

A brief historiography of the Civil war: how historians interpret the causes of the conflict.

This brief outline draws on the article by Anderson. Read this for fuller examples and explanations.

| Interpretation | The core of the interpretation | |
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| <p><u>Whig Interpretation</u> <i>18th and 19th C.</i></p> <p><i>Key Historians:</i> <i>Gardiner</i> <i>Trevelyan</i></p> | <p>History is seen as a continuous process, achieving progress, ie progress from primitive societies with limited individual/political liberty to societies where there is political & individual liberty/freedom.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> English Civil war is seen as a crucial element in this process. Conflict between Charles & Parliament is seen within the context of a struggle for greater liberty. Charles wants to conserve & protect the past. Puritans in Parl want greater freedom in a religious & political sense. (Freedom from royal control. RC church is seen as being against individual choice, ie freedom). Friction between the two over religion and politics produces the conflict. | <p>Key factors Political Religious</p> |
| <p><u>Marxist Interpretation</u> <i>20th century</i></p> <p><i>Key Historians:</i> <i>(Weber)</i> <i>Tawney</i> <i>Hill</i></p> | <p>Karl Marx writing in 19th century saw History as a process of class struggle for economic (and thus social) dominance in which two classes would eventually emerge: capitalists and proletariat. Marx does not write about the English civil war, but his basic belief that historical events are best explained by looking at economic and social factors is used by others to explain why civil war broke out in 1642.</p> <p>In early 20th century Weber wrote about a connection between the rise of protestantism and the growth of capitalism. This was developed by C Hill in the 1960's. The basic ideas were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protestantism emphasised individual choice and making of decisions without restriction (ie by the monarch or Pope). This belief was most acceptable to a growing merchant and commercial class. This group emerges in the 16th c., was hard working, frugal (ie lived simply, reinvesting profits) and saw growing personal wealth as a sign of approval by God. They see Charles as an obstacle to this process (eg 11 Years Personal Rule, Thorough, Monopolies, Ship Money all restricted their ability to "prosper") This social group also sought representation in Parl to protect "liberty". Outbreak of war is the inevitable culmination of these growing puritan attacks on royal authority. (although Charles inept handling of the final years is accepted as actually setting the time for the conflict) <p>These historians may also refer to the conflict not as</p> | <p>Key factors Economic Social</p> |

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| | <p>Civil war but as the “English Revolution”, arguing that the conflict fundamentally changed social relationships in England, giving power to a parliamentary class which was linked to economic (capitalist) expansion. This eventually created a social, economic and political environment in which Britain could be the first country to have an industrial revolution (and to return to Marx, be the first where two classes emerge: capitalists-emerging out of the puritan merchants, and the proletariat who worked in their factories.)</p> <p>See Anderson for criticisms of this interpretation</p> | |
| <p><u>The Revisionists</u> <i>Most recent work</i></p> | <p>Problems with the first two interpretations have led to revaluations with the following features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil war no longer seen as resulting from a single or pair of causes. Rather = due to combination of factors • Local factors were very important in deciding how different parts of the country reacted to events and which sides were supported (Morrill 1980) • War was blundered into, especially after 1640. By no means was war inevitable or expected until 1642 (Fletcher 1981) • Role of Charles is becoming more significant in the mix. By 1642 he is unable to cope with a mix of complex problems: finance, religion, conflicts in his multiple kingdoms (Fletcher 1991) • Within a European context Blanning (2001) argues that for the monarchs of the Ancien Regime (mid 17th to late 18th c.) to survive they had to show intelligence, energy and charisma. Charles, lacking these would fail... | <p>Key factors Various</p> |
| <p>Conclusion:</p> | <p>Causes are varied, and no single cause seems to be overwhelming. Some though may carry greater weight than others with regard to the timing of the actual outbreak of the conflict</p> | |