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Michael Neiberg, *The Blood of Free Men: The Liberation of Paris, 1944*. New York: Basic Books, 2012. Pp. xxxi, 309. ISBN 978-0-465-02399-8.

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Passersby strolling through the southern part of Paris today, near the Porte d'Orléans, amid cars, trams, and bicycles, barely notice the imposing monument to Gen. Philippe Leclerc's 2nd Armored Division. Squeezed between a bus stop, a gas station, and the périphérique intérieur,¹ this striking memorial of the entry of Free French troops into the city in August 1944 is no easy tourist destination. Despite the many reminders of the fight for the liberation of the French capital, including, besides the Leclerc monument, numerous plaques marking the place where a resistance fighter fell and bullet holes still visible in the façade of the École militaire, Parisians and tourists alike often forget that the liberation of Paris was considered to be, in 1944, one of the seminal events of the Second World War.

Historians generally present the liberation from one of two viewpoints. The first places it in the context of the Normandy landings, including the breakout from the beachheads and the Battle of the Falaise Pocket, stressing the role of the American troops who were helped by the Free French in freeing the city.² The second perspective evokes the Gaullist vision of events—as embodied by the Leclerc memorial—and focuses on the role of Free French forces, who, under their leader Gen. Charles de Gaulle, entered the city to rescue the ragtag assemblage of local resistance fighters and Parisian civilians who were fighting the Germans with a few pistols and rifles.

In *The Blood of Free Men*, historian Michael Neiberg³ (US Army War College) seeks to correct these misleading versions of events by reassessing the vital role of ordinary French citizens and local resistance fighters in a narrative adopting multiple perspectives: "It is ... the story of much more than the Germans and the French. It is a story of the Germans who physically held the city, the willing collaborationists who made that hold possible in order to serve their own agendas, the various and diverse people inside Paris who hoped to break that hold, and the advancing Allied armies, who had given surprisingly little thought to Paris" (xvii).

The deep symbolism surrounding the liberation of the city acts as a structuring element of the book:

In the heated days of August, when the fate of the city still hung in the balance, Albert Camus ... spoke of Paris returning to its historic role of purging tyranny with the "blood of free men." ... No other city in the world captures peoples' imagination like Paris. No other city could have motivated such intense feelings of love from people from around the world. And no other city during World War II so symbolized freedom and liberty suffering under the boot of naked aggression and bloodthirsty hatred. When, after more than four years under Nazi rule, Paris returned to French control, church bells across the globe rang out in celebration.... A free Paris meant that, even if the war was not yet over, the outcome could no longer be in doubt. A free Paris meant that the end of the Nazis was near. (xi-xii)

Neiberg's argument is organized in nine chapters that describe the underlying tension that emerged and grew in Paris after the Normandy landings and eventually burst out in the August insurrection that led to the liberation of the city from German control.

The first four chapters present the general context leading to the liberation from the viewpoints of the main historical actors: the Allies, de Gaulle and the Free French, the Resistance movement, Parisian civil-

1. The city's inner ring road, also known as the boulevards des Maréchaux.

2. See, e.g., example, Rick Atkinson, *The Guns at Last Light: The War in Western Europe, 1944-1945* (NY: Henry Holt, 2013) 171-85, and Andrew Roberts, *The Storm of War: A New History of the Second World War* (NY: Allen Lane, 2009) 487-90.

3. He is also the author of *Dance of the Furies: Europe and the Outbreak of the First World War* (Cambridge: Harvard U Pr, 2011), reviewed at *MiWSR* 2014-077.

ians, and the German occupiers. Neiberg shows that the feelings of these various groups about the eventual liberation were shaped by the humiliating defeat of French forces in 1940 and the subsequent evolution of the German occupation up to June 1944. These first chapters, by giving proper attention not only to the occupiers and the resistance fighters, but to the material conditions of ordinary Parisians, facilitate a better understanding of the wider political climate as well as the military issues at stake in summer 1944. The book's other five chapters concern the crucial events of 19–25 August, when the population of Paris, with the help of resistance fighters, took matters in hand and forced rapid changes. The author recounts, almost hour-by-hour, the actions and interactions of the protagonists of the uprising, especially resistance fighters and Parisian citizens.

Neiberg, a talented storyteller, begins each chapter with a personal anecdote or opinion. From this individual viewpoint he unveils the wider historical framework. Although he does not break new ground or directly challenge anything in the existing scholarship, he has skillfully used personal memoirs, relevant secondary literature, and some archival sources to construct a narrative that corrects many long-standing myths about the liberation of Paris.

First, Neiberg elucidates the complex situation in occupied Paris and France in general. The distinction between resistance and collaboration evolved with the changing nature of the French state, the German occupation, and the actions of the Vichy government. The book's introduction and first four chapters offer a particularly enlightening account of the political transformations in wartime France, including the role of the Vichy regime and various resistance movements. They also clarify the inner workings of, and divisions within, the resistance groups, especially the strains between de Gaulle's Free French forces and the Forces françaises de l'intérieur (FFI). While the Gaullist movement was backed, however reluctantly, by the United States and Great Britain and had regular military forces under Allied command, the FFI, which united disparate resistance movements inside France, balked at submitting to de Gaulle's authority, much to his and the Allies' displeasure. Although it comprised groups with quite different political inclinations, the FFI in Paris differed from the Free French in being distinctly left-leaning.

Secondly, Neiberg considers the German and Allied perspectives on the liberation of Paris. In spite of the city's importance as a railway and communications hub, neither the Allies nor the Germans gave much thought to either its defense or its liberation. Struggling to break out of the D-Day beachheads and then bogged down in the hedgerows of Normandy, the Allies originally saw the French capital as a potential liability, a diversion from their objective of destroying German military forces in France. How, for example, could they feed the Parisian population at a time when they had their own supply problems? Why not, Allied commanders reasoned, bypass the city and let Germany feed and control its populace? At the same time, the new German governor of Paris, Gen. Dietrich von Choltitz, while aware that he lacked the troops and resources to defend the city, suspected the Allies would choose to go around it. Both sides feared that a fight for Paris would become a new Stalingrad, destroying yet another city and decimating battle troops badly needed elsewhere.

Finally, the book details the thorny relations between the more conservative, London-based Free French and the leftist resistance forces in Paris. However, a common desire to free their country from her hated Nazi occupiers in the end trumped any ideological differences. Despite many political squabbles, local resistance fighters, the Parisian police, and the city's civilian population, under the leadership of Henri Rol-Tanguy, took up the fight and ultimately forced the Allies to intervene.

The Blood of Free Men will engage and instruct both historians and a wider readership with its balanced, vivid narrative and flair for telling anecdotes. Michael Neiberg has written a powerful story of the "free men" who overcame unfavorable odds to cast off the chains of tyranny and make the liberation of Paris an emblematic moment in the Second World War.