



Film Review

Being Jewish in France

By David Fear

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The land of liberty, equality and fraternity has had a storied history with Israel's children. France was the first country to recognize its Jewish population as free citizens; it also gave birth to the Dreyfus Affair and the most virulent anti-Semitism of the late 19th century. As Eastern European Jews flocked to the nation during the Third Republic, French Jews treated their new brethren as inferiors, adding fuel to the fires of social unease. As for what happened once the Vichy government voluntarily persecuted its Judaic residents on behalf of the Nazis in 1940...let's just say it's a stain that France shall never be able to fully wash away.



LONG ARM OF THE LAW

Gendarmes prevent a Jewish citizen from leaving.

Even those who've boned up on Gallic history will have their eyes opened by Yves Jeuland's comprehensive documentary regarding the Chosen People and this motherland blithe and brave. Combining testimonials, newsreel footage and snippets of cinematic representations from Renoir to Marcel Ophüls, Jeuland has concocted something close to a final word on the subject, even if the repetitive shots of talking heads against black backgrounds blur the interviews together. Still, this examination is essential viewing to understand a love-hate relationship that's been triumphant and—during WWII, after the Six-Day War and, crucially, throughout the new millennium—remarkably tragic.