

Dark Magic (A Note to Readers)

In "Dark Magic," Erik Larson reflects on the eerie parallels between historical events surrounding the American Civil War and contemporary political tensions, particularly following the Capitol attack on January 6, 2021. Larson, engrossed in research about Fort Sumter and the impending Civil War, experienced a disquieting convergence of past and present; both eras were marked by iconic moments of national unrest tied to electoral processes and presidential transitions.

The visceral emotions he felt while watching the chaos unfold—anxiety, anger, astonishment—echoed the sentiments prevalent in 1860-1861 among many Americans who could sense the nation teetering on the brink of chaos. This acknowledgment propels Larson to delve into the suspenseful narrative of a fragmented nation inching toward its greatest tragedy, driven by hubris, deceit, a craving for notoriety, and the complexities of human emotions.

Central to this inquiry is a perplexing question: How did South Carolina, seemingly an inconsequential state in economic decline, transform into the epicenter of this national crisis? Equally perplexing is the "malignant magic" that led Americans, both north and south of the Mason-Dixon Line, to entertain the thought of waging an all-out war against each other, culminating in the tragic loss of 750,000 lives.

Larson emphasizes that his work is deeply rooted in factual recounting; all quotations stem from credible historical documents, while behavioral descriptions are derived from eyewitness accounts. He has refined certain historical spellings and punctuation to align with modern standards while preserving the essence of original statements—Lincoln's delightful misspellings included.

With an invitation to readers to immerse themselves in this tumultuous time, Larson aims to evoke the emotions of passion, heroism, heartbreak, and even humor, akin to living in that pivotal moment unknowing of its dire outcomes. The narrative suggests a heightened sense of dread is necessary, particularly in the context of today's worrisome political landscape, where whispers of secession and civil war resurface among some segments of the population. Thus, the book serves as both a historical examination and a cautionary tale relevant to modern America .