

The Vanishing Anglo-Saxon Minority

by Samuel Francis

“The Anglo-Saxon carries self-government and self-development with him wherever he goes.”

—Henry Ward Beecher

*The Cousins' Wars:
Religion, Politics, Civil Warfare,
and the Triumph of Anglo-America*
by Kevin P. Phillips
New York: Basic Books;
707 pp., \$32.50

For almost exactly 30 years, Kevin P. Phillips has been cranking out some of the most interesting and provocative works of political analysis written since World War II. In 1969, *The Emerging Republican Majority* argued that American politics runs through periodic cycles of about 30 years and that a new cycle, based demographically on the “Sunbelt” (a term he is usually credited with having coined) and expressed through the Republican Party of Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan, was about to unfold. The prediction was somewhat derailed by the intrusion of more-or-less accidental events like Watergate and by the not-so-accidental incompetency of Republicans, who have managed to misunderstand the nature of their own constituency and have forgotten how to mobilize it. Nevertheless, the patterns Mr. Phillips perceived were essentially correct and, indeed, have been accepted as conventional political wisdom.

His other books followed similar paths, all of them having to do with contemporary political and social affairs. No one, as far as I know, ever suspected that Mr. Phillips had any other calling but that of

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a political bloodhound. Now, it turns out, what he has been writing about for the last generation is merely the icing on the much broader and deeper cake that his most recent book serves.

The Cousins' Wars has nothing to do with contemporary politics; indeed, in its sounder sections, it is reminiscent of David Hackett Fischer's *Albion's Seed* and of some of John Lukacs's excursions into American history: a vast exploration of what Mr. Phillips regards as the shared history of two different but closely related peoples, the English and the American, and how their common past shaped their eventual triumph in the last century as the dominant peoples of the earth.

The “Cousins' Wars” are the English Revolution of 1640-1660, the American War for Independence of 1775-1783, and the American Civil War of 1861-

1865. Entire libraries have been written about each one of them. That makes it all the more remarkable that Mr. Phillips was able to master so many of the details of each period, including not only the military minutiae of campaigns and battles but the ethnic, religious, economic, and demographic details of local and regional history that are the stuff of his interpretation. He occasionally makes a mistake (e.g., the wife of James I was not a Catholic, but the Lutheran Anne of Denmark), but on the whole the range of his erudition is astonishing, given his lack of an academic background (then again, perhaps because of it) in British or American history and the focus of his attention in his earlier books. Nevertheless, his interpretation remains somewhat open to question.

Phillips argues that it was

through these three wars . . . that the English-speaking world critically reshaped itself. Broadly, the result was to uphold political liberties, commercial progress, technological inventiveness, linguistic ambition, and territorial expansion.

The Anglos (for lack of a better term to describe the mainly Anglo-Saxon-descended dominant core populations of the British and American nations) achieved this reshaping because

from the seventeenth century, the English-speaking people on both continents defined themselves by wars that upheld, at least for a while, a guiding political culture of a Low Church, Calvinistic Protes-

tantism, commercially adept, militantly expansionist, and highly convinced, in Old World, New World, or both, that it represented a chosen people and a manifest destiny. In the full, three-century context, Cavaliers, aristocrats, and bishops pretty much lost and Puritans, Yankees, self-made entrepreneurs, Anglo-Saxon nationalists, and expansionists had the edge, especially in America.

Mr. Phillips may not realize it, but his interpretation is not exactly new. It is essentially a restatement of the Whig interpretation of Anglo-American history, though curiously without the Whiggery. In that view, history is working ceaselessly toward the goal of greater "liberty," and virtually every conflict, from that of the Greeks against the Persians through the Reformation, the victory over the Spanish Armada and Louis XIV, the defeat of Charles I in the 1640's and the expulsion of James II in 1688, the American Revolution, and the victory of the North in the American Civil War, reflects the larger conflict between the forces of "progress and liberty" (i.e., the guys who won) and the forces of "reaction, repression, and slavery" (i.e., the guys who lost). This view, of course, is not confined to Whigs but extends to the entire gaggle of folks now generally known as "the left" or, in non-political terms, modernists. It is a view shared by Lord Macaulay and Karl Marx, John Stuart Mill and Mao Tse-tung. Without it, there is and can be no "left," no political force that defines itself as both the morally correct as well as the inevitably victorious side of every historical conflict, and its opponents as the incarnations of immorality. That is unfortunate for the left, because the Whig view of history is quite wrong.

Mr. Phillips, of course, is not a man of the left, though a stupid review by a conservative in the *New York Times Book Review* earlier this year described him as having changed into "a muscular liberal, both protectionist and economically *dirigiste*." But Mr. Phillips is a somewhat unconventional conservative in an era that displays Jack Kemp and Arianna the Airhead as paragons of the right. Despite his apparent embrace of a leftist interpretation of history, Mr. Phillips is saved from leftism, if only because he rejects the ideologies of the left. Indeed, he seems to reject pretty much any ideology. Thus, writing of the influence of ideas on

the American Revolution, he concludes, rightly in my opinion,

it seems unwise to exaggerate colonists' preoccupation with John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government*, the justifications for revolution set forth by the Scottish "common sense" school or even the widely read columns of the *Independent Whig*.

It was not so much systematic concatenations of ideas that shaped the revolt against Britain as it was more elemental forces bubbling in the colonists' mind:

But most ordinary colonials, mulling questions of self-determination and America's future, took their outlook from a less learned framework: the "folk memory" of family and friends, Sunday sermons that compared royal counselors to pharisees and Britain to Babylon, newspaper articles and pamphlets by American dissidents, a rum-flip tavern politics critical of royal officials and far-off aristocrats, the musket-slapping bravado of local militia drills, and the republican camaraderie of groups like the Sons of Liberty.

An interpretation of the left, whether Whig, liberal, socialist, or Marxist, would have to see the triumphant forces (in this case, the American rebels) as in some way the representatives or agents of the forces of good, or of the right ideas; otherwise, victory is meaningless as a further leg of the march toward perfection that will end only when the whole planet resembles ourselves. But Mr. Phillips does not believe the triumphant forces necessarily were such representatives, nor that they triumphed because they stood for the morally right or historically inevitable ideas. In his view, what influenced them was less the workings of the rational mind with its consciously formulated ideas and principles than the facts of ethnicity and religion (to which he again and again calls attention) in the context of communities and peer groups. What eventually won might have looked like the left, but regardless of what it looked like, it won because it acted like the forces of the right.

Although Mr. Phillips displays an impressive erudition in the recent his-

toriography of the Cousins' Wars, he recapitulates a fundamental error of the Whig-leftist worldview: that each of the conflicts he is discussing can be fitted into the conventional pro-modern *versus* anti-modern dichotomy that the left peddles. In that model, for example, Charles I and the Cavaliers are anti-modern, while Parliament, the Puritans, Cromwell, and republicanism are all pro-modern. But if modern British historiography has shown anything, it is that this simple dichotomy is far too simple. Charles I and his court were in fact in the forefront of European art, fashion, letters, science, and religion; the Puritans, in many respects, were backward-looking, invoking a medieval economic ethic and a paternalistic political code that is entirely at odds with Max Weber's view of the relationship between Protestantism and capitalism (a view that Phillips endorses). Moreover, as Marxist historian Christopher Hill showed in his book *The World Turned Upside Down*, the English Revolution contained a powerful edge of irrationalism and outright madness, as revealed in the flourishing of occultism, bizarre religious movements, and social and political inversion having little to do with the rationality and progress usually associated with modernism.

Much the same is true of James II, whose expulsion in 1688 Phillips also sees as continuous with the triumph of modernity. The Catholic James, so far from seeking to reverse the Protestant Reformation, can more realistically be seen as one of the first of the "enlightened despots" of the 18th century in his promotion of religious toleration, and certainly what he and his brother Charles II did politically can be seen as an anticipation of the modern state rather than as a reaction toward personal autocracy. The point is that, whether you think modernism is a good thing or a bad one, spawners of it can be found on both sides of the Cousins' Wars and, indeed, on all sides of every conflict. The idea of the conflict between modernism and anti-modernism, if it is meaningful at all, is largely an artifact of the leftist mind, which invented it to demonize those who opposed the "progress" with which the left sought to identify itself and its agenda. Every time the dichotomy of modern *versus* anti-modern is examined closely, however, it begins to fall apart.

Mr. Phillips may not be a "muscular liberal," but he has, probably unconsciously, swallowed this dichotomy

whole, and also the interpretative model of the left that goes with it. As a result, each of the Cousins' Wars, in his analysis, tends to be the same war over and over again, like *Twilight Zone* reruns. To a large extent, this is the result of historical coincidence: The Puritans of East Anglia were the leading forces against the crown in the English Revolution of the 1640's, and their descendants in New England tended to assume the same role against the Southern states 200 years later, while the South itself—*Southerners from Virginia*, at least—liked to identify with the Cavaliers (though a good many Confederates from other parts of the region either ignored or more or less consciously rejected that identification). Mr. Phillips devotes a fair amount of space to discussing New England Protestant theological beliefs that fed the crusade against slavery, but he tends to neglect Southern religion. That is just as well, since Southern religion in that era was often equally reflective of the "Low Church, Calvinistic Protestantism" that

supposedly animated the North.

In short, for all its erudition, *The Cousins' Wars* still manages to compress into a preconceived and historically unreliable mold historical realities that just do not fit. Moreover, Mr. Phillips argues that it is precisely because the side that won did win that the Anglos triumphed. Had the High Church monarchism of Charles I or the slave economy of the feudalistic and deferential South won, then the Anglo-Saxon peoples would not have prospered in wealth and power in this century quite as much as they have.

Mr. Phillips may be right about that, but again he may also be the victim of his own historical myopia. Had the side that won not won, then the values and ideals it was promulgating would not have been dominant in the Western world, and there would be few today who would be defending them as morally correct and historically inevitable. Mr. Phillips also has little to say about the future that the victory of certain ideas has opened for the Anglos. If the 20th century has been the

Anglo century, and the Anglos have been driven by the kind of modernism that Mr. Phillips sees triumphing in the 1640's, 1780's, and 1860's, then these same forces might reasonably be held responsible for the incipient disappearance of the Anglo-Saxon peoples within the borders of the very lands their ancestors conquered and settled. In the short run, the kind of modernism Mr. Phillips ascribes to the victors in the Cousins' Wars may conquer new countries, develop new sources of wealth, and spread liberty as far as it can reach, but its very success may also lead to its own destruction as the liberty it sows poisons the soil of its own civilization, the wealth it produces corrupts, and the conquered give laws to the conquerors. Whatever Mr. Phillips' modernism may have done for Anglos in the past, unless they have the wit and the will to modify it soon, the civilization their forebears created will soon go the way of Mr. Phillips' shrinking Republican majority.

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In Memory of One of the Better Ones

by Richard Moore

He launched his presidential bid
on a strange whim:
to see if the whole Country'd get as sick of him
as Georgia did.

He won, and down the Country slid
with Godly Jim,
his judgments catastrophic, his perceptions dim.
God, to be rid . . .

but friends, it wasn't right to shed
our leader thus—
there on our boil of state, our head,

our crown of pus,
that yellow corn pone eater, that voice, toneless, dead—
him? No, friends, us.