



France in the Second World War: Collaboration, Resistance, Holocaust, Empire by Chris Millington.

New York: Bloomsbury, 2020. Pp. xv, 251. ISBN 978-1-350-09497-0.

Review by David Lees, University of Warwick (d.w.lees@warwick.ac.uk).

The history of France in World War II has been well studied. Between 1940 and 1944, the administration of metropolitan France was shared by the Nazi occupiers and Marshal Philippe Pétain's government based in the spa town of Vichy. The nation itself was carved up into several zones. Those embarking on a study of these so-called "dark years" of modern France would do well to begin their research with historian Chris Millington's informative and insightful new book.

Millington, a reader in modern European history at Manchester Metropolitan University, presents a concise synthesis of recent scholarship on occupied France while also stressing the global context of the period. Indeed, for historians concerned primarily with France and the French, it can be easy to neglect the everyday lives of the people and colonial rulers of the French Empire. At a time when historiography is increasingly focused on the broader picture when it comes to modern and contemporary France, Millington's book responds well to this shift towards transnational or global Frenchness.

A chapter on the experiences of the inhabitants and rulers of the Empire who witnessed the erosion of French dominance on the world stage addresses key themes of the Occupation. Special attention is paid to Vichy and Nazi policy vis-à-vis discrimination against Freemasons, communists, homosexuals, people of color and, notably, gypsies. But, Millington argues, foreign-born Jews bore the brunt of Vichy bigotry, not least in the mass round-ups in 1941-42. Another chapter carefully details the leadership structure in the Hôtel du Parc, where Pétain nominally ran the nation.

A meticulous examination of the challenges of everyday life in metropolitan France draws on recent work in a very productive field of study within the past decade¹ that has shown how and why people resisted or abetted Vichy authorities and the Nazi occupiers. Millington warns against the temptation to invoke outdated characterizations of the French:

Problems arise when we seek to apply the terms "collaboration" and "resistance" [It] is impossible to understand the behaviour of the French in black-and-white terms. Repertoires of defiance were varied and acts such as strikes and food riots, with limited and often economic aims, do not easily fit into the category of resistance to the political and ideological status quo. Moreover, daily life consisted of a series of choices and negotiations. Just as there were motives to resist and to collaborate, there were compelling reasons for doing nothing, not least one's own survival and the survival of one's family. (178)

1. E.g., Shannon L. Fogg, *The Politics of Everyday Life in Vichy France: Foreigners, Undesirables, and Strangers* (NY: Cambridge U Pr, 2009); Daniel Lee, *Pétain's Jewish Children: French Jewish Youth and the Vichy regime, 1940-1942* (NY: Oxford U Pr, 2014); Ludivine Broch, *Ordinary Workers, Vichy and the Holocaust: French Railwaymen and the Second World War* (NY: Cambridge U Pr, 2016); and Lindsey Dodd and David Lees, *Vichy France and Everyday Life: Confronting the Challenges of Wartime, 1939-1945* (NY: Bloomsbury, 2018).

Drawing upon his considerable prior work,² Millington takes the “long view” of the wartime period. He locates the origins of the Vichy regime firmly within the Third French Republic, with due attention to the aftermath of the Occupation years.

Another chapter is dedicated to the enduring postwar obsession with the Second World War in France (and elsewhere), including computer games as well as films and books and various other popular cultural outputs. Though scant attention has been given to representations of the Occupation in computer games, Millington correctly argues that they have helped shape the ways that the wider public understands France in the World War II: “videogames reach global markets. Those games that take a historical perspective have as much potential to influence public understanding of the past as cinema” (169).

The authors’ conversance with recent historiography is reflected in the book’s invaluable annotated bibliography. Though its entries are mostly English-language, Millington draws on the work of francophone academics as well. *France in the Second World War* is an accessible, well written, and highly informative text. It will engage and instruct both students of France under Vichy and Nazi rule, and anyone curious about global French history and the everyday experiences of those who lived through the Second World War.

2. Including *A History of Fascism in France* (NY: Bloomsbury, 2019).