

**Getting to Goldwater:
Robert Taft, William F. Knowland,
and the Rightward Drift
of the Republican Party**

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When confronting Barry Goldwater and the legacy of the 1964 Presidential campaign, historians generally emphasize two things: the ease with which F. Clifton White collected a majority of Republican delegates before the national convention and the zealotry of Goldwater's ideologically-driven supporters. Many view Goldwater's abortive run as the flashpoint of modern conservatism, starting a chain of events that ultimately led to the 1980 "Reagan Revolution" and beyond. Beginning the narrative in 1963, however, overlooks the broader context of the Republican Party's rightward shift. This paper argues that the traditional Goldwater narrative is problematic in that his campaign was not the start of modern conservatism, but merely the first time the GOP right had controlled the Republican apparatus during a presidential election year. Examining the correspondence files and campaign organizations of presidential hopefuls Robert A. Taft and William F. Knowland, one can trace the movement of Republicans conservatives from 1944 through 1964 and place Goldwater in his proper context. During these two decades the right-wing gained followers and perfected their talking points in the face of resistance from the more moderate, "Modern Republicans," and the Eisenhower administration. While it is highly doubtful that a conservative platform would have carried the GOP to a presidential victory prior to 1964, in many ways the events of the Goldwater campaign were reactions to the previous twenty years of Republican politics.