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Les Parisiennes: How The Women Of Paris Lived, Loved And Died In The 1940s



Synopsis

What did it feel like to be a woman living in Paris from 1939 to 1949? These were years of fear, power, aggression, courage, deprivation and secrets until - finally - renewal and retribution. Even at the darkest moments of Occupation, glamour was ever present. French women wore lipstick. Why? It was women who came face to face with the German conquerors on a daily basis - perhaps selling them their clothes or travelling alongside them on the Metro, where a German soldier had priority over seats. By looking at a wide range of individuals from collaborators to resisters, actresses and prostitutes to teachers and writers, Anne Sebba shows that women made life-and-death decisions every day, and, in an atmosphere where sex became currency, often did whatever they needed to survive. Her fascinating cast includes both native Parisian women and those living in Paris temporarily: American women and Nazi wives, spies, mothers, mistresses, and fashion and jewellery designers. Some women, like the heiress B atrice de Camondo or novelist Ir ne N mirovsky, converted to Catholicism; others like lesbian racing driver Violette Morris embraced the Nazi philosophy; only a handful, like Coco Chanel, retreated to the Ritz with a German lover. In enthralling detail Sebba explores the aftershock of the Second World War and the choices demanded. How did the women who survived to see the Liberation of Paris come to terms with their actions and those of others? Although politics lies at its heart, *Les Parisiennes* is the first in-depth account of the everyday lives of women and young girls in this most feminine of cities.

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Customer Reviews

Subtitled, 'How the women of Paris lived, loved and died under Nazi Occupation,' this looks at the years 1939 - 1949 with the focus firmly on the female citizens of that great city. It begins in July 1939 with a society party, given by eighty one year old Elsie de Wolfe. The US born interior decorator, married to a retired UK diplomat, gave legendary parties; but this example demonstrates a sense of recklessness which prevailed at that time. Yet, by the autumn, both France and England would be at war with Germany. From the very start of the war, the President of Haute Couture argued that the more elegant French women were, the more they would show those abroad that they did not fear the future. So, the author weaves a story of chic Parisian women and she introduces us to those from all walks of life. There is the author, Collette, who is uninterested in politics. Irene Nemirovsky, the Russian novelist. Actress Corinne Luchaire, the South African dancer, Sadie Rigal, a Comtesse, an Indian princess, a Scot married to a Frenchman, a French opera singer and many, many more. Many were extremely brave, many suffered terribly, others collaborated with the occupiers; whether by attempting to influence government policy, or by having love affairs with Germans. So, we go through 1940, when Paris was abandoned as many took a desperate, terrifying flight across France. However, when the German army arrived, they were often well-dressed, amiable and polite - at least at first and to most of the city's inhabitants. People began to return, but gradually resistance groups emerged. There are arrests, denunciations, betrayal, fear, solidarity and every possible emotion through the war years.

As this was an ARC from Bookbrowse the pictures which will be in the published edition were lacking and that is sad, for the captions of the empty spaces indicate that they will greatly enhance this story of the incredible women who lived through the German occupation of Paris and the rest of France during WW II. There are places where the story drags and others where the story is repetitious but overall it is a fascinating story. It begins in 1939 when the City becomes aware of the German threat but during the lull when the Germans are gracious and cultured and polite. Soon things begin to change and the food shortages begin and Jews are rounded up and made to wear yellow stars, Jewish companies are seized and their owners flee or go into hiding. Many French men have already gone to unoccupied France to fight in DeGaulle's army, what few are left are gathered up and sent to work in Germany for the war effort. Left behind are the women and

children, whom they need to protect and feed. The choices made by the women are unbelievable--some resist, some depart and others collaborate--some even collaborate while also resisting. All of the stories are heart-breaking and over and over I asked myself, what would I do, would I be able to survive some of the horrors, how would I protect my child? Once liberation comes the story is far from over. All of the women who survived, no matter how, now had to face the future--for some a very short future, with death the result of trials that found them guilty of treason, or the result of illness and weakness resulting from years spent at the hands of brutal German imprisonment. Yet, others lived into their nineties and they, too, found their future shadowed by the years of the war and its aftermath.

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