1967 (2).”

²¹⁴ Steven Wagner, *Eisenhower Republicanism: Pursuing the Middle Way* (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006), 5. See Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism* for a detailed discussion of Nixon’s tenuous relationship with the right.

²¹⁵ Anonymous Memo, June 3, 1967, Eisenhower Library, Appointment Books, Box 2, Folder: “Calls and Appointments 1967 (3).”

asking for advice on Vietnam, Nixon did not hesitate to utilize one of his greatest resources — Eisenhower. Whereas Romney struggled to implement Eisenhower’s suggestions into his discussions of Vietnam, Nixon did not hesitate to use the general’s words, if necessary. In response to one of Eisenhower’s letters on the war, Nixon wrote on September 26, 1967, “As a matter of fact, I’m very much taken by your line that in these areas ‘the struggle is not so much Communism versus freedom, as it is an orderly society against anarchy or despotism.’ It’s a point well taken and well put, and with your permission I may plagiarize it.”²¹⁶ At the bottom of Nixon’s letter, Eisenhower answered the request — “Fine!” is written right above Eisenhower’s signed initials.²¹⁷

Nixon and Romney may have both fallen on the moderate part of the Republican political spectrum, but they presented voters with a distinct choice. The edge went to Nixon, however, because the former vice president, despite many moderate opinions, still appealed to conservatives on certain matters. The right wing’s fear of communism had turned into a fear of the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Leading conservative activist Phyllis Schlafly sided with Nixon because of his defense plans, particularly a commitment to nuclear defense programs.²¹⁸ With some conservatives on his side, Nixon also benefitted from Romney’s unfortunate handling of Vietnam. After Romney bowed out of the contest, Nixon had a mostly clear path to the 1968 Republican presidential nomination. Reagan remained in the shadows, ready to jump in if Nixon faltered, but Nixon did not provide the conservative governor with an opportunity similar to the one Romney’s gaffes gave to Nixon. In the first round of voting at the nominating

²¹⁶ Richard Nixon to Dwight D. Eisenhower, September 26, 1967, Eisenhower Library, Post-Presidential Special Name Series, Box 14, Folder: “Nixon, Richard M., 1967 (1).”

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*, 187.

convention, Republican delegates selected Nixon to represent the party again and hopefully lead the GOP to victory, unlike eight years ago.²¹⁹

A Win for Ike

By 1967, Eisenhower had suffered multiple heart attacks, and his schedule was carefully structured to allow him ample rest time each day. His mind remained sharp and active, and he resisted his physical limitations, particularly when he wanted to discuss political matters. In one letter to Nixon, Eisenhower wrote, “When you come to see me please allow plenty of time. Although it is true that I have to take certain amounts of rest time, I think I can still perform that little chore and at the same time have plenty of time for a long talk with you.”²²⁰ Bothered more by the fact that he needed to rest than the prospect of a lengthy meeting with Nixon, Eisenhower considered his limitations a nuisance. This attitude defined Eisenhower’s approach to politics from August 1967 onward. Despite the state of his health, Eisenhower insisted on doing as much as possible to help Nixon and the GOP. Just about a year and a half later, Eisenhower’s lifetime of hard work and stress would catch up to him, and he died just weeks after Nixon’s inauguration.

Before the GOP named its presidential nominee, Eisenhower sought to prevent the GOP’s recent mistakes from occurring again. As the campaign progressed, Eisenhower focused his attention on issues that had plagued Nixon’s first bid for president. Among the greatest problems the GOP encountered during the 1960 campaign was Nixon’s likability, or lack thereof. This time around, the Nixon campaign made sure to stage question and answer sessions,

²¹⁹ Gould, *Grand Old Party*, 375–7.

²²⁰ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Richard M. Nixon, August 23, 1967, Eisenhower Library, Post-Presidential Special Name Series, Box 14, Folder: “Nixon, Richard M., 1967 (1).”

which Eisenhower approved. These meetings, he said, gave Nixon the “opportunity for spontaneity, humor and hard hitting observations.”²²¹ Efforts such as those improved public perception of Nixon and he transitioned from a qualified but unelectable candidate to the man whose qualifications meant that he needed to win in November.²²²

Nixon and Eisenhower both experienced déjà vu moments during the 1968 campaign season. In addition to the resurfacing of Nixon’s public appeal issues, Eisenhower endured criticism, similar to 1964, for not publicly declaring his opinion of the campaign. When Goldwater ran for office, many Republicans and critics of Goldwater had identified Eisenhower as one of the only individuals who could have quickly ended the conservative’s candidacy. In the case of the 1968 campaign, Eisenhower refrained from supporting Nixon too early, drawing the ire of those who wanted to know the ex-president’s pick. Eisenhower explained his reasoning to Admiral Frederick M. Reeder in April 1968, writing, “as of this moment, [Nixon] does not believe that a personal endorsement — that would, of necessity, appear derogatory of others — is either necessary or desirable at this time, because of its possible [divisive] effect on the Party.”²²³ Both situations provided Eisenhower with the opportunity to directly influence the party’s nomination process and on each occasion, despite his personal assessments of the respective candidates, he opted to stay quiet for the long-term sake of the party.²²⁴

As the campaign intensified in the summer of 1968, Eisenhower was increasingly unable to help Nixon. Respectful communication between the two continued, but it was noticeably briefer. Nixon and his supporters knew that Eisenhower could not do much to help them, but as

²²¹ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Richard M. Nixon, April 24, 1968, Eisenhower Library, Post-Presidential Special Name Series, Box 14, Folder: “Nixon, Richard M., 1968 (1).”

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Admiral Frederick M. Reeder, April 29, 1968, Eisenhower Library, Post-Presidential Special Name Series, Box 14, Folder: “Nixon, Richard M., 1968 (1).”

²²⁴ Brigadier General Robert L. Schulz to Dr. Richard J. Wright, March 6, 1968, Eisenhower Library, Post-Presidential Special Name Series, Box 14, Folder: “Nixon, Richard M., 1968 (1)”

long as the link between the two remained, Nixon had a powerful ally. Merely mentioning Eisenhower's name or his time in the Eisenhower administration proved valuable to Nixon. During the Republican nominating convention, Nixon frequently referred to his work with the party's elder statesman. In addition, Eisenhower left an impression with the attendees when a video he made expressing his support for Nixon played for the crowd. The video showed how frail Eisenhower had become by the summer of 1968. Nixon carefully referenced Eisenhower's health in his acceptance speech, calling on Republicans to win the next campaign for Ike.²²⁵

The careful steps taken by Republicans in 1968 nearly failed to produce the desired result. Given the sharp rejection of the Democrats in the 1966 midterm elections, the 1968 result seemed destined to go to the Republican candidate. However, the GOP encountered a strong fight in the last weeks of the contest. Vice President Hubert Humphrey rallied in the final stages after he started to publicly criticize President Johnson's Vietnam policies. Nixon also encountered a challenge from the South, as Governor George Wallace of Alabama ran on an independent ticket. Wallace's campaign proved particularly damaging to Nixon, as the majority of Wallace's nearly ten million supporters likely would have voted Republican. Although the results proved closer than the GOP would have liked, Nixon still brought the party back to the White House.²²⁶

Weeks away from death by the time of Nixon's election, Eisenhower remained a party leader. In December 1968, he sent a letter to Nixon on the subject of the president-elect's proposed cabinet. The general offered, briefly, his thoughts on different appointees and even suggested different individuals for a few of the posts Nixon had already determined.²²⁷ Up until

²²⁵ Gould, *Grand Old Party*, 377.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 380–1.

²²⁷ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Richard M. Nixon, December 13, 1968, Eisenhower Library, Post-Presidential Special Name Series, Box 14, Folder: "Nixon, Richard M., 1968 (2)."

the very end, Eisenhower continued to act as a leader of the Republican Party. Failing health and hospitals did not stop the general from leading his army of moderates.

Conclusion

What is Dwight D. Eisenhower's legacy? President and general are two descriptors forever associated with Eisenhower. However, the memory of Eisenhower moved to a different level when architect Frank Gehry recently opted to depict him as a barefoot boy from Kansas in designs for the planned Eisenhower Memorial in Washington, D.C. It is notable that Gehry chose this motif for his statue, rather than depicting Eisenhower in full uniform, as he is depicted on the grounds of the Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum, or in a suit. The rendering of young Eisenhower would look out across four acres, gazing at depictions of moments from Eisenhower's career of public service.²²⁸ But some voices, including Eisenhower's son John and other members of the family, expressed concern over the design. Historians and pundits weighed in as well, with the overarching concern that Gehry's design failed to properly memorialize Eisenhower and his accomplishments. The National Civic Art Society referred to the original concept as "an embarrassment to the man it was meant to honor."²²⁹

Historian Geoffrey Kabaservice noted that the group of critics did not include one party that should be concerned with Eisenhower's legacy — the Republicans. In an article on the memorial controversy, Kabaservice wrote that the "Republicans' silence on the matter of Eisenhower's legacy says volumes about how far the party has come since his day. Rather than claim ownership over his legacy, they have abandoned it entirely, to the detriment of their party and their country."²³⁰ Why would the Republicans abandon celebrating Eisenhower? During his

²²⁸ Gehry subsequently overhauled the design, making large statues of Eisenhower, both as general and president, the focus of the memorial. Lonnae O'Neal Parker, "Frank Gehry Submits Changes to Eisenhower Memorial Proposal," *The Washington Post*, May 15, 2012.

²²⁹ Geoffrey Kabaservice, "Why Won't the GOP Stick Up for Dwight Eisenhower?" *The New Republic*, <http://www.tnr.com/article/politics/101442/dwight-eisenhower-memorial-controversy>.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

eight years in office, Eisenhower managed to balance the budget, promote civil rights measures, and keep the Cold War cold, among other achievements.

Eisenhower left the White House just over fifty years ago, and since then the Republican Party has moved decisively to the right. The two Republican presidents after Eisenhower — Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford — followed a more moderate path, but controversy plagued their administrations. Understandably, the GOP moved away from Nixon after the Watergate break-in scandal, and Ford's decision to pardon Nixon turned into a defining moment of his brief presidency. Ford tried, but lost the presidency to Democrat Jimmy Carter in 1976. The Democrats' return to the White House was brief, and conservatives finally achieved a decisive victory in 1980 when Ronald Reagan swept into office. Reagan's ascendancy to the White House marks a clear turning point in the ideological history of the GOP. Even though moderates did not completely disappear from the party, the emphasis since Reagan has been on conservative values and policies.

Despite his popularity and success, Eisenhower's moderate Republicanism has limited his legacy within today's GOP. And indeed, the chasm between Eisenhower and conservatives existed from the start of his presidential candidacy in 1952, but intensified over the years. In April 1964, a few weeks before the Republicans' nominating convention, *The Saturday Evening Post* printed an article by Eisenhower, "Why I am a Republican." First, the ex-president explained that he joined the GOP because the "party offered the conscientious citizen the best guide for political judgment in these modern times."²³¹ Eisenhower followed up this remark by stating that the Democrats' policies put America on "a path of federal expediency which, like a narcotic, may give us a false sense of well-being, but in the long run is dangerous to our future,

²³¹ Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Why I am a Republican," *The Saturday Evening Post*, 17.

our basic rights, our moral fiber and our individual freedom.”²³² This condemnation of the Democrats’ policies and leadership, at first glance, cemented Eisenhower’s ties to the GOP. However, the latter two-thirds of the article emphasize moderate Republicanism. Eisenhower even incorporated elements of his 1949 speech before the American Bar Association and the importance of following the “middle way.”

Eisenhower’s “Why I am a Republican” offered the ex-president the opportunity to reflect on his political career and place in the GOP. Although brief, the article demonstrated Eisenhower’s commitment to his “middle way” philosophy. Believing in the same principles before, during, and after his presidency, Eisenhower’s loyalty to his perspective isolated him from the ever changing GOP. Despite his accomplishments in office, Eisenhower would remain a part of a past era for the party.

Republicans today might not invoke Eisenhower’s legacy when courting voters, as happens with Reagan — or the image of Reagan that exists — but that does not mean Eisenhower has not shaped the political world. The most immediate example, of course, would be the Nixon administration. Heavily influenced by his time with Eisenhower, Nixon oversaw the passage of equal rights legislation and traveled to China to improve America’s relationship with the communist nation.²³³ Nixon might have started his Republican political career as a conservative, but during his presidency, conservatives felt betrayed by his moderate, if not liberal, social and foreign policies.

In other words, Eisenhower enjoyed success for a time in keeping the party along a moderate path, notwithstanding the conservatives’ eventual triumph. And Nixon was not the only Republican to follow in at least some of Eisenhower’s footsteps. The latest crop of Tea Party

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Lewis L. Gould, *Grand Old Party: A History of the Republicans* (New York: Random House, 2003), 382–4.

congresspersons aside, the necessity of compromise and appealing to more than strictly conservative voters still encourages Republican politicians to, at times, pursue moderate positions. At the least, today's American politics, no matter how fractious and noisy they are, demonstrate the enduring wisdom of Eisenhower's assumption that moderate Republicanism, combining elements from the right and left, appeals to a great percentage of American voters.

And yet presently, Eisenhower is a politician without a party. The party — or faction — that Eisenhower led diminished over the years, and modern Republicans have drifted away from the man whose goal was to modernize the Republican Party of the 1950s and 1960s and establish a more progressive party. But even if Republicans are presently more willing to discuss the Reagan presidency than Eisenhower's, that does not mean that Eisenhower did not influence the modern political world. Ironically, the leader of moderate Republicanism has turned into a figure that many centrist Democrats look to for inspiration.

This may not be the political legacy that Eisenhower envisioned for himself, but perhaps he would approve of his ongoing influence. To Eisenhower, country came before party. In "Why I am a Republican," Eisenhower wrote "I am not, I hope in all sincerity, a blind Republican who puts party above all else. First and foremost, I am a citizen of the United States. My basic allegiance is to those unchanging principles of self-government laid down in the founding documents."²³⁴ Mirroring her grandfather's sentiment, Susan Eisenhower opened her remarks at the 2008 Democratic National Convention by saying she spoke "not as a Republican or a Democrat, but as an American."²³⁵

²³⁴ Eisenhower, "Why I am a Republican," 17.

²³⁵ Susan Eisenhower, "Remarks by Susan Eisenhower at the 2008 Democratic National Convention," <http://susaneisenhower.com/2008/08/28/remarks-by-susan-eisenhower-at-the-2008-democratic-national-convention/>

Before he died, Dwight Eisenhower witnessed Richard Nixon's election to the presidency, and he believed this event indicated a future for moderate Republicanism. The statesman did not witness the changes that occurred during and after the Nixon presidency; and he could not predict the scandals that his subordinate would endure. The GOP did not turn into the party that Eisenhower envisioned, and he may have faded from his party's consciousness and history, but his legacy of moderation in politics endures. Eisenhower may have titled his *Saturday Evening Post* article "Why I am a Republican," but his parting message was for voters to not get lost in partisan battles. "As an American who puts country above party," Eisenhower wrote, "I deeply and sincerely believe that all fellow citizens, whether Republicans, Democrats or independents, owe it to themselves and their country to pause for a moment and stand back from the partisan fray to ask themselves: How can the United States get back on the right path? Which political philosophy offers us the surest guide for the future?"²³⁶ This message — this willingness to question policies and party lines — is Eisenhower's political legacy, and it offers hope for today's troubled American political culture.

²³⁶ Eisenhower, "Why I am a Republican," 19.

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