

Susan Zuccotti. *The Holocaust, the French and the Jews.* New York: Basic Books, 1993. xv + 383 pp. \$14.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-465-03035-4.



Reviewed by Martin E. Vann

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As she did several years ago in *The Italians and the Holocaust*, Susan Zuccotti offers an admirably researched and briskly paced narrative about one country's involvement in the destruction of European Jewry. Zuccotti presents a more nuanced and balanced view than some other books on the fate of French Jewry. This book, which relies on archival documentation, memoirs, and interviews, read together with *Vichy France and the Jews* by Michael R. Marrus and Robert O. Paxton, provides a complete treatment of the subject. Zuccotti personalizes the experience of the Jews and the men and women who either aided in their survival or destruction. Myths about the craven complicity of France's population, particularly in Vichy France, are avoided. What remains, though, is still fairly depressing. While a high percentage (some seventy-six percent) of France's Jews survived the Holocaust, the Vichy government often anticipated Nazi orders for deportation and surpassed the German desire for restrictions against Jews. The antisemitism displayed toward the substantial foreign-born Jewish population was more virulent than the treatment of native Jews—between forty-one and forty-five percent of the foreign community perished. Xenophobia and economic dislocation were at the root

of the targeting of the foreign Jews. In the last year before liberation, even Jewish French nationals were in jeopardy, as the French, who had previously prepared census data on the Jews, sought to fulfill deportation quotas established by the Germans.

Untold numbers of ordinary French citizens and many clergy risked their lives to aid both native and foreign-born Jews in many ways. Often this aid consisted merely of being passive, allowing Jews to remain in hiding or to cross borders without informing on them. Those fortunate enough to obtain fake identity and ration cards could sometimes live and work openly, reliant on the goodwill of their neighbors and co-workers. Zuccotti chronicles numerous clandestine networks of Jewish rescue organizations which contributed to the hiding and survival of France's Jews, along with non-Jewish assistance and armed resistance groups. Nevertheless a huge propaganda machine had convinced citizens that Jews were their enemy and collaborators who joined Fascist leagues hunted for both Jews and Resistants. Betrayers believed that informing on others was a patriotic duty. Pierre Laval generally did not permit French police to participate in roundups of native Jews and so, with the exception of French-

born children of immigrants, they benefited from limited protection. Zuccotti theorizes that the high survival rate was partly due to the fact that France was a large country with mountainous terrain conducive to hiding, and the Germans did not commit adequate personnel to hunt down all the Jews.

Zuccotti explores the curious relationship of France to Jews. The country was the first in Europe to grant full citizenship to Jews, yet the scandalous Dreyfus case exposed the rampant anti-semitism throughout society. It was a convenient tool for demagogues on both the extreme right and left, appealing to xenophobes who viewed Jews as foreigners, responsible for the liberal state and the loss of Alsace and Lorraine. The rapid advancement of French Jews in every field only masked antisemitism which was easily called forth in times of trouble. And yet, to many Eastern European Jews in the first decades of this century, the eventual rehabilitation of Capt. Dreyfus was evidence of French tolerance and equality—a sure sign that France was a suitable country for emigration. It was precisely the swelling numbers of Jews in France which played into the latent fear of economic disruption. In troubled times, some politicians, including even members of Leon Blum's own party, attacked him as a Jew, rather than address the real issues that divided them.

Zuccotti concludes that a substantial number of Jewish lives were saved due to a combination of factors: a lower percentage of foreign-born Jews than in Belgium and Holland, a longer and fuller assimilation (knowledge of French) of the foreign-born Jews in France, and a growing awareness and sense of shame among the non-Jewish population at the maltreatment and deportation of the Jews. Early acceptance of antisemitic and anti-foreign rhetoric gave way to a palpable appreciation of and sympathy for the suffering of the Jews and to public protests by churchmen breaking the silence. The passage of time allowed the Jewish population to make plans to hide or es-

cape. The majority of Jews saved in France owed their rescue not to Jewish organizations, but to the assistance and benevolence of the French population, increasingly aware of the inevitability of an Allied victory and the folly of collaborationist behavior. Clearly, the history of France's treatment of the Jews during World War II is a checkered one. Zuccotti manages to imbue the story with a passion for the subject of her tale and thus brings the reader to a better understanding of the complexity of the issues which faced the French in those dark years.

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