



# The Unfree French: Life Under the Occupation

*Richard Vinen*

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## **The Unfree French: Life Under the Occupation** Richard Vinen

The swift and unexpected defeat of the French Army in 1940 shocked the nation. Two million soldiers were taken prisoner, six million civilians fled from the German army's advance to join convoys of confused and terrified refugees, and only a few managed to escape the country. The vast majority of French people were condemned to years of subjugation under Nazi and Vichy rule. This compelling book investigates the impact of the occupation on the people of France and dispels any lingering notion that somehow, under the collaborating government of Marshal Pétain, life was quite tolerable for most French citizens.

Richard Vinen describes the inescapable fear and the moral quandaries that permeated life in German-controlled France. Focusing on the experiences of the least privileged, he shows how chronic shortages, desperate compromises, fear of displacement, racism, and sadistic violence defined their lives. Virtually all adult males festered in POW camps or were sent to work in the Reich. With numerous enthralling anecdotes and a variety of maps and evocative photographs, *The Unfree French* makes it possible for the first time to understand how average people in France really lived from 1940 to 1945, why their experiences differed from region to region and among various groups, and why they made the choices they did during the occupation.

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