

Book Review: The Extreme Right in the French Resistance: Members of the Cagoule and Corvignolles in the Second World War by Valerie Deacon

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Deacon, Valerie. *The Extreme Right in the French Resistance: Members of the Cagoule and Corvignolles in the Second World War*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2016. x + 230 pages. Hardcover, \$45.00.

The French Third Republic, established following defeat in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871), launched an era of change for the French political right, which emerged as a loose collection of movements, individuals, and ideas (including protest, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, anti-socialism/communism, anti-parliamentarianism, a stronger central government, and often anti-German sentiments). Several fascist or fascist-like organizations developed, and the rise of leagues, like the *Ligue des Patriotes*, became common. With the Nazi German invasion of France in World War II, the Third Republic collapsed, and a French collaborationist government under Marshal Philippe Pétain, a World War I hero with right-wing leanings, was established in Vichy. Pétain initially launched his program of National Revolution, which rejected much of the former Republic's secular and liberal traditions for an authoritarian, paternalist, Catholic society under the slogan "*travail, famille, patrie*." Meanwhile, the French Resistance Movement was born.

The Extreme Right in the French Resistance: Members of the Cagoule and Corvignolles in the Second World War counters traditional views which posit the Resistance as an apolitical, unified movement, as followers of exiled French leader Charles de Gaulle or as supporters of republicanism. Historian Valerie Deacon uses members of the right-wing *Cagoule* and *Corvignolles*, who fought in the Resistance, as case studies to examine the extreme right's participation. In so doing, she depicts the Resistance and French domestic affairs during the German occupation as more complicated. One might assume, based on their far-right views, that members of these organizations would have universally supported Vichy or sided with the Nazis. However, right-wing resisters navigated between varying beliefs in the changing political context. In fact, members of these right-wing movements, which also drew from French revolutionary traditions (including insurrection), had been involved during the interwar years in conspiratorial and anti-parliamentarian activities that provided them with skills to organize an effective underground Resistance. During the pre-war era, members of these groups sought to bring down the Republic; however, those supporting the Resistance knew their actions would help restore a parliamentary system.

The first chapter of the book provides an overview of French history during the interwar era and World War II. The second chapter contextualizes the study in relation to previous scholarship as well as clarifies terminology. Identifying the extreme right's role in the Resistance has been complicated by different components, such as "the politics of the Right in the 1930s, the defeat and the Occupation, the different reactions of the Right to these events, the Resistance and the many tensions within it, the postwar reestablishment of the republican government, the rise and fall of rightist political fortunes, the creation of a Resistance myth in

France, and the challenges to that myth” (p. 24). Chapter three provides an overview of the *Cagoule*—often described as a terrorist organization—whose members were not above committing criminal acts, even murder, to further their aims. The *Cagoule* became a hodgepodge of individuals frustrated with less extremist right-wing organizations like royalist *Action française*. They maintained an insurrectionist agenda even after many political leagues embraced modern politics to gain influence and reorganized into parties, particularly during the left-wing Popular Front coalition government in the 1930s. The subsequent chapter focuses on the shadowy *Corvignolles*, who were often associated with the *Cagoule*, but of which limited information is known. Both the *Cagoule* and *Corvignolles* operated illicitly, and were known to be anti-communist, generally anti-republican, and had politics informed by anti-Semitism.

The next three chapters are the heart of the study. Chapter five, “Resistance at the Heart of Vichy,” centers on the anti-Gaullist, anti-German Georges Loustaunau-Lecau of the *Cagoule*. He played an instrumental role in Vichy by founding the Allied network, focusing on military intelligence. Chapter six, “From Vichy to Exile,” demonstrates that the Vichy regime had inconsistent policies and attitudes toward resisters. Deacon follows military man Georges Groussard, who was linked to interwar-era, anti-parliamentary and anti-communist struggles, as well as the *Cagoule* and *Corvignolles*. Groussard led the *Centre d’informations et d’études* (CIE), nicknamed the “French Gestapo,” which was involved with the Resistance. Eventually, he severed ties with Vichy and went into Swiss exile, cooperating with the pro-British Resistance. Chapter seven, “Rightist Gaullism,” addresses how some right-wing resisters questioned their loyalty to Pétain or the Vichy government. Some fled France, others adopted more anti-Vichy tones, and still others supported de Gaulle, particularly after it appeared that he was uniting the Resistance. Support for de Gaulle, however, was generally conditional; many withdrew it after his decision to recognize Algerian independence from France in the 1960s. Deacon focuses her chapter on Pierre de Bénouville, a *Cagoulard* and former *Action française* member once sympathetic to Vichy’s National Revolution. He conducted operations in cooperation with de Gaulle in exile and Allied forces. The chapter also discusses Maurice Duclos, another *Cagoulard*, exiled in Britain, where he connected with de Gaulle and his efforts. Due to the fact that de Gaulle emerged as the leader of postwar, republican France, many right-wing resisters who had collaborated with him had their roles recognized in the postwar era.

Finally, chapter eight, “Postwar Memories,” focuses on the postwar reputation of some rightists who had been members of the *Cagoule* or *Corvignolles*. These individuals did not fit within the popular historical narrative of wartime activity that gained hegemony after World War II depicting Vichy as an anomaly, and all French as ‘resisters’ and supporters of the republic. A conclusion sums up the book.

Interestingly, nearly 45 percent of the book is comprised of introductory or background information. However, this material is necessary as the chosen individuals, and extreme-right groups with which they were associated, have not been widely studied. This information is needed in order to grasp the significance at the heart of Deacon’s study. Indeed, while right-

wing supporters were a minority within the French Resistance, they were by no means marginal in significance, and Deacon's case studies exemplify the various ways in which the rightists contributed. *The Extreme Right in the French Resistance: Members of the Cagoule and Corvignolles in the Second World War* is an interesting, compelling study that is well researched, written, and organized. The text will be useful for history and political science scholars, and it opens the door to future research in this area.

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