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## Book Review

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# President McKinley Made a Victim Of Character Assassin

by John Ascher

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### William McKinley

by Kevin Phillips

New York: Times Books, 2003

208 pages, hardcover, \$20

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Before we turn to Mr. Phillips' assessment of William McKinley, here is Lyndon LaRouche's often-stated view concerning McKinley's assassination, and that turning point in American and world history.

"It was only through the peace secured by the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, that a somewhat civilized degree of progress and stability was achieved in Europe. The general progress in European economy and political institutions, continued during the war-torn two and a half centuries following that 1648 treaty, until a turning-point was reached, as a result of the 1901 assassination of U.S. President William McKinley.

"It was that assassination of McKinley, which was conducted in the strategic interests of Britain's King Edward VII, which set in motion an alliance between the British monarchy and its former foe, the United States, which unleashed all of the great wars and related conflicts which dominated most of the Twentieth Century, up to the present time." ("Dialogue Among Cultures: The Road to Peace," by Lyndon LaRouche, Jan. 5, 2001, see *EIR*, Feb. 9, 2001.)

LaRouche's assessment of the McKinley assassination led this reviewer to examine McKinley's life from that standpoint (see "Remembering William McKinley, 100 Years After His Assassination," *New Federalist* Sept. 3, 2001). Such a study must examine the ongoing struggle of American patriots of the American Intellectual Tradition against the British Empire, and how that struggle was weakened in the aftermath of the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln.

Phillips rejects the concept of intention by individuals acting in history, and therefore, the way in which the individual leader acts upon certain principles in a specific historic context. His overall approach is a form of historical determinism, based upon religious, sectional, ethnic, class and other distinctions. For a reference concerning his approach, this

reviewer looked back at a quite lengthy, 1999 work by Phillips, entitled *The Cousins' Wars: Religion, Politics, and the Triumph of Anglo-America*.

Gone from this American history, are the Founding Fathers, the *Federalist Papers* and much more, in Phillips' fantastical account, which would make Charles Beard's revisionism appear to be simply a mild aberration by comparison. All of the Founders' lofty ideas, and the very notion of the Revolution, were adopted as part of a myth, Phillips says, as he sees U.S. history as sort of an extension of Great Britain, with other factors thrown in: "The new United States, however, needed a myth, and one soon took shape around the idea of an independent, liberated America as an altogether new kind of country: liberty's refuge, freedom's shining beacon, a nation destined to spread across the continent and perhaps even to redeem the world."

### Creative Bookkeeping Meets History

So, how does an "historian" who leaves Benjamin Franklin out of the American Revolution, write a biography about a specific American President?

Very simply, he makes up some, and leaves out more.

Kevin Phillips states that his mission is to rehabilitate William McKinley from the ranks of a third-rate American President, to the rank of near-great, or second-rate. In this short work—written as part of Times Books *American Presidents Series* of short biographies, with Arthur Schlesinger as series editor—Phillips navigates his way through most of the well-known, older works on McKinley, not with any pretense that he will add any new scholarship on the subject; but then discovers what he calls the "McKinley-(Teddy) Roosevelt continuum." Besides the political and economic realignments which he ascribes to McKinley, Phillips then adds a real doozy: that McKinley invented the Anglo-American alliance, which led to the political alignment of the 20th Century, of America with Britain, against Germany and Japan! Thus, we have returned to one of the underlying theses of *Cousins' Wars*, that the American republic was some form of momentary gyration of the English-speaking empire tradition, restored by McKinley. Until Phillips' account of history, McKinley had been robbed of that honor!

On occasion, Phillips tries to cover himself, by referring to actual events in real history, some of which I believe he has cribbed from his familiarity with the research by associates of Lyndon LaRouche.<sup>1</sup> He says that William McKinley was an advocate of the American System. McKinley “sought a late-19th-Century nationalist version of what Henry Clay had called the ‘American System’ of internal improvements and protected industries seeking a powerful tomorrow.”

By way of comparison, the reader can find a methodologically appropriate approach to this historical period from Lyndon LaRouche’s Feb. 9 Open Letter to the Democratic Party “This New Turning-Point in World History” (see *EIR*, March 5, 2004). Here, LaRouche, who is a pre-candidate for President in this year’s election, makes some specific points of the period of history in question. “Hence, the economic history of the U.S.A. since approximately 1876, has been, overall, during most among those decades, an increasing corrosive influence of the Anglo-Dutch Liberal system of political-economy traced from the post-1763 system of the British East India Company. Except for the Franklin Roosevelt interval, that has been the prevalent trend in U.S. policy of practice during the entirety of the post-1901 20th Century, and the present century to date.”

LaRouche then cites the shift from an economy based on the production of farmers, independent manufacturers and the like, to the Wall Street and London financier takeover. “The mythological hoax of Teddy Roosevelt’s heroic struggle against the trusts, has been used since as a bludgeon to crush private entrepreneurs in favor of the financier-run oligopolies. The attempt of Wall Street’s and London’s financiers to gobble up the physical productive power of the U.S.A., a trend that had been more or less rampant since the mid-1870s, had provoked a protectionist response, known as the ‘trusts,’ from actual entrepreneurial interests. It was a brutal fight, fought from both sides, largely by brutish, often unscrupulous methods, but the significance of what Teddy did was to enthrone the Anglo-American financier power, at the expense of the U.S. people and a true entrepreneurial interest in ‘protectionist’ methods of resistance to financier predators.”

In Phillips’ account, McKinley deserves the credit for the “trust busting” of Teddy Roosevelt, and therefore, for Woodrow Wilson’s progressive movement, and even for the establishment of the Federal Reserve, an independent central bank—in every way the opposite of Hamilton’s republican concept for a national banking system—fully worthy of the kind of European system this nation disdained.

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1. Other examples of Phillips cribbing from LaRouche and his associates can be seen in his most recent book *American Dynasty: Aristocracy, Fortune and the Politics of Deceit in the House of Bush*, on former President George H.W. Bush. And in *The Cousins’ Wars: Religion, Politics and the Triumph of Anglo-America*, Phillips refers to the Knights of the Golden Circle as a myth, in his discussion of the Civil War. The truth about this matter was exposed extensively in Anton Chaitkin’s *Treason in America: From Aaron Burr to Averell Harriman* (Washington: Executive Intelligence Review, 1999).

## ‘American System’ versus ‘British System’

There was a battle on two policy fronts during this time, which reflected the underlying battle between the “American System,” and the “British System.” In economic policy, following the 1876 Specie Resumption, while the massive growth of U.S. industry and manufacturing accelerated, it did so under the financial strangulation of the gold standard. The directed credit policy of Lincoln and Henry C. Carey, gave way to political fights over bi-metallism. Western and agricultural interests fought to maintain easy credit, rallying around the populist elements both inside and out of the Democratic Party, such as William Jennings Bryan; while the pro-American System Republicans, in alliance with industrialists, sought to head off Wall Street and the British, by fighting for protectionist measures. Carey had died shortly after the 1876 Specie Resumption, and pro-British operatives and factions like the “mugwumps” ran rampant in all parties.

The second policy fight was around the shape of Manifest Destiny, and American foreign policy as the United States was emerging as a major world power. Would America remain under the principles of John Quincy Adams and the Monroe Doctrine, or fall prey to Confederate/British impulses towards imperialism? Central to an understanding of McKinley’s foreign policy is the role of James Blaine in the post-Civil War era. Blaine organized McKinley and others around extending Adams’ and Clay’s fight for the Monroe Doctrine approach to Ibero-America. Both Blaine and McKinley saw the shift of the U.S. relationship with Ibero-America as the key to defeating British geopolitical maneuvering.

Phillips, of course, finds that McKinley was robbed of the credit for his successful initiation of the new era of imperialism, which Phillips sees coming from America’s British roots, although McKinley was not a “full-fledged” imperialist.

Without a doubt, William McKinley was the most anti-British political figure in the post-Civil War era, outside of Blaine. This extends to McKinley’s views and policies on both economic and strategic matters. All of the evidence of this is, of course removed from Phillips’ account of the period.

The ultimate fabrication of Phillips concerns McKinley’s assassination, which he barely mentions. The assassination robbed McKinley of what Phillips falsely considers to be his accomplishments. But, as ideas seem not to exist in this approach to history, neither, of course, do conspiracies.

Phillips wonders aloud, why did McKinley appear to be so secretive about his plans and intentions? Perhaps Phillips should refer back to what McKinley’s friend, the industrialist Mark Hanna, said to the Republican nominee after the political machinations staged to make Teddy Roosevelt his Vice Presidential running mate: “Now it is up to you to live!” Presidents who represented a threat to this nation’s enemies, as McKinley well understood, died quite suddenly.

So, Phillips succeeds in this book in attributing to William McKinley, the success of policies the President largely opposed, and gave his life in so doing. Thus, Kevin Phillips has given us a successful character assassination.