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Remembering French Collaboration and Resistance during Vichy France during the Vel' d'Hiv Roundup

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Introduction

Nations have often found it difficult to come to terms with atrocities committed in the past. The same is true of how the Vichy regime that collaborated with Nazi Germany treated Jews during World War Two. During the course of the war, the French gave 230,000 people residing in France to Germany, and only 32,000 returned.¹ In the post-war period, however, the French believed in the Gaullist myth that all of France resisted these collaborative measures. The Vel' d'Hiv Roundup, where almost 13,000 men, women, and children were arrested, interned, and deported to Auschwitz by French officials became a key event that changed public opinion and has since become a rallying cry for France to recognize what the Vichy government did. France's reaction to these events poses the questions: what made people collaborate, resist, or simply allow the roundups and deportations to occur? What are the unintended consequences of our actions, or inactions, in the grand scheme of things?

The central argument of this essay is that the events of the July 1942 Vel' d'Hiv Roundup provide an example of how the French collaborated, resisted, and passively allowed the mass arrest and deportation of Jewish families. The Vel' d'Hiv Roundup showed that French collaboration with Germany went above and beyond what the Germans demanded, that the traditional definition of active resistance can be broadened, and ultimately how apathy and simply "following orders" led to catastrophic events. Finally, this event falls prey to the Gaullist myth of widespread resistance prevalent in public memory, and demonstrates a reluctance to face the crimes France committed. The following historiography, while not conclusive, traces some of the most important works on Vichy and the Jews in France. Each of the sources have their own biases, but have formed the way academia and the public have viewed Vichy and the Jews, in a way, representing the changing public opinions throughout history.

In the post-war period, the prevailing thought in France was Gaullist in theory, praising the

¹ Claude Levy and Paul Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, trans. Inea Bushnaq (New York: Hill and Wang, 1969), 211.

whole nation of resisters with few collaborators. Joan Wolf argued in her 2004 book *Harnessing the Holocaust* that de Gaulle purposefully suppressed the extent of collaboration to unite a divided France.² However, starting in the late '60s with Patrick Modiano's novels and Marcel Ophüls' 1969 documentary *The Sorrow and the Pity*, focus shifted to an emphasis on often enthusiastic collaboration from all levels of society.³ Henry Rousso's *The Vichy Syndrome*, published in 1969 during the Klaus Barbie trial, forced the French and the world to reexamine France's collaborationist role in the Holocaust.⁴ Robert Paxton and Michael Marrus's book, *Vichy France and the Jews* (1983) gave credence to this viewpoint and argued that Vichy went above and beyond what the Nazis required and that most of the French population was collaborating with Germany by default if they were not actively resisting.⁵

This argument that most people collaborated with the Germans, either actively or passively, has been challenged by some scholars in the past twenty years, including Susan Zuccotti in *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews*, and John Sweets in *Choices in Vichy France*. Zuccotti argued that widespread apathy enabled about three quarters of French Jews and about half of foreign Jews in France to survive, in spite of Vichy's collaboration (there were about 330,000 Jews in France at the end of 1950, and about 135,000 of those were foreign Jews).⁶ She claimed that many French aided Jews (especially children) either actively by helping them escape or hide or passively by not informing on them. Additionally, Sweets called for a redefinition of collaborators, saying that unlike Paxton and Marrus, only those who were actively working with Vichy or Germany were collaborators, but that those who were passive, with an *attentisme* (wait-and-see) attitude cannot be *de facto* lumped with collaborators.⁷

² Joan B. Wolf, *Harnessing the Holocaust: The Politics of Memory in France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 187.

³ *The Sorrow and the Pity*, directed by Marcel Ophüls (Columbia Pictures Home Video, 1969) documentary.

⁴ William VanderWolk, *Rewriting the Past Memory, History and Narration in the Novels of Patrick Modiano*, (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 1997), 125.

⁵ Robert Paxton and Michael Marrus, *Vichy France and the Jews* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), xii-xiii.

⁶ Susan Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews*, (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), 3-5.

⁷ John Sweet, *Choices in Vichy France: The French under Nazi Occupation*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 83, 168-169.

Despite the wide availability on many subtopics of Holocaust history, there are some that are sparse and hard to locate. There is a lack of specifically English sources on the Vel' d'Hiv and other roundups and deportations in France. Claude Levy and Paul Tillard's book *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv* is one of only a few English monographs on the Vel' d'Hiv Roundup. This book was instrumental for learning about the events of the roundup and used hundreds of excerpts from testimonies and official documents to uncover what actually happened.⁸ Most of the primary sources I used came from work by Levy and Tillard and Susan Zuccotti.⁹ Part of the reason there are so few sources on this topic is due to the fact that it is an event that much of France would rather forget, because of its collaborationist nature, but also because few of those arrested survived. In addition to a lack of extensive sources on the Vel' d'Hiv, there is also a discrepancy between the amount of memoirs and primary sources from those who participated in the resistance and those who actively or passively collaborated with Vichy and Germany.

Public memory of the Holocaust in France can in part be seen through the above mentioned histories, but separate studies on how the French remember their involvement with these events reveal a desire to not address the problem or discuss it. W. James Booth argued that when people discuss Vichy and French involvement in World War Two, they separate the current French government from Vichy to avoid blaming oneself for their actions.¹⁰ Additionally, Susan Suleiman in *Crisis of Memory and the Second World War* claimed that people forget what they do not want to remember or associate themselves with.¹¹ The prevailing idea in these sources is that France has struggled to come to terms with Vichy's and their own involvement in the Holocaust, which the Vel' d'Hiv Roundup became a

⁸ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*.

⁹ See bibliography. Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*; Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews*.

¹⁰ W. James Booth, "Communities of Memory: On Identity, Memory, and Debt," *The American Political Science Review* 93, no. 2 (1999): 250.

¹¹ Susan Suleiman, *Crisis of Memory and the Second World War*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

symbol of, because of a national sense of guilt for either collaborating or simply allowing it to happen.

The scholars noted above and others have conflicting definitions on what it means to collaborate and to resist. This paper defines collaborators as those who actively worked with the German government or went a step further to make France more fascist and anti-Semitic. Resisters are defined as those who actively worked against Vichy and Germany militarily to stop the advancement of German troops, by actively spreading news in clandestine newspapers, or aiding Jews and other outcasts escape or hide. However, these two definitions overlook a large part of the population who remained apathetic, did nothing, and had an *attentisme* attitude. This group of people had varying degrees of respect for and agreement with Vichy and its policies, but were united in spite of their feelings for choosing to not act. Oftentimes the indifferent are lumped in with the collaborators, reminiscent of the “if you are not with us then you are against us” idea, however, it is beneficial to discuss these as three separate groups in order to have a clearer idea as to how people reacted to Vichy and to the Jews they knew or encountered.

Background

In the inter-war period, thousands of Jews fled to countries that included France, England, and America from Germany and other Eastern European nations.¹² During this time and the rise of Hitler, France was preoccupied with its own economic depression and had a false sense of security about the ability of Germany to invade. The post-World War One economic stagnation and Great Depression caused unemployment to skyrocket in France and caused migration from moderate political parties to more extreme ones, such as the Communist or fascist parties (the Action Française).¹³ In addition to being distracted by internal economic and social problems, the French also thought they were safe from Hitler’s expansion because of their Maginot Line. The French military dug a huge defensive line on the

¹² Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel’ d’Hiv*, 47.

¹³ Eugene Weber, *The Hollow Years: France in the 1930s*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994), 47.

East of France to prevent an attack, championed as one of the best defensive measures. This gave the French a false sense of security and a reason to deny that there was a problem in Germany, leaving them unprepared to deal with the impending attack.¹⁴

In her memoir, Vivette Samuel, who worked for the Œuvre de secours aux enfants (OSE, or Society for Assistance to Children) recounted that her father was still confident that France was not going to be threatened by Germany even when Austria was annexed in March 1938, but that many people were worried for war that summer. She said when the Munich Pact was signed everyone was relieved and people were more worried about Spain and the fascist revolution going on just South of the French border than they were Germany.¹⁵ However, when Germany attacked in 1940 and took a mere four weeks to reach Paris, the French and the world were shocked.

As soon as France fell, Marshal Petain, an 80 year old World War One veteran and a member of Action Française, sent negotiators to Hitler to set up a collaborative government between France and Germany, known as the Vichy regime. Historian Stanley Hoffmann argued that Vichy was established out of political necessity and can be considered “involuntary collaboration” essential “to safeguard French interests in interstate relations between the beaten power and the victor.”¹⁶ However, in addition to this “involuntary collaboration,” some voluntarily collaborated with the Nazis because they agreed with their racial and fascist beliefs.¹⁷ No matter the varied and arguable causes for Vichy’s establishment, “the Vichy regime wanted to solve in its own way what it saw as a ‘Jewish problem’ in France,” based on France’s long history of anti-Semitism, according to Marrus and Paxton.¹⁸ However, it is important to note that unlike Hitler, “Vichy’s measures were not intended to kill,” but instead to

¹⁴ Weber, *The Hollow Years*, 175.

¹⁵ Vivette Samuel, *Rescuing the Children: A Holocaust Memoir* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 10.

¹⁶ Stanley Hoffmann, “Collaborationism in France during World War II,” *The Journal of Modern History* 40, no. 3 (1968): 376.

¹⁷ Hoffmann, “Collaborationism in France,” 376.

¹⁸ Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), xii

assimilate Jews who had been living in France for a while and emigrate those who were more recent arrivals, in order to have few Jews in France when the Germans began deporting Jews from Western Europe to death camps in the East.¹⁹

Since August 1940, Vichy implemented varied anti-Semitic legislation progressively removing Jews from normal society. The *Statut des juifs* excluded Jews from advanced positions with public or governmental influence and other economic limitations, and later Jews' identity papers in the Occupied Zone had to be stamped with *Juif*. Even though public opinion for years held that this was done on orders from Germany, there were no German orders until after these French laws were already instated.²⁰ Referring to these laws, Samuel recollected, "French Jews could not understand how a legitimate government headed by Marshal Petain could take such measures against World War I veterans, citizens integrated into the French community – 'assimilated,' as it was then termed – often the children of mixed marriages who, it should be emphasized, felt very little kinship with the Jews of eastern Europe."²¹ Jews thought things could not get worse for them, but new laws were passed that further restricted their rights, such as allowing local executives to intern foreign Jews, removing Jews from military positions, and forbidding Jews to hold professional positions, including in law and medicine, and from studying at university.²² By the summer of 1942, mass roundups and deportations of Jews in France were beginning.

The planning for these roundups began seriously at the Wannsee Conference in January 1942. It was here that the Germans decided on the Final Solution and declared they would receive 11 million Jews from across Europe, with 260-280,000 from France's Unoccupied Zone and 180,000 in the Occupied zone.²³ In the minutes of the Conference, the details for the Final Solution were recorded,

¹⁹ Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, xii.

²⁰ Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, 3-7; Samuel, *Rescuing the Children*, 20.

²¹ Samuel, *Rescuing the Children*, 20.

²² Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, 13, 75, 98.

²³ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 83 -84.

The pattern of the Final Solution of the problem should be the transfer of all Jews, under a reliable escort, to the East where they are to be attached to the Labor Service....It goes without saying that a large proportion will quite naturally be eliminated by their physical unfitness at the beginning. The survivors at the end of the work project, who will also be the strongest among them, will have to be given suitable treatment at the conclusion of the operation.²⁴

This clearly lays out the Nazis' plan to murder the European Jews, including those in France. It was this goal that the Germans were striving for when Rene Bousquet, Secretary of State for the Vichy Police and chief organizer of the Vel' d'Hiv Roundup, agreed with the SS to deliver 32,000 foreign Jews to avoid the arrest of French Jews.²⁵

The Vel' 'Hiv Roundup

In order to meet the quota, German and French officials planned the Vel' d'Hiv Roundup. The plan was for French police officers to arrest 27,388 foreign Jews (from Germany, Austria, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union) living in Paris and the surrounding suburbs based on the index cards made for these Jews from the mandatory census in 1940.²⁶ The arrests included men and women, and based on the recommendation of Pierre Laval (the new Vichy President) to ensure the quota was met and to avoid the problem of what to do with the children whose parents were arrested, children were also arrested.²⁷ When the head of the Gestapo's anti-Jewish section in France, Theodor Dannecker, learned of Laval's request, he sent the following message to Adolf Eichmann, the SS leader of the Jewish Department in Germany, "President Laval has proposed that, when it comes to the deportation of Jewish families from the non-occupied zone, children under sixteen be taken too. As for the Jewish children who would remain in the occupied zone, the question does not interest him."²⁸ Not unsurprisingly, Eichmann approved this request.

²⁴ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 83 -84.

²⁵ Caroline Wiedmer, *The Claims of Memory: Representations of the Holocaust in Contemporary Germany and France* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1999), 40; Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 86.

²⁶ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 3; Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews*, 105.

²⁷ Wiedmer, *The Claims of Memory*, 41.

²⁸ Serge Klarsfeld, *Vichy-Auschwitz: le role de Vichy dans la solution finale de la question juive en France, 1942* (Paris: Fayard, 1983), 237, quoted in Wiedmer, *The Claims of Memory*, 41.

The only people who were excluded from arrest were women over 55, men over 60, women about to give birth or with children under two, wives of prisoners of war, and a few other groups that would not be targeted until later roundups.²⁹ In theory, Jewish children born in France should not have been arrested, but they were taken anyway. Until July 1942, except for a few exceptions, only men were arrested and sent to the work and internment camps, however, the Vel' d'Hiv Roundup was the start of large scale roundups that did not differentiate based on youth or sex.³⁰ On the morning of Tuesday, July 16, 1942, about 4,500 French policemen went out in on average teams of two or three to arrest 27,388 foreign Jews with some of the following instructions:

As soon as the identity of a listed Jew has been confirmed, inspectors and guards are to proceed with the arrest, taking no notice of any protest or argument the prisoner may offer.

Every Jew listed is to be brought to the preliminary collecting center, no notice being taken of the state of health of the prisoners or exceptions made for that reason.

Guards and inspectors are responsible for the success of the operation, which must be carried out with the maximum speed and without useless conversation or argument.

Children living with the person or persons arrested shall be taken away with them, and no member of the family shall remain in the apartment. Nor are children to be left with neighbors.

Where an individual named on the list has not been arrested, guards and inspectors are to give the reasons for the failure, keeping their report brief and to the point.³¹

In addition to these instructions, the police were told to have Jews bring their identification and ration cards, food and clothing for at least two days, along with two blankets and basic kitchen utensils. Each person was only allowed two suitcases and police had to make sure the electricity, gas, and water were turned off, keys were left with the concierge or a neighbor, and pets were left with the concierge.³² The

²⁹ Paris Prefecture of Police, "Consignes pour les equips charges des arrestations," July 12, 1942 and "Secret circulaire no. 173-42," July 13, 1942, reprinted in Klarsfeld, *Vichy-Auschwitz*, 248-56, quoted in Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews*, 105.

³⁰ The first large roundup occurred between May 9 and May 14, 1941 when 3,747 foreign men (aged 18-60) received orders to report to a certain location, where they were arrested and sent to Pithiviers and Beaune-la-Rolande.; Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews*, 81-83.

³¹ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 10-11.

³² Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews*, 105.

fact that those arresting them were French and in French uniform comforted the Jews, not believing that anything seriously bad was happening. Additionally, no one suspected that women and children would be sent to a work camp, let alone Auschwitz, as up until this point only men had been arrested and taken to labor camps.

Once the Jews were arrested, they were taken to local checkpoints for processing at schools, police stations, and gymnasiums, and then adults without children were sent to Drancy (a holding ground until deportation) and those with children were sent to the Velodrome d'Hiver, known as the Vel' d'Hiv (a sports stadium for indoor cycling and racing).³³ Mrs. Rado noted the change in the policemen after they arrived at the collection centers. She said, "As soon as we had all got onto the bus, a police officer shouted to the driver and the policemen accompanying us-though the message was intended mainly for us-'If anyone so much as moves or tries to escape, use your guns.' That made me shiver. Being a woman with three small children, I was scared."³⁴ It was at this point, when after the Jews were processed and then sent to either the Vel' d'Hiv or Drancy, when they realized the seriousness of their situation.

The police handled and performed this job with varying levels of enthusiasm. Some policemen were clearly upset about the task at hand, and others attempted to warn Jews about the roundup and provided opportunities for Jews to escape. Annie Kriegal, 15, was walking home on Tuesday morning and saw "a policeman in uniform who was carrying a suitcase in each hand and crying. I distinctly remember those tears running down a rugged, rather reddish face because you would agree that you do not often see a policeman cry in public. He was going down the street followed by a little indistinct flock, children and old people mixed together carrying bundles."³⁵ Other officers gave people a 15 minute to an hour warning, saying that they would come back in an hour to arrest them, and to take this time to

³³ Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews*, 105.

³⁴ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 40.

³⁵ Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews*, 104.

prepare, giving them the opportunity to escape.³⁶ One boy remembered a policeman hinted to his mother, Mrs. Soral, that she should escape, telling her to go buy food but “don’t go too far. I’ll wait for you here by your things.”³⁷ Mrs. Soral bought some food and returned with her three children to the police officer. Even with the goodwill from police officers allowing some a chance to escape, there were few options of escape or hiding for foreign Jews living in Paris in areas teeming with policemen, especially for women with children.

Similar to a few of the sympathetic police officers, others involved in the roundup offered some help to the Jews. For example, concierge Marie Chotel woke seven year old Odette Meyers and her mother at 5AM warning them that the police were coming. They hid in Marie’s broom closet while she entertained the police officers with wine and anti-Semitic comments. Afterwards, her husband Henri took Odette to stay with a Catholic family in a small village outside of Paris where she hid for the remainder of the war.³⁸ In addition to concierges and the police, bureaucrats and office workers who were involved in the planning and preparation of the roundup alerted friends and family that a roundup was coming and to flee or hide. Some slipped warnings into mailboxes and a warning was published and in two clandestine newspapers. Many people did not heed these warnings because they did not believe the rumors, could not understand the seriousness of the situation, or only hid if they were men because they did not believe that women and children would be included.³⁹ Maurice Rajsfus said that his parents had heard rumors of a roundup, but that “so many false warnings had already reached us that we did not attach the necessary importance [to this one].”⁴⁰ But instead of anticipating the horror of the Vel’ d’Hiv and eventual deportation to Auschwitz, they believed they would simply be interned for the rest of

³⁶ Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews*, 106.

³⁷ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel’ d’Hiv*, 35.

³⁸ Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews*, 106-107.

³⁹ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel’ d’Hiv*, 16; Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews*, 108.

⁴⁰ Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews*, 108.

the war outside of Paris like other male family members had been.⁴¹

While the Jews who were aided by police officers, shop owners, neighbors, and resistance workers appreciated this kindness, French and German officials thought otherwise. In a memo to Knochen and Oberg on July 18, 1942, Roethke criticized the French police for allowing some officers to help the Jews. He said, "There were many instances of French bystanders expressing pity for the Jews who were being arrested. They reacted particularly to the arrest of Jewish children. The transport of Jewish families was not effected with due efficiency in many cases, so that the non-Jewish population noticed, and people gathered into small crowds to talk about the event."⁴² In addition to his complaints, Roethke made sure to mention that the transportation of the Jews was still on schedule and that they were working hard to get the information of the officers who warned Jews.⁴³

In contrast to those who tried to help or warn Jews, others took advantage of those who were arrested, turned Jews in hiding in to the authorities, and/or carried out their duties of arresting Jews zealously. Some policemen were angry when there was no answer at the doors they knocked on, and one said, "If we only had the necessary authorization, we would ferret out these Jews who think they can saddle themselves on us."⁴⁴ Some policemen did so anyway, and broke down the doors of apartments when no one opened the door. One woman at home alone with her two young children was afraid to open the door when the police knocked early in the morning, for her husband had already been arrested and was held at Pithiviers to be deported to Auschwitz. When the police broke down the door she picked her children and jumped out of the five story high window, killing all three of them.⁴⁵

In addition to over-zealous police officers, regular citizens became informers who betrayed Jews in hiding. A report from an anonymous informer said the Vistuck family hid in a neighbor's house,

⁴¹ Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews*, 8.

⁴² Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 80-81.

⁴³ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 81.

⁴⁴ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 26-27.

⁴⁵ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 27.

probably giving the neighbors their milk coupons in exchange for letting their family stay. The report said, "Most Jews hid in their neighbors' houses, though some went considerable distances from their homes. The Vistuks, for example, who live at 76 Rue de Bondy, were not at home when the police called for them. Yet after their disappearance their milk ration continues to be collected from the diary on the ground floor of the building, where they are registered. The fact that their supply of milk is fetched for them by a Frenchwoman suggests that they must be hiding nearby."⁴⁶ Reports like these show how there were people who were actively collaborating with Germany and Vichy helping them to achieve their anti-Semitic goals of expelling Jews out of France.

Despite the kindness of some and the callousness of others, the majority of policemen and French civilians were indifferent towards these roundups, exhibiting the *attentisme* "wait-and-see" attitude. No policemen refused to arrest the Jews and only one, possibly two, resigned afterwards as a result of the roundup.⁴⁷ Instead, according to Levy and Tillard, the police carried out their duties with "complacent calm," had "good behavior," and were "confidence-inspiring" to the Jews who were being arrested.⁴⁸ It was more common for the police to be stoic and methodologically work their way through the arrests they had to make. A nurse talking to the guards outside the gymnasium at Japy said, "Almost all of them said that they would never have joined the mobile guard if they had known they would be given this kind of duty. They admitted that their orders to were shoot if necessary."⁴⁹ Even though many of the policemen and other workers instrumental for the operation, claimed they did not want to do those jobs, they did so anyway with little to no dissent. It was this *attentisme* attitude, this apathy, which allowed the roundup to happen and for almost 13,000 innocent Jews to be arrested and deported.

⁴⁶ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 82.

⁴⁷ Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews*, 106.

⁴⁸ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 32.

⁴⁹ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 40.

In the Vel' d'Hiv Roundup there were clearly those who actively aided Jews, those who actively collaborated with the Germans and Vichy, and those who simply did nothing and observed what went on. Many Jews encountered people who fell into all three of these categories throughout the roundup. Nine year old Annette Muller's story shows the clear variety of reactions to the roundups. The policeman who arrested her family allowed her to buy a comb when she could not find hers, and a shopkeeper tried to get her to escape. However, passersby expressed approval of the roundup, and her concierge pillaged their apartment after they were arrested.⁵⁰ In addition, one survivor said that as they were walking through the streets after being arrested, "people stared at us, but I could not make out what they were thinking. Their faces seemed blank and indifferent. At Place Voltaire there was a small crowd, and one woman started shouting: 'I'm glad! I'm glad! Let them all go to the devil!' But she was the only one. The children clung to me tighter. As we passed the group, a man turned to the woman who had shouted and said, 'It'll be our turn next. Poor things.' She blushed and walked away. The policemen told us to walk faster."⁵¹ Parisians had a wide range of reactions to the Vel' d'Hiv Roundup, but overall there was a prevailing distaste for it, as this was the first time there was a mass roundup including women and children that, despite Vichy's and Germany's efforts, was visible to the public.

At the end of the two day roundup, 3,031 men, 5,802 women, and 4,051 children, totaling 12,884 Jews, were arrested and held as prisoners in Drancy or the Vel' d'Hiv.⁵² Due to the kindness of those who spread the word about the roundup, hid or helped Jews flee, and those who remained silent and did not turn in the Jews in hiding, less than half of the Jews whose cards were pulled were actually arrested. The difference between the anticipated goal and reality is believed to represent those who went into hiding, fled, or committed suicide. Throughout the two-day roundup and the days that

⁵⁰ Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews*, 106.

⁵¹ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 39.

⁵² Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 80.

followed, there were an estimated 106 suicides and 24 deaths from sickness or childbirth.⁵³ However for the nearly 13,000 Jews, being arrested was only the beginning of a nightmarish one-to-four weeks with the end destination of Auschwitz.

When the Jews with children arrived at the Vel' d'Hiv, they were met with a space that could fill 15,000 spectators, but that was ill equipped to house 7,000 for up to a week.⁵⁴ Young and old alike were packed into the sports stadium, lying on hard bleachers or the floor. Eyewitnesses consistently report that there was hardly room to move and that people were being trodden underfoot.⁵⁵ A doctor's report tells of the horrible circumstances the victims were kept in, "It would take a whole book to record the heartbreaking sights I came across during my shifts at the Vel d'Hiv."⁵⁶ A nurse told the doctor that he was not helping by providing medicine because "not only were the toilets inadequate, but by now they were blocked and absolutely unusable and furthermore could not be repaired."⁵⁷ A Red Cross nurse also reported of the conditions at the Vel' d'Hiv, "The atmosphere was stuffy and nauseating: nervous breakdowns, shouting, weeping of children and even of adults who were at the end of their ether. Several deranged individuals also spread panic. All was helter-skelter, it was impossible to sleep, there were not mattresses, and people were piled one on top of the other."⁵⁸ The conditions at the Vel' d'Hiv were far from humane, and provided a glimpse into the similarly bad situation at Drancy and other camps across France and Europe.⁵⁹

In addition to the lack of sanitation and inability of basic needs being met at the Vel' d'Hiv, the general mood was that of despair and hopelessness, with few managing to escape. During the week,

⁵³ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 33-34.

⁵⁴ Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jew*, 251.

⁵⁵ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 45.

⁵⁶ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 73.

⁵⁷ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 73.

⁵⁸ Serge Klarsfeld, *Memorial to the Jews Deported from France, 1942-1944* (New York: Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1983), 60, quoted in Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews*, 111.

⁵⁹ Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, 253.

there were 30 attempted suicides (ten were successful), and the most common method was by individuals throwing themselves over the tiers of the arena.⁶⁰ This affected some of the French police guarding the entrances, with accounts reporting some guards were weeping, but that in general they were “icy and indifferent” according to Dr. Vilenski, one of the few medical practitioners to be allowed entrance into the Vel’ d’Hiv.⁶¹ A few very lucky and determined individuals were able to escape from the Vel’ d’Hiv during confusion at the entrances and exits, that were only possible because of a lack of organization and the occasional benevolence of a guard. For example, 14 year old Louis Pitkowitz slipped out while a group of angry mothers were arguing with the guards.⁶²

To help combat the general despair and unbearable conditions within the Vel’ d’Hiv, there were various groups who tried to help the victims as best as they could, including the Quakers, school groups, teachers, the Red Cross, and the UGIF (l'Union Generale des Israelites de France), an organization set up by the Germans and Vichy as the state recognized Jewish representative organization.⁶³ Throughout the course of the week, no more than 15 nurses, doctors, and social workers were allowed into the Vel’ d’Hiv, and only a couple were allowed in at a time. Even though the members of the UGIF knew the roundup was coming and talked about it at a meeting on July 14th, they decided they were powerless to stop it and resigned themselves to simply offering medical aid to those held at the Vel’ d’Hiv. The UGIF was a Jewish organization that tried to help Jews who were being targeted by the government, but in actuality was used by the Germans and Vichy to help them attain their goals of arresting and eradicating the Jews in France.⁶⁴ This shows how even some resistance groups allowed events to happen and simply tried to mitigate the effects of German and Vichy policy, acting at times more like those with the *attentisme* attitude than resisters, showing how complex it was for those trying to decide how to react

⁶⁰ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel’ d’Hiv*, 49.

⁶¹ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel’ d’Hiv*, 53.

⁶² Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews*, 112.

⁶³ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel’ d’Hiv*, 64, 15.

⁶⁴ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel’ d’Hiv*, 66, 67, 15.

to the situation in France.

Within three to seven days of being arrested, those at the Vel' d'Hiv were transferred to Pithiviers and Beaune-la-Rolande and the work of the resisters to get the children out and to safety became the biggest focus.⁶⁵ There were some individual efforts and some by organized groups and networks who tried to work to get the children released, and then hide them with families in France or smuggle them into Switzerland or Spain.⁶⁶ Similar operations were going on elsewhere in France by various organizations, such as the OSE. Vivette Samuel worked with others to save 427 children from the Unoccupied Zone from deportation from Riversaltes, and about 100 children from Venissieux in the same summer.⁶⁷ However, most of the children from the Vel' d'Hiv Roundup were not as lucky, and the few that were released and put into the homes run by the UGIF, while well taken care of, were eventually all deported anyway.⁶⁸ Even though many had good intentions, it was not enough to save the children of the Vel' d'Hiv.

On July 31, the children at Pithiviers and Beaune-la-Rolande were separated from their parents because even though Germany had granted Laval's request to arrest children, officials had not yet approved their deportation (although no one saw that it would be an issue, they were simply waiting for the go ahead from Eichmann).⁶⁹ Nine year old Annette Muller Bessmann described what happened, "The children hung on to their mothers, pulling on their dresses. They had to separate us with rifle butts, with truncheons, with streams of icy water. It was a savage scramble, with cries, tears, howlings of grief. The *gendarmes* tore the women's clothing, still looking for jewels or money. Then suddenly, a great silence. On one side, hundreds of young children, on the other the mothers and older children. In the

⁶⁵ Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews*, 112.

⁶⁶ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 143.

⁶⁷ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 78, 82-83.

⁶⁸ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 144.

⁶⁹ Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews*, 112.; Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 94.

middle, the *gendarmes* giving curt orders."⁷⁰ These *gendarmes* took their duties to the extreme, by not only guarding the interned Jews, but also by being unnecessarily harsh and abusive to them. It was, and still is, hard for the French today to come to terms with the fact that it was French police and guards who were in charge of the roundups and deportations until they reached the German border. After this separation of parents from children, the mass deportations of those held in the Vel' d'Hiv to Auschwitz began, starting with the adults.

By August 8th, nine trains had taken 9,000 mostly foreign Jews from France to Auschwitz. Left behind were 3,500 children, a handful of mothers and some Red Cross volunteers. The sanitary conditions were still terrible, with only a few buckets for lavatories in the barracks, and most of the children had diarrhea and the attendants could not keep the children nor their single pair of clothes clean. About half were infants and did not know their own names, which contradicted the official claim that the children were simply being sent east to be reunited with their families.⁷¹ The French finally received permission to deport the children to Drancy in early August.⁷² Annette Monod Lewis was a Red Cross worker who recalled that "They [the children] didn't understand what was expected of them, and some even wandered off from the group."⁷³ As many didn't know their names roll call was impossible. Monod continued, "Finally they were ordered to take the children to the railroad station nearby and not bother with the roll call, as long as the required number of children were put on the train."⁷⁴ This deportation of children strikes a chord with many people because of the clear innocence of the children and their inability to protect themselves, which is why the Vel' d'Hiv Roundup became a symbol for

⁷⁰ Klarsfeld, *Memorial to the Jews*, 87, quoted in Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews*, 112-113.

⁷¹ Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews*, 113.; Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 156.

⁷² Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews*, 113.

⁷³ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 158.; David Lees, "Remembering the Vel d'Hiv Roundup," Warwick Knowledge Center, last modified July 16, 2013, <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/knowledge/culture/roundups/>.

⁷⁴ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 158.

Vichy's and France's crimes against humanity, and a rallying cry for recognition of France's role in the Holocaust after the war.

Three days after the children arrived in Drancy they followed their parents to 'Pitchipoi,' which one child named the mysterious destination.⁷⁵ French guards searched their bundles and took any jewelry they had left, in some cases ripping earrings from the girls' ears if it took too long for them to take them off.⁷⁶ Between August 17th and 31st, seven trains left with 1,000 passengers each. Some one third to one half of them were unaccompanied children from the Vel' d'Hiv, with one to ten adults in each car. They were packed in cattle cars with no food, no water, and a couple buckets for a lavatory. The stench and exposure to the elements was unbearable. Albert Tselnick said that people exclaimed: "This can't go on! They will have to stop the train. We will be allowed into the clean air. Nothing can be worse than this."⁷⁷ There is no evidence recording how many children died on the way to Auschwitz or how they were unloaded, but no child who was deported to Auschwitz ever returned to France.⁷⁸ From July 18 to the beginning of August, including those rounded up on July 16 and 17, 14,579 men, women, and children from France were deported to Auschwitz, and only about 50 returned.⁷⁹

As the Vel' d'Hiv Roundups led to the deportation of only about 13,000 Jews out of the agreed upon 32,000, the Commissioner for Jewish Affairs, Darquier de Pellepoix wrote a letter to Pierre Laval on July 23, 1942 saying the following:

I take the liberty of proposing the following supplementary measures: 1. The arrest of all alien Jews...who have fled into the unoccupied zone, holding them in readiness for transportation. 2. Since the Germans do not object, one could equally arrest...all foreign Jews not possessing passports issued recently and clearly valid. 3. If...the agreed total of 32,000 has not been reached, it might be advisable to make up that number by arresting Jews of French nationality whose naturalization does not date back further than January 1, 1927. I would like to stress that these absolutely essential measures are to be applied immediately in order to fulfill the promise

⁷⁵ Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews*, 115.

⁷⁶ Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews*, 115.

⁷⁷ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 167.

⁷⁸ Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews*, 115-116.

⁷⁹ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 171-173.

made by the French government to the German authorities.⁸⁰

This letter shows how Vichy was working very closely with Germany and had many shared goals. Instead of simply carrying out the measures Germany ordered, Vichy officials went a step further and actually created their own policies in order to meet German demands, as shown in the above letter and in Laval's idea to arrest and deport children as well as adults. The concern to fill the trains provided by the Germans to transport the Jews from Drancy to Auschwitz led Vichy to fill the remaining spaces by deporting Jews in the Unoccupied Zone, as well as handing over those already in concentration camps to the Germans and holding new raids to refill the camps.⁸¹ Vichy went above and beyond simple collaboration by obeying Germany's orders, but instead thought of their own ways to rid France of its Jews.

Additionally, Vichy's position of collaboration was endorsed, or at the least not challenged, by the Vatican, whose indifference and apathy allowed Vichy's collaboration to go unchecked by the Church. Petain asked Leon Berand, the ambassador to the Vatican to find out what Pope Pius XII thought of Vichy's anti-Semitic legislation. On September 2, 1942 Berand reported that "nothing was ever said at the Vatican which might suggest that the Holy See felt any criticism or disapproval of the laws and regulations in question....I have it from a reliable source that the Vatican will pick no quarrel with you over the statute of the Jews."⁸² Vichy knew that it would be unchallenged by the Vatican, who while not actively collaborating, allowed Vichy to continue its anti-Semitic policies and roundup and deportation of Jews. According to Daniel Goldhagen, Catholic doctrine even provided justification for the Holocaust, specifically in targeting Jews, based on centuries of anti-Semitic church teachings that Jews were the tainted murderers of Christ.⁸³ It was because of this anti-Semitism entrenched in traditional Catholic

⁸⁰ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 87-88.

⁸¹ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 128.

⁸² Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 192.

⁸³ Daniel Goldhagen, *A Moral Reckoning: The Role of the Church in the Holocaust and its Unfulfilled Duty of Repair*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 162.

doctrine that “The Church, Pius XII, and bishops and priests across Europe reckoned morally during the Nazi period and, by and large, decided that allowing or abetting the Germans’ and their helpers’ persecution of the Jews and even letting the Jews die was preferable to intervening on their behalf.”⁸⁴ Therefore, institutions normally considered moral compasses played a role in the Holocaust by both setting the stage for discriminatory and hateful behavior as well as failing to come to the defense of the Jews when it was clear something needed to be done.

People actively collaborated, simply went along with Vichy, and allowed these events to happen for a variety of reasons. Those who actively collaborated often agreed with the Nazis’ anti-Semitic beliefs and/or wanted to set France up with who they presumed would reign victorious at the end of the war. Others said they simply wanted to get through the war and not cause trouble, but it is often difficult to uncover people’s true motivations, especially if those motivations contradict with what is considered morally or ethically right. In Vivette Samuel’s memoir, she talked about a French captain who talked to her about de Gaulle, saying “It’s all a lot of nonsense. Me, I’m a reservist anyway. All I want is to get back to my business in Paris. Me, I’ve got a family to feed...he’s a crackpot, that de Gaulle, you mark my words.”⁸⁵ However, for Samuel, de Gaulle gave her hope and inspired her to join the resistance, showing that people reacted to these events widely differently from each other.⁸⁶

Serge Netchine, who was 18 at the time of the German occupation, recollected the importance of those who decided against collaboration or apathy. He said, “Without Vichy’s collaboration, the Nazis would not have been able to exterminate so many Jews living in France, but without the help – visible or invisible – of the people around us, few Jews could have survived.”⁸⁷ It was those who were deliberately going against Vichy and Germany who helped save Jews, which while not including the Vatican, did

⁸⁴ Goldhagen, *A Moral Reckoning*, 15.

⁸⁵ Samuel, *Rescuing the Children*, 7.

⁸⁶ Samuel, *Rescuing the Children*, 7.

⁸⁷ Danielle Bailly, ed, *The Hidden Children of France, 1940-1945: Stories of Survival*, trans. by Betty Becker-Theye, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010), 355.

include some churches and priests. A pastoral letter read in churches, written by Jules-Gerard Saliege, the Archbishop of Toulouse, rallied Christians to stand up and help the Jews. It said, "Jews are men and women. Foreigners are men and women. It is just as criminal to use violence against these men and women, these fathers and mothers with families, as it is against anyone else. They too are members of the human race. They are our brothers like so many others. A Christian cannot forget that."⁸⁸ Some priests were actively involved in hiding Jewish children and refused to give them up, even though the French government arrested them if they declined to do so. In a cable from Ambassador Bergen to Berlin on September 14, 1942, he said "The French government has ordered the arrest of all priests who hide Jews wanted for deportation, or help them escape deportation by any means whatever. Several priests from the Lyon diocese have already been taken into custody, some because they supported and spread the message of protest spoken by their archbishop and others because they refused to give up the Jewish children in their care."⁸⁹ The refusal of these priests to collaborate with Vichy and give up the children to be inevitably deported demonstrated that among resisters and the many apathetic French, there were people who were passionate and dedicated to standing their ground and aiding the Jews in need.

Similar to collaborators, resisters had different reasons for joining the fight, either militarily, working for clandestine newspapers, or in aiding the Jews in other ways. Danielle Bailly, who during the German occupation was separated from her parents and was hidden and protected by strangers, said in the introduction to *Hidden Children of France*, "We [the hidden children] are here because of those who – spontaneously or after reflection, willingly or somewhat reluctantly, paid or unpaid – refused to accept Nazi barbarianism and the complicity of zealous collaboration."⁹⁰ The Jews in France relied on the kindness of strangers, friends, and neighbors to survive, enabling 75 percent of the Jews living in France

⁸⁸ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 188.

⁸⁹ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 142.

⁹⁰ Bailly, ed, *The Hidden Children of France*, xix.

to be saved from deportation.

This demonstrates the importance of those who did not cooperate with Vichy, but also shows how the apathetic and indifferent section of the population, while they were instrumental in allowing the Holocaust in France to occur, were also instrumental in allowing the majority of the Jews in France to survive the war. This is why those with the *attentisme* attitude should not be immediately lumped with the collaborators, nor with the resisters, because there were a variety of people who did nothing for a variety of reasons. Trying to uncover what the majority of the population thought, especially when what they thought may or may not have correlated with their actions, provides a historical challenge.

Public Memory

While during and after the war many feigned ignorance about what was going on with the roundups and deportations, the reality was that people knew about as much as they wanted to, especially towards the end of the war when the deportations to the east dramatically increased. News of the Vel' d'Hiv Roundup spread quickly through pamphlets, eyewitness accounts broadcast on the BBC, and through conversations on the streets. Even though these stories were sometimes exaggerated and contained many falsehoods and omissions, the basic information of the roundups and France's role in them made its way to most French households within a month.⁹¹ Even so, most people did not believe the rumors of gas chambers and deliberate mass killings that occurred in the east, thinking that it was enemy propaganda or just impossible.⁹² They did not want to believe that something that horrible was happening and that their government and possibly the citizens themselves had allowed it to occur. Even the people who were apathetic and had an *attentisme* attitude still made a choice, conscious or unconscious, to react in a certain way to Vichy, the roundups, and deportations. While those who chose to do nothing and to continue living as if this was not happening cannot necessarily be lumped with

⁹¹ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 183.

⁹² Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews*, 289.

those who collaborated along with Vichy, they still allowed these events to happen and for thousands of innocent Jews residing in France to die.

After the war, many French expressed sympathy to the Jewish victims of the roundup as well as shock that France could have participated in such an event, which was especially true of large organizations and political leaders. However, the true test lay in how people reacted in the moment, when they had to choose how to act towards Vichy and the Jews in light of the roundup.⁹³ Additionally, some collaborators said that they were simply practicing a pre-emptive strategy by undertaking certain projects, such as anti-Semitic legislation and roundups in the Occupied areas. At Xavier Vallat's (the first commissioner-general for Jewish affairs) trial in 1947, Andre Lavagne (former chief of Petain's civilian staff) said that the *Statut des juifs* was enacted as a "lighting small fires to save the forest."⁹⁴ Even if this was a legitimate reason why people collaborated, it would only make sense for Vichy to conduct roundups and other anti-Semitic policies in the Unoccupied Zone if they believed that Germany had intentions of extending their policies there, which at the beginning of the war was not a reasonable assumption.⁹⁵ While it is difficult to see what motivated officials and average French citizens to react in different ways to the Holocaust and the German occupation, if one looks at the historical record left behind in policies and documents, it is clear that there were many enthusiastic collaborators, especially in influential positions in the Vichy regime, who made the deportations and roundups possible.

Similar to the changing public opinion and memory of Vichy and the Holocaust in France found in important scholarship described earlier, the way the French people and government have remembered and commemorated the Vel' d'Hiv Roundup has gone through many different transitions. Overall, the general move was from commemorative plaques and memorials that contained critical

⁹³ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel' d'Hiv*, 61.

⁹⁴ *Le Proces de Xavier Vallet presente par ses amis* (Paris, 1948), 325, quoted in Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, 9.

⁹⁵ Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, 9.

historical inaccuracies and omissions (typically about the French involvement in the roundups, the amount of women and children arrested and deported, and the conditions in the Vel' d'Hiv) towards a more accurate portrayal of the roundup and recognition of France's collaboration, at least on an institutional level, and role in the roundup.

The first plaque, created in 1949 under de Gaulle, was displayed outside of where the Vel' d'Hiv used to stand (it was destroyed shortly after the war) and said the following:

On July 16, 1942,
thirty thousand
Jewish men, women and children
victims of racial persecution
were confined in this place by order of the Nazi occupier,
all separated from each other,
they were deported to Germany and the concentration camps.
Free men, remember.⁹⁶

This plaque neglected to provide the correct dates of the roundup, not including the 17th, and omitted the amount of Jews who were both rounded up and held at the Vel' d'Hiv. Most significantly, it placed all of the blame of the roundup on the Nazis, supporting the Gaullist myth that France was a nation of resisters with few collaborators. A more recent plaque, erected in 1986 by Jacques Chirac (then-mayor of Paris) tells a slightly more detailed and accurate tale.

On July 16 and 17, 1942
Thirteen thousand one hundred and fifty-two Jews were arrested
in Paris and its suburbs
deported and assassinated at Auschwitz
In the Velodrome d'Hiver, which stood here,
Four thousand one hundred and fifteen children
Two thousand nine hundred and twenty-nine women
One thousand one hundred and twenty-nine men
were confined under unhuman conditions,
by the police of the Vichy government,
on the order of the Nazi occupiers.
May those who tried to come to their aid be thanked.

⁹⁶ Wiedmer, *The Claims of Memory*, 44.

Passer-by remember!
May they rest in peace (in Hebrew)⁹⁷

The corrected historical details are evident, including the date and number of Jews arrested, however, the plaque still omits that the Jews who were arrested were foreign Jews, many of whom migrated to France to gain protection. In addition, the plaque makes no mention that it was a French idea to arrest and deport the children, misleading the reader to thinking France was simply acting on orders from Germany. Wiedmer commented that even though this second plaque contains more correct information, the fact that it presents incomplete facts as the whole truth detracts from its validity.⁹⁸ The existence of inaccurate plaques is not unique to those at the site of the former Vel d'Hiv, but also occurred at other sites, such as at the Saint-Quen school, one of the collection centers during the roundup, where nearly 600 Jews were arrested by thirty-two policemen. A plaque placed at the school in 1965 stated that the Jews had been arrested by "German occupation troops" instead of the French police, showing how it was not uncommon for the French to neglect to address the extent to which France was involved in the deportations of Jews.⁹⁹

Public memory of the Vel d'Hiv Roundup can also be looked at through the changing commemorative ceremonies, transforming from being privately observed by various French Jewish organizations to a national commemorative ceremony. In 1993, then-President Francois Mitterrand, after stirring up controversy over still observing the death of Petain, a long friendship with Bousquet, and refusing to acknowledge that France even needed to recognize its crimes during the Holocaust, officially dedicated July 16 to be the "National Day of Commemoration of the Racist and Anti-Semitic Persecutions Committed under the *de facto* Authority called 'Government of the French State' (1940-1944)." This was the first official recognition of French involvement in the Vel' d'Hiv Roundup.¹⁰⁰ In

⁹⁷ Wiedmer, *The Claims of Memory*, 45.

⁹⁸ Wiedmer, *The Claims of Memory*, 45.

⁹⁹ Levy and Tillard, *Betrayal at the Vel d'Hiv*, 40-41.

¹⁰⁰ Wiedmer, *The Claims of Memory*, 46-47; Wolf, *Harnessing the Holocaust*, 170-171.

addition to commissioning a new plaque, Mitterrand also sponsored a competition for a commemorative statue to be placed in a more prominent and public location. However, this statue, consisting of four adults and two children spread out with their luggage misconstrues the percentage of children at the Vel' d'Hiv and the cramped conditions.¹⁰¹ However, the shift from private to national commemoration of the Vel' d'Hiv Roundup broke the continuity between the France and Vichy who committed these acts and the current France, thus allowing people the opportunity to continue to place the blame of the events on others, either a previous government or a previous generation.¹⁰²

The first national commemoration ceremony was observed on July 16, 1993 and was in stark contrast to the private services held in years past. The ceremony was attended by 2,000 invited individuals, and there were barriers to prevent any others from officially participating. Various organizations placed wreaths around the plaque at the site of the former Vel' d'Hiv, there was a speech by the president of the Jewish organization CRIF (Representative Council of the Jewish Institutes of France), a recital of the *kaddish*, a couple speeches from survivors of the roundup, and a performance of two Yiddish songs from the daughter of a survivor. The Prime Minister, Edouard Balladur gave the keynote address, assuring the people that the current government was fighting racism. The ceremony ended with two songs (*Le Chant des Marais* and *La Marseillaise*), which typically would include the audience singing along, but the speakers were so loud that the people stopped and just listened to the choir.¹⁰³

Many of the survivors and participants in the old ceremonies commented that the ceremony was well done, but that it was insensitive to their wishes and desires for remembering and mourning. One survivor said "I preferred it before. It was just us....there weren't all of these barriers to channel the

¹⁰¹ Wiedmer, *The Claims of Memory*, 47-49.

¹⁰² Booth, "Communities of Memory", 253.

¹⁰³ Wiedmer, *The Claims of Memory* 51-52.

people. Barriers, here, they don't realize what that reminds us of."¹⁰⁴ While many agreed that it was right and necessary for France to officially recognize their part in the Vel' d'Hiv Roundup, there has been some criticism for the way they went about it and about whether or not the French government and people have accepted their different roles in the Holocaust in France, and what that means for the present and future France and French Jews.

The events of the Vel' d'Hiv Roundup, the arrest, deportation, and death of almost 13,000 innocent foreign Jews in France are engrained in France's history, and is prominent today in public memory of the Holocaust in France. However, even though there has been increased discussion, apology, and commemoration of France's role in these events, there is still a reluctance to personally take the burden of responsibility for France's actions, in a desire to separate oneself from these crimes against humanity. The Vel' d'Hiv Roundup and deportations provide an example of how a government and a people can collaborate with an occupying power by both obeying orders and also actively introducing their own racist and unjust policies. It also demonstrates the importance of having a population comprised of people who will stand against injustices they see committed by fellow citizens and their government, and to understand that the smallest of helpful acts can do immeasurable good in the lives of others. But this event can also be seen as a warning to those who do not actively collaborate or actively resist oppressive regimes and policies; that the way they react or do not react in these situations can either increase the amount of evil done or increase the amount of good and prevent further atrocities. If anything, the Vel' d'Hiv Roundup shows that everyone has a choice to make in terms of where they stand. It is clear what humanity is capable of if people allow injustices to occur, but it is also clear that thousands of lives can be saved and lots of good done with relatively simple acts of kindness and goodwill.

¹⁰⁴ Nathaniel Herzberg, "Vel' d'Hiv': la Republique retrouve la memoire," in *Liberation*, July 17, 1993, 17, quoted in Wiedmer, *The Claims of Memory*, 52.

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