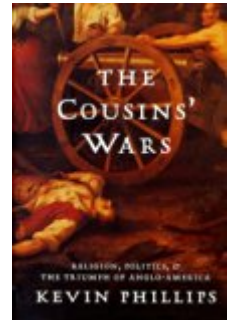


Kevin P. Phillips. *The Cousins' Wars: Religion, Politics, and the Triumph of Anglo-America.* New York: Basic Books, 1999. xxviii + 707 pp. \$35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-465-01369-2.



Reviewed by Robert W. Burg

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List members will know Phillips from his previous endeavors, including his stints as an NPR commentator, a Los Angeles *Times* contributing columnist, and a CBS News election pundit. In this ninth book, a tome entitled *The Cousins' Wars*, Phillips forgoes his customary subject--contemporary politics--in favor of a sweeping analysis of the English Civil War, the American Revolution, and the American Civil War. Part George Bancroft, part Paul Kennedy, and all Phillips, the result is a good example of how popular history can combine with academic history--how the work of authors at the local bookstore and from the ivory tower can overlap and coincide.

Phillips began research on what would become *The Cousins' Wars* in 1994, although his intention was to produce another history of the battle of Saratoga at the time. However, as he delved into his topic, his account broadened into a full-scale analysis of the American Revolution. By 1996, he all but abandoned the core of his work on Saratoga and began to shift his time frame back to the English Civil War. Once he made the decision to dig into the roots of the Revolution, it

was relatively easy to move forward to the shoots--the American Civil War. As Phillips put it at the close of his book, although he had never attempted a study of this range previously, at least it "promised to be more interesting than spending th[e] year thinking about Bill Clinton, Al Gore, Bob Dole, and Jack Kemp" (p. 670).

In an interview with David Gergen on *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* on 15 March 1999, he discussed the book's primary themes: 1) the importance of the cousins' wars to Anglo-American development, and 2) the similarities shared by the wars' "winners," i.e., those who supported the emerging republican majorities (or at least pluralities) of the 1630s, the 1770s, and the 1860s. Phillips' winners were England's Puritans, New England's Pilgrims, and Greater New England's Emigrant Aid Societies. More specifically, winners were low-church Protestants as opposed to high-church Anglicans; republicans as opposed to monarchists; middle-class merchants or small industrialists as opposed to aristocrats or monopolists (like crown appointees); economic market revolutionists (favoring the development of

banks, tariffs, and a currency system) as opposed to economic traditionalists (favoring manorial agriculture and its tools), and westward expansionists as opposed to anti-expansionists, or consolidationists (p. 153). Phillips' definition, though quite specific, remains flexible enough to include Tidewater planters like Jefferson during the American Revolution. It is more akin to a pattern than a mold--some variation between each war's winners is expected and accounted for.

He traces the winners' diaspora--from East Anglia to Massachusetts to the Midwest--down to the most minute detail. Using a wide array of secondary sources, including community, state, and immigration studies, Phillips also offers larger analyses of Great Britain, the Thirteen Colonies, and the United States that will delight historians of region. The style employed is similar to that of *Albion's Seed* and is one of the book's strengths.[1]

Underscoring Phillips' themes is his view of American history, which is reminiscent of turn-of-the-century scholarship by authors like Woodrow Wilson. The belief that American history was a logical extension of British history was an important assumption underpinning their work. Phillips' decision to concentrate on Anglo-American exceptionalism (in relation to continental Europe in particular) at the expense of more contemporary and multicultural views of American history shares this outlook. This is not to say that he does not devote time and space to a variety of ethnic groups, particularly Irish-, German- and African-Americans: far from it. Rather, the contribution of these groups, while not minimized, often is not emphasized; their efforts tend to be ignored, and when discussed at all, the groups that made them are relegated to the role of "losers" in American history. Phillips seems to prefer Teutonic germs to the frontier, in other words. This is less true of his analysis of British history, where the Scots and Irish are discussed more compellingly, if not more frequently.

The Cousins' Wars is split into four parts. Part One, a mere chapter in length, focuses on the expansion of Protestantism into the British monarchy, through the home isles, and across the Atlantic, while Part Two, the largest part of the book, considers the English Civil War and the American Revolution. After a prologue on Cromwell's reign--including a segment on reaction in the colonies towards the Roundheads--Phillips hones in on the Revolution.

The following five chapters discuss seemingly every aspect of the Revolution, including republican ideology in the colonies, the larger war in the western hemisphere, the question of who shall rule at home, as well as who did and did not support the war, views on the war within Britain, and the significance of Britain's defeat. Phillips argues that the Revolution was largely ideological, but that it was also a civil war, which made questions of religion, ethnicity, and economics relevant. He also points out that the war was more widely supported in the empire and less supported on the isles than is often recognized. This view led Phillips to conclude, particularly during his review of the Saratoga campaign, that the British fought the Revolution with one hand tied behind their back. Phillips largely winds up his segment on the Revolutionary War with his analysis of Burgoyne's defeat (little about the war from 1778 to 1781 is considered). Part Two concludes with the contention that the defeat Britain suffered at Saratoga led to needed reforms which prepared the country for the French Revolution; if those changes had not occurred, British hegemony during the nineteenth century would not have been assured.

Part Three, made up of four chapters, covers the American Civil War. The first chapter in this section emphasizes the continuity between the Revolution and the Civil War. Phillips not only trades upon the view that the Civil War's combatants were fighting a second revolution; in this chapter, he also pays homage to authors like

Arthur Bestor who saw the Constitution as a deep-seated, institutional cause of the war. The remaining chapters discuss other causes of the war, particularly the question of territorial expansion, who did and did not support the war, and how the war was viewed in Britain. In Phillips' view, the war was critical to the development of American hegemony in the twentieth century, not only because it unified the nation and spurred industrial development, but because it demonstrated the growth of American power for all to see. Soon this power would be projected, particularly during the latter decades of the nineteenth century, when a rapprochement in relations occurred between Britain and the United States. The war's significance was felt in Britain in other ways as well--here, the author adheres to the old argument that the momentum the war gave the cause of equality was instrumental to the passage of the Reform Bill in 1867.

In the three chapters that make up Part Four, Phillips digs further into the role the cousins' wars played in Anglo-American politics, as well as the importance of open-door immigration to both Britain and the United States throughout his period of study. For purposes of comparison, he also examines how Irish- and German-Americans handled their cousins' wars, i. e., World Wars One and Two. In his view, immigration to the Thirteen Colonies and the United States explains why Ireland did not contest Britain for control of the isles in the nineteenth century. Germany was unable to defeat the Allies in the twentieth century for similar reasons. Hence Britain's ability to be an aristocratic outpost in Europe, and the United States' ability to offer a democratic alternative. Phillips concludes with a look at the continuing importance of the English language, and the effect its prevalence will have on future Anglo-American destiny.

The general public for which this book is targeted will find *The Cousins' Wars* interesting and readable. Some will find the book as comprehen-

sive as an introductory college course, while others will no doubt wish they had taken a few more courses to fully understand Phillips' many insightful observations. The excellent maps, numerous figures, handy chronology, and select bibliography will help those in either camp.

Of course, previous authors have also linked the English Civil, American Revolutionary, and American Civil Wars--as Phillips is aware (pp. 609-14). Some historians may also find his Anglo-American emphasis Whiggish or anachronistic. But Phillips' "iron triangle" of politics, religion, and war calls needed attention to the role religion played in the cousins' wars, underscores the importance of these wars to the freedoms Anglo-America holds dear, and reemphasizes the need for military history within the larger narratives of both English and American history. For scholars, these are *The Cousins' Wars's* greatest contributions.

Note

[1]. David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

This review was commissioned for H-Pol by Lex Renda <renlex@uwm.edu>

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