

Stealing home: looting, restitution, and reconstructing Jewish lives in France, 1942-1947

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Abstrak

Between 1942 and 1944, the Germans sealed and completely emptied at least 38,000 Parisian apartments. The majority of the furnishings and other household items came from abandoned Jewish apartments and were shipped to Germany. After the war, Holocaust survivors returned to Paris to discover their homes completely stripped of all personal possessions and often occupied by new inhabitants. In 1945, the French provisional government established a Restitution Service to facilitate the return of goods to wartime looting victims. Though time-consuming, difficult, and often futile, thousands of people took part in these early restitution efforts. This work demonstrates that attempts to reclaim ones furnishings and personal possessions were key in efforts to rebuild Jewish political and social inclusion in the wars wake. Far from remaining silent, Jewish survivors sought recognition of their losses, played an active role in politics, and turned to both the government and each other for aid. Drawing on memoirs, oral histories, restitution claims, social workers reports, newspapers, and government documents, this volume provides a social history of the period that focuses on the everyday lives of Jewish survivors during the lengthy process of restoring citizenship and property rights. It examines social rebirth through the prism of restitution and argues that the home was critical in shaping the postwar relationship between Jews and the state, and in the successes and failures associated with rebuilding Jewish lives in France after the Holocaust.