



Germany at the Fin de Siècle: Culture, Politics, and Ideas

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The phrase fin de siècle conjures up images of artistic experimentation and political decadence. The contributors to this volume argue that Wilhelmine Germany -- best known for its industrial and military muscle -- also shared these traits. Their essays look back to the years between 1885 and 1914 to find in Germany a mixture of sociopolitical malaise and experimental exhilaration that was similar in many ways to the better-known cases of France and Austria.

Revising the view that the German Second Reich was merely a precursor to the Third, this broad-scoped study presents pre--World War I Germany in its own fascinating and often contradictory terms. The foundations of the antiliberal passions that would plague the Weimar Republic are evident, but Wilhelmine society also had a lighter, more playful and moderate spirit, one that was largely extinguished by the Great War.

Blending social, cultural, and intellectual history, the contributors -- a distinguished cross-section of older and younger scholars -- trace changing German views on liberalism, penal reform, race, women, art, popular culture, and technology. They juxtapose better-known figures such as Max Weber, Thomas Mann, and Martin Heidegger with now-forgotten individuals like the Jewish feminist novelist Grete Meisel-Hess and the iconoclastic Swiss painter Arnold Böcklin. Their essay topics range from the esoteric and erotic poetry of Stefan George to the Jewish comedy of the Herrnfeld Theater. "Modernity" is examined from the perspectives of bourgeois cinema-goers and judicial reformers, as well as from the viewpoint of Carl Jung. The result is a variegated picture of an unsettled world, rich in its innovations, ambitious in its undertakings, and often apocalyptic in its dreams.

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