



Dance of the Furies: Europe and the Outbreak of World War I

Michael S. Neiberg

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The common explanation for the outbreak of World War I depicts Europe as a minefield of nationalism, needing only the slightest pressure to set off an explosion of passion that would rip the continent apart. But in a crucial reexamination of the outbreak of violence, Michael Neiberg shows that ordinary Europeans, unlike their political and military leaders, neither wanted nor expected war during the fateful summer of 1914. By training his eye on the ways that people outside the halls of power reacted to the rapid onset and escalation of the fighting, Neiberg dispels the notion that Europeans were rabid nationalists intent on mass slaughter. He reveals instead a complex set of allegiances that cut across national boundaries.

Neiberg marshals letters, diaries, and memoirs of ordinary citizens across Europe to show that the onset of war was experienced as a sudden, unexpected event. As they watched a minor diplomatic crisis erupt into a continental bloodbath, they expressed shock, revulsion, and fear. But when bargains between belligerent governments began to crumble under the weight of conflict, public disillusionment soon followed. Yet it was only after the fighting acquired its own horrible momentum that national hatreds emerged under the pressure of mutually escalating threats, wartime atrocities, and intense government propaganda.

Dance of the Furies gives voice to a generation who found themselves compelled to participate in a ghastly, protracted orgy of violence they never imagined would come to pass.

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