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Olivier Wieviorka, *The French Resistance*. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016. 592 pp. 1 line illustration, 3 maps, chronology, and bibliography. \$39.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 9780674731226.

Review by Valerie Deacon, New York University.

The very essence of the French resistance means that its history, memorial status, and commemorative practices are complicated and sometimes even contradictory. Resisters themselves often disagreed about the true nature of resistance. Take for example, Pierre de Bénouville, who wrote that “the term ‘Resistance’ is used here to designate the eight movements which were to unite and form the basis for the National Council of the Resistance in 1943—that is, the official groups recognized by London and in contact with General de Gaulle. I do not include in this category the fly-by-night groups or those which were to fuse with the eight official movements—such as the Carte organization—or the intelligence networks. The agents of the latter led much the same sort of life as any secret agent on enemy territory, whereas the life of a fighter in the Resistance—a phenomenon new to history—was entirely different, and, if I may say so, infinitely more dangerous.”[1] Conversely, Georges Groussard, who shared many similar political tendencies as Bénouville, noted that the resistance should focus entirely on intelligence, military preparation, and escape routes. He felt that many recruits to the movements were too politicized, victims of the National Revolution, and their focus would always be on politics, rather than war.[2]

If the very definition of “resistance,” or what it meant to resist the German occupation of France, was already in question during the war, it should come as no surprise that historians have also struggled to achieve consensus on such subjects. Their task was made all the more difficult by changing legal definitions of who could claim a resistance heritage, as well as shifting cultural representations of resisters. As Olivier Wieviorka writes in his new book, “the Resistance fighter, considered a soldier by default in 1945, became in the late twentieth century a pioneer of human rights” (p. 455).

By 2016, scholars had created a fairly substantial body of work on the subject of the resistance, but most of it was in French and much of it continued to replicate earlier perspectives. Fortuitously, it was at this precise moment that Harvard University Press chose to publish two lengthy books on the subject, both written by seasoned historians who are well known for their interventions in the field of modern French history.[3] Both books are presented as overviews of the resistance in France and both promise new insights into the subject. The two books are far from being carbon copies of one another, however. Reflecting dramatically different considerations, each book addresses the resistance in its own way. Wieviorka’s focuses primarily on the heterogenous nature of the resistance and the result is a book that is the most comprehensive English overview to date. Wieviorka considers both the networks and the movements (a distinction usually made by historians as one between civic and military resistance), he examines the role of the political parties, he details the development of the Free French and its interaction with internal resistance groups, he notes the changing parameters of resistance over the course of the war, and he carefully outlines the role the resistance played (or did not play, to be more accurate) in the

postwar recreation of the French Republic. Central to Wieviorka's study is a careful assessment of the parameters of French resistance, as well as an analysis of its effect both during and after the war.

Given his emphasis, one of the strengths of Wieviorka's book is its quantitative analysis of the resistance. Counting resisters, not to mention acts of resistance, is no easy feat and Wieviorka's determination to talk about the resistance in concrete ways is impressive. Like other historians, Wieviorka takes the figure of 200,000 resisters as a modest estimate and suggests that the resistance likely involved between 300,000 and 500,000 people. While these general numbers are fairly easily found in multiple sources, Wieviorka offers his readers a much more specific assessment of different elements of the resistance, allowing for a clearer picture of who was doing what during the war. By way of example, we might look to his discussion of the maquis. Rather than conflating the number of French people who fled from their homes to avoid being sent to work in Germany as part of the Service du travail obligatoire (STO) with the number of French people who joined the maquis, Wieviorka makes explicit the fact that only a minority of STO evaders (some 20 percent, fewer than 40,000 people) ended up in active resistance. Wieviorka brings this emphasis on quantification to other kinds of resistance as well, like the underground press or the activities of the intelligence networks. As an indication of the growth of networks, Wieviorka notes the rather dramatic increase in the number of telegrams the Gaullist intelligence services received from France: more than 3000 telegrams in 1943 jumped to more than 8000 in the first eight months of 1944.

An additional strength of the book is its analysis of how the different elements of the very diverse resistance interacted with one another. Wieviorka looks at the ways in which organizations worked together, competed for resources, battled over goals, shared intelligence, jostled for power, tried to protect one another, and dreamed of different futures. While other historians (mostly working in French) have detailed the strains the resistance experienced, Wieviorka's study really highlights such divisions and he is deeply sympathetic to the travails of resisters who tried to work collaboratively beyond their immediate social networks. Always sensitive to just how impressive resistance was, Wieviorka seems to detail constraints in order to emphasize successes. Unlike many other scholars who privilege one form of resistance over others, thus leading them to negatively view forces that thwarted the overarching goals of those groups, Wieviorka's balanced approach means that he understands the pressures on all parties: the internal resistance, the Free French, de Gaulle, and the Allies. Many former resisters (and historians sympathetic to them) denounced the skepticism with which the Allied forces viewed the resistance. While not ignoring the validity of those criticisms, Wieviorka suggests a somewhat different reading of the relationship between the resistance and the Allies. He points to the very real problems of reliability on the ground in France, noting that parachute drops of weapons and money often failed because there was no one to receive them. Even more horrifying, from the perspective of the Allies who were working with limited resources for resistance groups, was the amount of money and number of arms that fell into German hands. Some 8,572,000 francs were dropped by parachute and picked up by the Germans.

Writing a history of the resistance, writ large, is a task not for the faint of heart. Wieviorka's attention to detail and careful assessment of the many different elements of resistance means that readers may feel burdened by the demands on their ability to retain organizational names, to say nothing of their acronyms. If readers are able to look past the sometimes convoluted narrative structure, they will be treated to some of the best scholarship on the Resistance to date. Wieviorka is comfortable working with sources in multiple languages and has done research at French, British, and American archives (though this book is primarily rooted in published sources, Wieviorka's previous archival work informs it in countless ways). This overview, thanks to its translation, will be immensely useful for anybody who wants to teach North American students about the resistance.

As for the debate about the very nature of resistance in France, the publication of Wieviorka's book, alongside Robert Gildea's latest work, tells us just how hard it is to challenge long-held beliefs. Gildea's definition of resistance is very broad, bringing to mind old assertions of a nation united in resistance, and includes symbolic manifestations of patriotism: acts of resistance because they were banned by the

Germans. Wieviorka, on the other hand, notes the difficulty of a too broad conception of the resistance. He writes that “in the first place, resistance requires a continuity of action: occasional acts must not be confused with long-term engagement” and he goes on to argue that we must consider the risks incurred by different acts of resistance, without which we obscure “the considered and thoughtful choices that led individuals to opt for struggle and to commit most of their energy to it, sometimes at the cost of their lives” (p. 410). His book is a fitting tribute to those who did pay for France’s liberation with their lives.

## NOTES

[1] Guillin de Bénouville, *The Unknown Warriors*. Trans. Lawrence G. Blochman (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1949), p. 100.

[2] Georges Groussard, *Service Secret 1940-1945* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1964), pp. 326-332.

[3] The other book is Robert Gildea, *Fighters in the Shadows: A New History of the French Resistance*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2016.

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