

# Republicanism For the Long Haul

**"Moderation" is a sentiment, not a disposition  
-- and it's definitely not a philosophy**

by Bruce K. Chapman, [www.DiscoveryNews.org](http://www.DiscoveryNews.org)

If there's a better book on the subject of whatever happened to "moderate Republicanism" than *Rule and Ruin* by **Geoffrey Kabaservice** (Oxford University Press, January 2012, 482 pages), I can't imagine what it is. And I probably would know, having helped hold aloft the "moderate" banner during the period leading up to Barry Goldwater's nomination in 1964 (see box of links, next page).

What Kabaservice has written is thorough, fair, and sometimes very entertaining. That doesn't mean I agree with some of its conclusions.

Kabaservice, a writer and former history professor who wrote *The Guardians*, a widely acclaimed account of Kingman Brewster's reign at Yale, is not happy that the moderate faction in the GOP was slowly, but inexorably, sidelined by more assertive (sometimes aggressive) right-wingers.

"Moderate" once was an accolade. Not any more. Today practically all GOP candidates fall over themselves assuring voters that they are the true conservative in any given race and that their intra-party rivals are covert moderates or liberals.

*Rule and Ruin* takes advantage of the time that has passed since the moderate vs. conservative battles of the '60s and now is yielding archival letters and memos that have not been reported before. They reveal, for example, the true feelings and operations of candidates like Nelson Rockefeller.

Governor of New York from 1959 to '73, "Rocky" was seen as a moderate GOP hero, but in the Kabaservice telling he turns out to believe that extremism in the pursuit of his own career was no vice. "It was the moderates' great misfortune that Nelson Rockefeller devoted his storied wealth to fruitless and counterproductive quests for the White House rather than building up the moderate movement," Kabaservice concludes.

The reporting and analysis in *Rule and Ruin* are first-rate, but even a participant in the story occasionally may find himself bogged down on insider accounts of minor political skirmishes of long ago.

Furthermore, Kabaservice seems unduly pessimistic about the political future. He himself obviously feels like a moderate Republican out of season, a bit like a latter-day Confederate. But the analogy is not apt, nor is the pessimism. To have held moderate Republican views decades ago was to be a conservative today.

## For Further Enlightenment --

In his own words: *Rule and Ruin* author Kabaservice propounds his thesis to a business readership -- [www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-12-28/republicans-lost-in-moderation-part-1-geoffrey-kabaservice.html](http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-12-28/republicans-lost-in-moderation-part-1-geoffrey-kabaservice.html)

In his own time: With George Gilder, reviewer Chapman co-authored *The Party that Lost its Head: The Republican Collapse and Imperatives for Renewal* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1966, 331 pages).

And the web makes available, at shamefully low prices, Bob Novak's rollicking account of the Rockefeller-Goldwater struggle -- *The Agony of the G.O.P. 1964* (Macmillan, 1965, 469 pages, ASIN: B0007DNN72). From the dust jacket: "[A] brilliant dissection of the weirdest year in the history of the Grand Old Party...this book depicts personalities -- such figures as Rockefeller, Nixon, Scranton, Romney, Eisenhower, Lodge, and, of course, Goldwater and his 'Arizona Mafia' -- who played roles in this extraordinary political drama..."

The moderate *Advance* magazine was published, and the Ripon Society organized, before the huge government spending expansions following Lyndon Johnson's election; before the regulatory excesses of almost all the liberal (and some Republican) Administrations since then; and before the rise of predatory social-engineering experiments that have helped demoralize society.

The only way to remain a "moderate" in the environment of recent decades has been to keep moving one's actual viewpoint leftward -- just to stay in position. This is a serious intellectual as well as political flaw. Being practical and being willing to accept compromises makes sense. But it is not a political program.

To some extent, Geoffrey Kabaservice grasps this concept and his book certainly gives it an airing. But maybe it could be strengthened. And maybe Mr. Kabaservice could afford to be more cheerful.

Conservatism has been described as a disposition, not a philosophy *per se*. If so, moderation can be described as a sentiment, not a disposition, let alone a philosophy. It's an attitude, not a set of principles; and not an agenda, let alone a program.

The intentional moderate is always in danger of becoming the slave of right and left. If the general mood swings right, the moderate -- to get in the middle -- is compelled to move right. That's what moderates did after Ronald Reagan was elected and after the 2010 Tea Party-influenced congressional elections. If the mood moves left, the moderate does, too, as happened briefly in the Carter years and again after Barack Obama came to office.

If a self-conscious moderate writes an article, he seems to think he must damn both right and left, showing that he is above them both, because he is between them. For example, when the sentiment for war is strong, as in the early days of the Vietnam War or the second Iraq War, one supports U.S. entry. When war fatigue sets in, the moderate finds the war no longer supportable.

That's the trouble with moderation, other than as a sentiment: It is not very inspiring.

Who are the great moderates of history? Dwight Eisenhower? Well, he was a moderate in his time, but his program was basically conservative, making necessary accommodation -- as he saw it -- with the Democratic-controlled House and Senate after 1954. The same might be said of both President Bushes.

One can argue with their analyses of their predicament, but history -- and the Left -- certainly understood them to be motivated by conservative aims and -- to the extent possible, again in their eyes -- by conservative policies.

Of course, the danger is that the self-proclaimed moderate will represent opportunism in practice, disguised -- even to him -- as a program. In a culture dominated by left-wing media, academia and bureaucracy (and even a largely liberal Wall Street), the moderate program soon turns to dust. Its pretenses do not deserve respect.

However, while there is no moderate program in politics, there is a moderate temperament that does bear respect. When carried away, the conservative (or the liberal) may be susceptible to extreme measures, even to the endangerment of civil liberties and government economy. Then the moderate in temperament is able to suggest a cooling of passions and a more deliberate pace of reform rather than of revolutionary change.

The '64 Goldwater campaign famously went wrong in tolerating the extreme Midwest in the John Birch Society and the segregationists in the South. Even many old-time Republican conservatives who resented the supposedly East-Coast GOP elite were put off. An immoderate tone helped bring about a colossal electoral defeat, though at the same time the campaign itself was energizing the conservative movement and the Republican base with new recruits, especially among the young.

The proof of this analysis is its subsequent acknowledgement and acceptance by such conservative leaders as Bill Buckley, and, even in part, by Sen. Goldwater after the election defeat. (Kabaservice, by the way, tells this tale well.)

But conservatism itself should never have been an issue within the Republican Party. It should have been recognized that the Republican Party ineluctably is the party of conservative principles -- of limited government, skeptical of expanded central government power and spending, of free trade (not historically a conservative principle, of course), favoring individual liberty and reward for individual initiative.

It supports a national government strong enough and competent enough to do the few important, necessary things well because it doesn't fritter away its strength and the energies of the citizenry by undertaking tasks that are unnecessary, wasteful and outside the Constitution. It is the party of patriotic faith in American exceptionalism.

The most relevant question is not the validity of these principles, but how to put them into practice. Fifty years ago the challenge was the same as today: How might conservatives employ their principles to answer the challenges of the times, and not simply rest with opposition to liberalism?

It turns out that some conservatives have understood that calling better than others, and some supposed moderates have not understood it at all.

Geoffrey Kabaservice, as I say, seems discouraged about conservatism today and pines for moderation. But, actually, conservatives today -- not the showboaters and flash-in-the-pans -- have internalized the requirement to stand for positive changes and not just opposition.

Indeed, some of the best thinkers and achievers in Republican history are alive today -- Congressmen like Paul Ryan and Eric Cantor and Governors like Mitch Daniels, Scott Walker and Chris Christie. And it would be hard to find a more even-tempered and trustworthy Speaker than John Boehner -- firmly conservative in principles, moderate in demeanor, temperament, and refreshingly reliable and trustworthy.

The final irony about *Rule and Ruin*, and what should give Mr. Kabaservice cheer (but probably won't) is that, here in May 2012, the Republican Party is preparing to nominate a candidate for President who -- like Gerald Ford and George H. W. Bush -- is essentially of the moderate persuasion Mr. Kabaservice desires. That is, his moderate temperament is likely to lead his conservative philosophy.

The danger will be that that the conservatism of the candidate might fade in the glare of left-wing media attacks. If a Republican wins, therefore, conservatives will count on principled members of Congress to help him keep his feet securely on a path that is forward and rightward.

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**Bruce Chapman** founded the Seattle-based Discovery Institute in 1990 and was its CEO and president for 21 years. He is now chairman of the board and, among other duties, manages the [blog](#) from which the foregoing review was adopted. From 1960 to '64, Mr. Chapman was the publisher of *Advance*, and during 1965-66 an editorial writer for the *New York Herald Tribune*. In 1966, Mr. Chapman wrote *The Wrong Man in Uniform*, one of the earliest calls for a voluntary military. He was elected to the Seattle City Council in 1971, and served as Secretary of State for Washington State during 1975-80.

For the rest of the Chapman bio, see [www.discovery.org/p/7](http://www.discovery.org/p/7)

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