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Edited by Richard F. Hamilton and Holger H. Herwig
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The Origins of World War I

This work poses an easy but perplexing question about World War I: Why did it happen? Several of the oft-cited causes are reviewed and discussed. The argument of the alliance systems is inadequate, lacking relevance or compelling force. The argument of an accident (or “slide”) is also inadequate, given the clear and unambiguous evidence of intentions. The arguments of mass demands, those focusing on nationalism, militarism, and social Darwinism, it is argued, are insufficient, lacking indications of frequency, intensity, and process (how they influenced the various decisions).

The work focuses on decision making, on the choices made by small coteries, in Austria-Hungary, Germany, Russia, France, Britain, and elsewhere. The decisions made later by leaders in Japan, the Ottoman Empire, Italy, the Balkans, and the United States are also explored.

The final chapters review the “basic causes” once again. An alternative position is advanced, one focused on elites and coteries, their backgrounds and training, and their unique agendas.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

For Irene and Lorraine

Contents

<i>List of Tables and Maps</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Contributors</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xiii
1 World Wars: Definition and Causes <i>Richard F. Hamilton and Holger H. Herwig</i>	I
2 The European Wars: 1815–1914 <i>Richard F. Hamilton</i>	45
3 Serbia <i>Richard C. Hall</i>	92
4 Austria-Hungary <i>Graydon A. Tunstall, Jr.</i>	112
5 Germany <i>Holger H. Herwig</i>	150
6 Russia <i>David Alan Rich</i>	188
7 France <i>Eugenia C. Kiesling</i>	227
8 Great Britain <i>J. Paul Harris</i>	266
9 Japan <i>Frederick R. Dickinson</i>	300
10 The Ottoman Empire <i>Ulrich Trumpener</i>	337

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 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

viii	<i>Contents</i>	
11	Italy <i>Richard F. Hamilton and Holger H. Herwig</i>	356
12	Bulgaria, Romania, and Greece <i>Richard C. Hall</i>	389
13	The United States <i>John Milton Cooper, Jr.</i>	415
14	Why Did It Happen? <i>Holger H. Herwig</i>	443
15	On the Origins of the Catastrophe <i>Richard F. Hamilton</i>	469
	<i>Appendix A: Chronology, 1914</i> <i>Geoffrey P. Megargee</i>	507
	<i>Appendix B: Dramatis Personae</i>	520
	<i>Appendix C: Suggested Readings</i>	525
	<i>Index</i>	532

List of Tables and Maps

Tables

1.1 World Wars	<i>page</i> 4
2.1 European Wars, 1815–1914	54

Maps

2.1 Southeastern Europe, 1850	63
3.1 The Balkans, 1912	97
3.2 The Balkans after the Peace Settlement, 1913	102
4.1 Ethnic Groups of the Habsburg Empire, 1910	114
4.2 Austria-Hungary, Germany, and Russia	147
9.1 Japan and the Pacific	301
11.1 Italy, 1914	361

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xii

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Richard F. Hamilton
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