

Suzanne Vromen

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Biography:

Licence ès Sciences Sociales and Première Licence ès Sciences Economiques, University of Brussels, Belgium; MSc, urban planning, Columbia University; MA, PhD, sociology, New York University. National Endowment for the Humanities summer seminars (1976, 1984), summer stipend (1988). Fulbright Senior Specialist Grants (2004, 2006). Author: *Hidden Children of the Holocaust: Belgian Nuns and Their Daring Rescue of Young Jews from the Nazis* (Oxford University Press, 2008). Essays in *Diverse Histories of American Sociology* (Brill, 2005); *Jewry Between Tradition and Secularism* (Brill, 2006); *Sociology Confronts the Holocaust* (Duke University Press, 2007). Articles on Hannah Arendt, Georg Simmel, Rose Coser, Maurice Halbwachs, social theory, collective memory, and nostalgia in *European Journal of Political Theory*, *History of European Ideas*, *Jewish Women in America*, *Comparative Social Research*, *Journal of Arts Management*, others. Cofounder (1979) and coordinator (1982–90) of Women’s Studies Program, Bard College. (1978–2000) *Professor Emeritus of Sociology*.



From: <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/author/vromen-suzanne>

Suzanne Vromen is professor emerita of sociology at Bard College, where she co-founded the Women’s Studies program and directed it for eight years. Her research interests include social theory, gender, collective memory with emphasis on commemorations, memorial and monuments, and the identities of Jewish-American women. Vromen’s articles and reviews have appeared in many journals, including *Yivo Annual* and *History of European Ideas*. Recent publications include an essay on Hannah Arendt’s Jewish identity in *European Political Theory*, and a chapter on Maurice Halbwachs in *Diverse Histories of American Sociology*.

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By: Bonnie Kieffer for AAUW

Hidden Children of the Holocaust: Belgian Nuns and their Daring Rescue of Young Jews from the Nazis By Suzanne Vromen

Consider this scenario: You, as a young child, are torn from your family, compelled to live with strangers along with other children for an indefinite period of time in an unknown place, and all this done in secret. You must adapt to a totally foreign lifestyle with a new language, a new daily routine, new caretakers in a time of great fear and worry about your absent family. How would you feel? What would you do? How would you cope?

This is the scenario which repeatedly occurred in Belgium in the 1940’s when the Nazis attempted to round up and exterminate Jewish children and which Suzanne Vromen so vividly relates in her book Hidden Children of the Holocaust: Belgian Nuns and Their Daring Rescue of Young Jews from the Nazis. Jewish children in Belgium were taken by the Resistance to Catholic convents to save them from death. Ms. Vromen interviewed twenty eight adult children, eight nuns, one priest and two members of the Resistance who willingly told their story of sacrifice, heroism, and survival. This book is, up to now, the only one in English to address at the same time the experiences of hidden children, the nuns who sheltered them, and Resistance members in Belgium. The interviews, transcribed

and translated by Ms. Vromen, examine the lives of all those who were involved in this rescue and how they coped, some well, some not, in these difficult times.

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Hidden Children of the Holocaust

Belgian Nuns and their Daring Rescue of Young Jews from the Nazis

by [Suzanne Vromen](#)

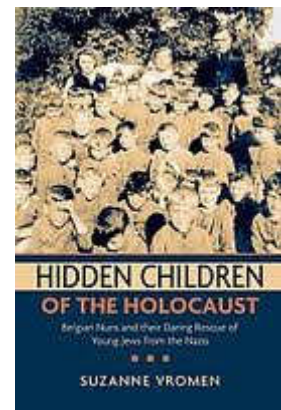
<http://www.oup.com/us/catalog/general/subject/ReligionTheology/SociologyofReligion/>, search for *Hidden Children...*

In the terrifying summer of 1942 in Belgium, when the Nazis began the brutal roundup of Jewish families, parents searched desperately for safe haven for their children. As Suzanne Vromen reveals in *Hidden Children of the Holocaust*, these children found sanctuary with other families and schools--but especially in Roman Catholic convents and orphanages.

Vromen has interviewed not only those who were hidden as children, but also the Christian women who rescued them, and the nuns who gave the children shelter, all of whose voices are heard in this powerfully moving book. Indeed, here are numerous first-hand memoirs of life in a wartime convent--the secrecy, the humor, the admiration, the anger, the deprivation, the cruelty, and the kindness--all with the backdrop of the terror of the Nazi occupation. We read the stories of the women of the Resistance who risked their lives in placing Jewish children in the care of the Church, and of the Mothers Superior and nuns who sheltered these children and hid their identity from the authorities. Perhaps most riveting are the stories told by the children themselves--abruptly separated from distraught parents and given new names, the children were brought to the convents with a sense of urgency, sometimes under the cover of darkness. They were plunged into a new life, different from anything they had ever known, and expected to adapt seamlessly. Vromen shows that some adapted so well that they converted to Catholicism, at times to fit in amid the daily prayers and rituals, but often because the Church appealed to them. Vromen also examines their lives after the war, how they faced the devastating loss of parents to the Holocaust, struggled to regain their identities and sought to memorialize those who saved them.

Features

- The book is up to now the only one in English addressing at the same time the convent experiences of hidden children and their rescuers, both nuns and members of the Resistance, in Belgium.
- Much has been written in French about the difficulties of returning children to their Jewish identity after the war. While the subject has not been ignored in English writings, the way Vromen details the Catholic arguments, the position of the Belgian state and the stance of the Jewish community (in the chapter on Memory and Commemoration) is an important contribution to the debate.



Reviews

"Suzanne Vromen's deeply moving book about Jewish children hidden in Belgian convents during World War II is an extraordinary study of human courage, devotion, and transcendent spirit. Capturing the voices of those who were saved and of their rescuers, Vromen illuminates history and offers us inspiration." --Susannah Heschel, author of *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*

"Suzanne Vromen masterfully uncovers the hidden history not just of Jewish children rescued during the Holocaust, but also of the courageous women who saved their lives. Vromen has restored a missing piece of the Belgian and Jewish past. She tells the story of the children and their saviors with tact, gentleness, and insight." --Deborah Dash Moore, author of *GI Jews: How World War II Changed a Generation*

"*Hidden Children of the Holocaust* offers important insights into the lives of children who disappeared behind Convent doors in Belgium during the Holocaust. We still know far too little about what happened to children during the Nazi period and even less about those who were hidden by Catholic institutions. Relying on both the printed record and interviews with some of the children and the priests and nuns who hid them, Suzanne Vromen paints a vivid picture. This is an important book that will captivate readers and open a door to a body of knowledge that has been hidden for far too long." --Deborah E. Lipstadt, author of *History on Trial: My Day in Court with David Irving*