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William I. Hitchcock. *The Bitter Road to Freedom: The Human Cost of Allied Victory in World War II Europe*. New York: Free Press, 2009. ISBN: 978-1439123300 (paperback, \$16.00).

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The popular story of the liberation of Europe in World War II is a tale of mission accomplished. In it, Allied troops landed at the Normandy beaches, advanced against enemy forces, recovered from the German counteroffensive, and pushed on to win. While the defeat of Japan came with haunting mushroom clouds, the victory in Europe seemed to be a clear triumph of good over evil. The dramatic portrayal of grateful Europeans welcoming Allied troops inspired new versions, as in the 1991 Gulf War when U.S. “perception managers” provided Kuwaitis with small American flags to wave as they greeted American troops. The message of the “Good War” liberation story has been that the American military gets the job done and as a result the world is a better place. In *The Bitter Road to Freedom*, William I. Hitchcock challenges this triumphant narrative with another, more complicated, narrative. In doing so, he shows a war as ugly as it was heroic.

By including the perspectives of civilians, concentration camp survivors, displaced persons, and Allied soldiers, Hitchcock combines military with social history and American with European history. His account explores the traumas of war experienced by both the liberated and the liberators. For instance, British relief workers, who had expected to bring decency and justice to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, instead spent weeks burning the bodies of the tens of thousands who died before liberation and the tens of thousands who died after being liberated. Hitchcock lets the people on this bitter road describe their joy, disgust, or the struggle to feel anything at all, given the prevalence of what might be called the brutality of indifference.

Hitchcock’s multifaceted account inspires new questions about a familiar story. He shows that “freedom” meant many different things to those who wanted to see the Nazis defeated. Which meaning would dominate? Layers of memory and forgetting influenced contested meanings as well. Jewish survivors and Allied administrators, for example, clashed over different visions of the past and the future. At the same time, as Hitchcock explains, for many people, forgetting was as essential for survival as remembering. Once the war became history, what would be remembered and forgotten, and whose versions of the liberation would prevail?¹ For the reviewers here, these are powerful and provocative questions raised by their reading of *The Bitter Road to Freedom*.

Wayne E. Lee discusses Hitchcock’s examination of the human costs of the war. Lee observes that Hitchcock does not accuse the Allies of deliberately harming civilians, but points out how military strategy affected the lives of people who happened to be in the path of advancing and retreating armies. Allied bombing devastated the people of Normandy, the Battle of the Bulge rolled back and forth over Belgian civilians, and the unsuccessful Operation Market Garden left no one responsible for feeding the Dutch.

¹ These questions are explored, for instance, by Emily Rosenberg in *“A Date Which Will Live”*: *Pearl Harbor in American Memory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) and John Bodnar in *The “Good War” in American Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010)

Hitchcock, Lee notes, exposes the irony that Allied policies frequently perpetuated the suffering of the people most abused by the Nazis.

As Michael Sherry observes, Hitchcock insists on including in stark detail the dark side of the Allied liberation---the bombing, looting, rape, starvation, and cruelty---that has long been a part of the story of the conduct of Soviet troops on the Eastern front, but not of the Americans and the British. Sherry points out that American attitudes toward Germany shifted after the war, but initially the United States poured a wealth of troops and funds into its occupation because it was determined to keep the defeated Germans down. Sherry notes that, according to Hitchcock, the soldiers, civilians, and journalists did not romanticize the liberation. These eye-witnesses associated the war and the occupation with destruction and degradation, which leads Sherry to question when and how the triumphal liberation narrative challenged by Hitchcock was constructed.

Marla Stone praises Hitchcock for restoring humanity to the liberation by describing the multiple points of view of the people who experienced it. Hitchcock shows how the attitudes of the Allies regarding race and gender affected the treatment of African American troops, Belgian women, and Jews. Stone points to what she sees as shortcomings in Hitchcock's transnational approach, arguing that it is less strong on the Eastern Front and Southern Europe where many people viewed the Red Army as liberators. She asserts that the vision of freedom held by many socialist and communist partisans in Greece, Italy, and France contrasted with the democratic and capitalist version offered by the Americans and the British.

Adrian R. Lewis charges Hitchcock with displacing the big story of military liberation with the smaller story of what happened to civilians. He believes that this distortion leads to the exaggeration of crimes and rapes committed by Allied troops who for the most part conducted themselves honorably. He acknowledges that mistakes were made and atrocities took place, but argues that overall the liberation of Europe from Nazi Germany must be considered a great success.

Rob Citino compliments Hitchcock for showing how the "Good War" was also a bad war. The kind of war it was---big, aggressive, industrialized---determined the kind of liberation that ended it. For Citino, Hitchcock's book reveals how Nazi and Allied policies at the highest levels had an impact on the lives and deaths of so many people. In turn, the interaction of ordinary civilians and soldiers, as for example during the Allied occupation of Germany, influenced the erosion of such Allied directives as non-fraternization. As Hitchcock explains, American troops tended to prefer the clean and relatively well-fed Germans to the scrawny, desperate civilians of the Allied nations they liberated.

The definitions of meaning, the selections of what is remembered and what is forgotten, and the evaluation of which stories are big and which are small are fundamental to the making and writing of history. Hitchcock's achievement shows us many narratives of the liberation of Europe. It is a history that has delivered the message of "never again," while serving to justify military action ever since.

Participants:

William I. Hitchcock is Professor of History at the University of Virginia. He received his Ph.D. from Yale in 1994, and has taught at Wellesley College and Temple University, where he was Chair of the Department of History. He is the author of a number of books including *The Struggle for Europe: The Turbulent History of a Divided Continent, 1945-present* (Doubleday, 2004) and, most recently, *The Bitter Road to Freedom: A New History of the Liberation of Europe, 1944-45* (Free Press, 2008), which won the George Louis Beer Prize from the American Historical Association and was a Finalist for the Mark Lynton Prize and the Pulitzer Prize. He is now at work on *The Age of Eisenhower: America and the World in the 1950s*, to be published by the Free Press.

Susan A. Brewer is professor of history at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. She is the author of *Why America Fights: Patriotism and War Propaganda from the Philippines to Iraq* (Oxford, 2009) and *To Win the Peace: British Propaganda in the United States during World War II* (Cornell, 1997).

Rob Citino is a faculty member of the Military History Center at the University of North Texas. He is the author of eight books, most recently *Death of the Wehrmacht: the German Campaigns of 1942* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2007). His *Blitzkrieg to Desert Storm: The Evolution of Operational Warfare* won the Paul M. Birdsall Prize from the American Historical Association for best Book in Military History and the Distinguished Books Award from the Society for Military History, both in 2005.

Wayne E. Lee is associate professor of history at the University of North Carolina, and the Chair of the Curriculum in Peace, War, and Defense. He received his Ph.D. in military history from Duke University in 1999. He is the author of *Crowds and Soldiers in Revolutionary North Carolina: The Culture of Violence in Riot and War* (2001), and the forthcoming *Barbarians and Brothers: Anglo-American Warfare, 1500-1865* (March 2011). He has written many articles on Native American and early American warfare, and on the use of cultural analysis in military history. The latter most notably in the *Journal of American History* as "Mind and Matter--Cultural Analysis in American Military History: A Look at the State of the Field" in 2007.

Adrian Lewis received a Ph.D. in European and Military History, University of Chicago, 1995, and is a Professor of history at the University of Kansas. Lewis served with the 9th Infantry Division and the 2nd Ranger Battalion at Fort Lewis and specializes in twentieth century warfare, including World War II, the Korean and Vietnam Wars, and the more recent military activities of the United States. His books include *The American Culture of War: A History of American Military Force from World War II to Operation Iraqi Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 2007); and *Omaha Beach: A Flawed Victory* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

Michael Sherry is the Richard W. Leopold Professor of History at Northwestern University. His books include *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon* (1987) and *In the Shadow of War: The United States since the 1930s* (1995). He is currently working on a book entitled, *Go Directly to Jail: The Punitive Turn in American Life*.

Marla Stone is Professor of History at Occidental College in Los Angeles, California. She is the author of *The Patron State: Culture and Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton University Press, 1998) and *The Fascist Revolution* (Bedford/St. Martin's, 2011). She is currently completing a manuscript entitled *The Enemy: The Politics of Italian Anti-communism from Fascism to Democracy*.

The twentieth century should have made us all fall out of love with war as a way to solve our political problems. It's not a pretty picture: two global conflicts--"world wars"--that killed millions and injured many, many millions more; smaller contests--"regional wars" like Vietnam and Korea, Arab-Israeli and Iran-Iraq--that made up in intensity what they lacked in geographical scope; the invention of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons that, at any given moment, might account for all the fortunate souls those earlier conflicts missed. What a mess! If ever there was a century that deserved a "good riddance," it was the twentieth. If ever there was an era that should have made us swear off war forever, this was the one.

Of course, we didn't, and frankly, one of the reasons we didn't was World War II, the "good war." Even today, the most convinced pacifist can have a difficult time answering a simple question from an undergraduate: What about World War II? The crusade against Hitler--as we still like to describe it--seems to be the very epitome of St. Augustine's "just war." The prewar era had been an ugly time, with dictators in jackboots strutting across the European and world stage and spouting hatred. William Butler Yeats put it best: "the worst," he wrote, "are full of passionate intensity." Hitler was one of "the worst." He started a war out of a *mélange* of militarist and racist ideologies. The Allies had no choice but to crush him and did so *con brio*.

Let's not be simpletons, however. Any decent historian knows that the good war, as good as it was in theory, wasn't all that good in execution. The Axis gave themselves a permanent seat in the Hall of Shame with their sadistic behavior, murdering civilians wholesale and attempting, in the case of the Jews, to exterminate an entire people. There's a reason that the war gave us the word "genocide," after all. In laying their enemies low, however, the Allies, too, seemed often to have misplaced their moral compass. They reigned down death and destruction on the guilty and the innocent alike. However evil Hitler's Reich might have been, it is still difficult, or at least it should be, to contemplate the death of tens of thousands of women and children in Allied fire-bombing raids. The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, with Japan already on its last defensive legs, may well have been necessary in the strictly military sense. Even so, it is disturbing, if only for reasons of good taste, to hear anyone willing to defend them too enthusiastically. Even Studs Terkel, the author and oral historian who coined the notion of World War II as the good war, had the decency to put the phrase in quotation marks. While the outcome of the conflict was infinitely preferable to a victory for Hitler or the Japanese militarists, the war itself was a disaster for Europe, for the world, and indeed, for the entire human race.

For all these reasons, I welcome the publication of William Hitchcock's *The Bitter Road to Freedom*. It tackles the part of the war that has received relatively little attention up to now: the liberation of Europe in the last year of the war and beyond. Usually presented as a glossy travelogue of liberated capitals, military parades, and delirious crowds screaming themselves hoarse with happiness, liberation appears here in very different terms, stripped of the "heroic register" (p. 367) with which historians have invested it. The Allied invasion

of Normandy featured heroic fighting on Omaha Beach and wrested a toe-hold on the continent from tenacious German resistance. It also rained down bombs on French towns, homes, and civilians alike--a bloody campaign of mass destruction that targeted a "friendly" country, not an enemy. The victorious Allied armies then rolled through Belgium and freed it from German occupation. Belgium usually features in the history books as one of the West European lands that had essentially been spared the horrors of war. It wasn't spared the rigors of liberation, however. Those "victors" were in reality an army of strapping young men freed from the constraints of home and family and operating under what we today call the "50-mile rule." One of the results was a venereal disease epidemic of truly epic proportions. And, oh yes, the Germans came back. The Ardennes offensive in December 1944 (the "battle of the Bulge" to Americans) featured a German attempt to slash through U.S. defenses in Belgium and get back to Antwerp. In the course of the fighting, eastern Belgium learned all about the "horrors of war" and the problems of having a firepower-intensive force like the U.S. army operating on friendly soil. The population of the neighboring Netherlands had to wait for its liberation, as Allied forces barely got across the border before the hardening of the front. With the Germans stripping the land of everything they could carry out, however, the result was the Hongerwinter of 1944-45--the starvation winter--in which tens of thousands of Dutch civilians died in what Hitchcock reminds us had been one of the most intensively cultivated lands on the planet before 1940.

It is the discussion of the Allied arrival in Germany, however, that gives this book its edge. The Allies did not come to Germany as liberators, after all, but as conquerors and perhaps also as chastisers, a latter-day "scourge of God" to show the German people the error of their militarist ways. If there was one motto pounded into the heads of Allied soldiers before they reached Germany, it was "No fraternization!" And yet, Allied soldiers fraternized from the moment they entered Germany, they kept doing so no matter how many warnings they received, and eventually General Eisenhower simply decided to drop the proscription altogether. His alternative, arresting every soldier under his command, seemed unworkable. The Germans struck the American occupiers as "people like them." Well-fed. Orderly. Obedient. Dignified even in defeat. All in all, a pleasant change from the starving and ragged scarecrows that Allied soldiers had met in the occupied countries. Of course, this was no accident. Germany had looted its conquered lands for just this purpose: to keep living standards in the Reich as high as possible in order to forestall the kind of revolutionary disturbances that had swept the country at the end of the last war. Hitler swore that there would never be another November 1918 in German history, and that was one promise he kept.

Partially as a result of these affinities, friendships, and sexual encounters between Allied soldiers and German civilians, Allied policy soon changed. No longer was the emphasis on punishing or re-educating the Germans; now it was on feeding them and bringing the German economy back from the precipice. Bottom-up pressure was not the only story, however. There were pressures from the top down, as well. In what could best be described as a period of proto-Cold War, a functioning, prosperous and reasonably happy Germany soon became a *sine qua non* of U.S. policy.

So if you were a German civilian, life, though hard that first winter, gradually returned to “normal”. If, however, you were one of the millions of victims of Nazi policy unfortunate enough to be caught inside Germany at the end of the war--prisoners of war or slave laborers or Jews--you just had to wait your turn. Those who have never read the history of the immediate postwar era and the ordeal of the “displaced person” (DP) will be justifiably shocked: Germans going about their daily lives, getting healthier and wealthier, while Jews were still being held in “camps” behind barbed wire and Allied armed guards. To be fair, of course, these were no longer “concentration camps” or “death camps,” but neither did they represent “freedom” or “liberation.” Most Jews had no desire to return to homes from which they had been hounded during the war, often with the connivance of their non-Jewish neighbors. British policy, however, was not about to let them go to their destination of choice: Palestine. It would take years to sort out, if indeed that problem has ever really been sorted out.

Hitchcock tells all this with deep research, excellent writing, and a humane sensibility. He has written a fine book, and students of the war will be reading it for a long time. I did find a few arguable points here and there, however. As a card-carrying military historian, I found the operational military narrative so generic that it might well have been dispensed with altogether. Indeed, these portions of the book struck me as simplistic. To give just one example from the text, the author depicts Eisenhower’s decision to back a “single-thrust” strategy on the road to the Rhine (culminating in Operation Market-Garden, the airborne drop onto Arnhem) as a “strategic blunder” (p. 71), as if there is an instruction manual that allows us to make these kinds of definite judgments. It strikes a jarring note in a book that is otherwise so nuanced in its treatment of the material. Suffice it to say that military historians have long been investigating the complexities of the fighting in the ETO in 1944-45, the systemic problems that go well beyond “good” or “bad” generalship, the fog and friction that are inherent in war. For interested readers, I might recommend John Nelson Rickard’s book on the Lorraine campaign, *Patton at Bay*, Hal Winton’s fine look at the Ardennes, *Corps Commanders of the Bulge*, or Derek Zumbro’s analysis of the final defeat of Germany, *Battle for the Ruhr*.

In addition, there are times that Hitchcock draws his heroes (the women of UNRRA, for example) and his goats (mid-range U.S. Army officers, replete with southern accents) a bit too vividly, and it’s clear for whom we’re supposed to be rooting. As he readily admits, however, both sides had their point of view--the army to restore order and get people back to their homes, the humanitarian agencies to provide for body and soul. Finally, the very nature of the book--the conceptualization of the problem--makes it seem as if liberation was a misfortune that simply dropped out of the sky one day. Reading the book reminds us that “War” in the abstract is the enemy of all humanity; real-world “wars” break out for various reasons, however, and this one happened because Germany tried to conquer its neighbors. It was as clear-cut a war of aggression as human history has to offer. A shifting coterie of Allies (France went out, the USSR and USA came in) resisted, eventually gained the upper hand, and won it. In so doing they ripped apart a continent, yes, but given the situation and the then-current level of technology, it is not easy to see how it could have ended much differently, or how liberation could have been smoother, gentler, or more sensitive to the needs of the civilian population.

All of these are minor points, however, thrown out more for discussion than as serious criticism. After reading Hitchcock's very fine exposition of the problems and absurdities of the final year of war and the first year of peace, I found myself developing an unexpected fondness for absolute monarchy. Kings and queens back in the day believed that war should be the *ultima ratio*--the final argument, something that you resorted to only when everything else had failed. Maybe they weren't as backward as we like to think they were.

The concluding scene of Roberto Benigni's *Life is Beautiful* (1997) in many ways encapsulates the modern American, if not European, view of World War II and its meaning. Benigni's character Guido and his young son Giosué have been imprisoned in a concentration camp of sorts (it is never really clear whether it is a death camp or a labor camp). Guido has somehow managed to hide the more fatal components of the camp from Giosué, convincing him that it is all a vast game. In the chaos generated by the approach of allied forces the Germans begin to kill the remaining prisoners, including Guido, but Giosué emerges from hiding with the game fantasy intact, and runs straight into his promised reward for winning the game, an American tank. The movie ends with Giosué celebrating his victory atop the tank, still unaware of the death of his father. The critically acclaimed film generated widely disparate reactions; many felt it trivialized the Holocaust, while others found it to be a profound exploration of love and family. One thing it certainly did was fulfill certain stereotypes about the war: yes, there was a tremendous amount of suffering under the Germans, and yes, the fighting was desperate and destructive, but liberation was a moment of pure joy--the joy of a boy celebrating atop an American tank (with chocolate); a joy somehow uncomplicated by the suffering and fighting that preceded it.

It is this particular shallow memory that William Hitchcock's *The Bitter Road to Freedom* complicates. Hitchcock, a noted historian of post-war Europe, narrates a more nuanced history of the end of fighting in Europe while simultaneously building a powerful implied critique of more recent simplistic assessments of the consequences of using force in the world. In many ways this is a book with more of a purpose than an argument. Hitchcock tells a deeply humanistic story about what it meant to be "liberated" in 1944-45 Europe, and he wants us to remember that "when considering the history of Europe's liberation, we [must] not lose sight of the human costs that this epic contest exacted upon defenseless peoples and ordinary lives. There is surely room enough in our histories of World War II for introspection, for humility, and for an abiding awareness of the dreadful ugliness of war" (p. 373). Hitchcock repeatedly counterpoises this humanistic intent against the tendency of military histories of the war to focus on military choices, their operational consequences, the destruction of German armed might, and their blithe assumption that virtually any human cost was justified in the pursuit of victory. Perhaps it was, but those strategic calculations then, and those historians' choices now, obscure, or at least neglect, a vast arena of human suffering associated not just with German occupation, but with allied liberation.

Hitchcock has a lot of stories to tell, despite the fact that he confines his purview to the period between June 1944 and late 1946, with a few forays into the planning that occurred in 1943 or into some of the continued spillover effects in 1947. Indeed, without saying so, he seems very deliberately to end his account prior to the implementation of the Marshall Plan or the emergence of deeply hostile Soviet-western relations. Those stories would open up far more complexities and would quickly be dominated by the Cold War's political configurations and calculations. Again, it bears repeating that his intent here is

humanistically to recount the extent of suffering associated with a nominally *good* thing, with *liberation*.

Given his Anglophone audience, it only makes sense to begin that story with D-Day and the liberation of western Europe. In the three chapters of Part 1, Hitchcock successively guides the reader through a far more complex operational history of the liberations of France, Belgium, and Holland than most students of World War II will remember. To refer to yet another movie image, most readers of this forum will have seen, in one movie or another, Hollywood's version of bombed-out Caen, or any one of a number of other French towns. Hitchcock puts the people back into that seemingly deserted landscape, literally burrowing into their basements, or frantically moving the civilian wounded out of the fighting zone. His narration of the Normandy campaign repeatedly assesses the local human cost, but he also does so with interesting twists and turns. He digresses in Chapter 1 to discuss French and American attitudes toward African-American troops, and those troops' relatively greater likelihood of being hauled in front of a judge.

Chapter 2 continues in a similar vein, chronologically leaping ahead to the liberation of Belgium, at first relatively painless, but then much trodden upon during the Bulge campaign. Again Hitchcock provides ironic statistics: for example the difference between deliberate German atrocities in Houffalize, which targeted and killed eight civilians, and the non-targeted, collateral killing of 184 civilians by allied bombing (86-7). But continuing his pattern, Hitchcock's analysis is not confined to a litany of destruction. He also narrates the complex political problem of replacing Belgium's occupation government with a new one, one that had sufficient popular support and administrative capability to begin rebuilding. And he uses the American soldiers' experience of the Bulge campaign to "digress" into the extent of the soldiers' suffering. And, finally, in another fascinating "digression," he draws on the competing Belgian and American visions of how to contain a venereal disease outbreak to comment on their differing understandings of gender and contagion. Calling these "digressions," of course does not do them justice. They are part and parcel of the complex experience of liberation, which took different courses and different effects in different parts of Europe.

The extent of that difference is particularly marked in Chapter 3. With the failure of Operation Market Garden, liberation bogged down in the Netherlands, German administration essentially ceased, and the population began to starve. Allied military attention turned elsewhere, and for perhaps far too long, refused to devote resources to relieving the situation, while the Germans also refused to cooperate to solve the problem. Hitchcock here, like elsewhere, is careful not to "blame" the allies for all the sufferings of liberation--many of which he can directly attribute to the Germans--but the Netherlands neatly represented one of those moments of paradox: do we lengthen the war by turning resources to the problem of alleviating starvation in the Netherlands, or do we stay focused on ending the war as soon as possible? No matter how Eisenhower (or Churchill, or Roosevelt) answered that question, suffering would ensue.

Part 2 continues in a similar vein, but now moving, (again roughly chronologically) into Germany. Chapter 4, reliant primarily on secondary sources, tells the Soviet version of the

story, to include first their sufferings when the Germans invaded, but then also the extent of the Red Army's vengeance when they moved into Germany in 1945. Chapter 5 turns to the American planning for and then initial occupation of Germany. And indeed the planning differed sharply from practice. American statements in September 1944 had insisted that "Germany will not be occupied for the purpose of liberation but as a defeated enemy nation." Almost immediately upon the war ending, the western allies had turned instead to feeding and rebuilding the nation, a process which Hitchcock argues "required an almost schizophrenic ability to separate the occupier's duties of denazification and reeducation from the liberator's role of giving comfort and aid" (208). In this chapter, as in the others, Hitchcock also provides extensive sidebars on related issues: here, the damage from the strategic bombing campaign and American soldiers' (limited) rape and (much more widespread) recourse to prostitutes.

Where Parts 1 and 2 retained more or less traditional elements of campaign narrative, relating the movements of armies to the problems of liberation, Parts 3 and 4 are much more exclusively about what happened once the armies stopped moving and the civilians started. Part 3 is thus titled "Moving Bodies." Chapter 6 is about the role of UNRRA, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, in trying to relieve the suffering so ably described in Parts 1 and 2. Almost a standalone essay, derived primarily from the memoirs and records of UNRRA officials and workers, this section seems a bit undecided. With only 10,000 employees, and severely limited in its ability to extract logistical assets from the military, was it a success? Hitchcock certainly does not think it was a failure. It delivered \$4 billion in aid (food, medicine, blankets, and so on), and, as a minimum, the "longed for gift of decency and charity to Europeans in desperate need" (247). It was certainly true that UNRRA's operations were challenged by the "Tidal Wave of Nomad Peoples," which forms the title of Chapter 7. Here too, Hitchcock is telling a story usually left under the radar. Huge numbers of civilians were displaced either by the movements of armies or by the Germans' deliberate relocation of workers. In August of 1944, in Germany alone, there were 5.7 million foreign civilian laborers, plus an additional 1.9 million POWs forced to work (249). These people, and others in other countries, took to the roads in their millions, seeking home and family. Unfortunately, as Hitchcock ably narrates, allied bureaucratic assumptions and techniques tended to dehumanize them, treating them as numbers, and blithely categorizing them without regard for their past or their experience, even as they ostensibly recognized their suffering and humanity. Hitchcock tries to recover that humanity not only by describing their often painful attempts to return home and reintegrate into their communities, but also by developing a fully-fledged narrative of the displaced person (DP) camp at Wildflecken, and the fundamental disconnect there between strained bureaucracy and humanitarian hope.

A similar but even more tragic paradox confronted the allies in their efforts to deal with the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust. Initially unable even to comprehend that these survivors' experiences did not fit the standard DP category, and indeed that returning a Croatian Jew, for example, to Croatia, might not be the best solution, the allies, narrated here by Hitchcock in the three chapters of Part 4, at best stumbled through this unique aspect of liberation. Hitchcock begins with the death camps themselves, and the survivors' experience of their last days, punctuated by long forced evacuation marches to camps

deeper inside Germany. There are parallels to the DP chapters of Part 3, but with far more intense consequences. Hitchcock then takes us inside the American and British attempts to heal, shelter, and, inevitably, *administer* the survivors. That process, which essentially sought a return to some form of pre-war status quo, eventually conflicted with the Jews' emerging vision of their need for a new future. In Hitchcock's vivid formulation, "the Jews were beginning to construct a narrative of their fate in which history, memory, commemoration, and retelling of the persecution they endured would accompany and condition their recovery. There was to be no 'new' life, but a conscious carrying of the recent past into the future" (324-5).

This is a deeply and widely researched portrayal of a complex and kaleidoscopic human experience. Hitchcock could not possibly tell every story, but he has done a fine job of selecting exemplary moments (Caen, UNRRA, Wildflecken, Bergen-Belsen, and more). And he has also carefully situated the social experience of those places and organizations within their political context. But as an interested non-specialist, I do not detect substantial engagement with ongoing historical debates. That, at least to me, does not seem to be his point. Hitchcock makes his humanistic purpose clear in his conclusion, and he endows it with meaning for the present. For us, and for the generations that follow, the war exists as a constructed memory. Its physical affects linger, and its political redistributions of power persist, but they have become assumed facts. That part of the war's legacy which continues to *act*, to *affect* current thinking and thereby current decisions, is its reconstructed memory. At many points in *Bitter Road*, Hitchcock points to a deliberate process of *forgetting*--often perhaps necessary to the process of surviving the turbulence and pain of the time. But this process of forgetting one aspect of the war allowed for public memory to focus on other aspects. The boy celebrating on a tank dominates our memory; not the civilians cowering in basements, or trudging home for hundreds of miles to shattered homes, or desperately seeking to build a new community in a new nation among fellow survivors of an incomprehensible cruelty. Restoring that memory, Hitchcock clearly believes, is a path to greater wisdom about the role of force in the world

In his depiction of the effects of World War II on noncombatants in Europe William I. Hitchcock tells a story of the misery of war, of the suffering of noncombatant, civilians whose home and work places happened to be the battlefield. Hitchcock brings to light new, significant facts and details. But, make no mistake: this is not a new story, as the author himself suggests. The danger in Hitchcock's approach is that the minor story threatens to displace the major story, the more significant story.

A sarcastic and arguably cynical thread that is only thinly disguised runs through this book. Hitchcock writes: "For half a century, therefore, the American public has been fed a steady diet of triumphalist narratives in which great generals and visionary politicians placed the burden of freedom onto the willing shoulders of the anonymous American G.I., who carried out his duties with determination and honor (p. 369)." No serious student of World War II can claim that American and British Generals and political leaders have been spared criticism. But, the bottom line is essentially true. American, British, and Canadian soldiers, sailors, and airmen with all their human flaws, did carry out their duties with "determination and honor."

But the examples Hitchcock provides run counter to that assertion. For example, he writes: "The evidence shows that sexual violence against women in liberated France was common... (p. 53)." It was not "common" for American soldiers to rape French women. He writes: "Most wartime memoirs mention that the shooting of POWs, while frowned upon, was common. So was the mutilation of corpses (p. 80)." Most American soldiers did not commonly kill POWs and mutilate the corpses of German soldiers. Hitchcock writes: "Sometimes, civilians died because Allied air forces were criminally sloppy (p. 88)." Sometimes people fighting war are sloppy, but usually not "criminally sloppy." There is an underlying assumption in Hitchcock's work regarding the motives and actions of soldiers/leaders that I do not believe is justified. To be sure there was criminal behavior, but to define it as "common" is to tarnish the entire U.S. Army.

Hitchcock displaced the main story with the side story, the minor story. He writes: "By contrast, this book has drawn upon the testimony of many ordinary people, civilians as well as soldiers, to offer an alternative way of looking at the events of 1944-45 (p. 367)." This is not an "alternative way of looking" at the war. Hitchcock gives us numerous minor stories. They are not the main story of World War II. The principal story of World War II is that men in mighty armies fought and killed each other in large numbers to determine the social, political, and economic system that would dominate the globe for the remainder of the century and into the next. That is, and will always be, the principal story of World War II.

Consider one of Hitchcock's minor stories, the story of the treatment of African-Americans by the Army's criminal justice system in World War II: "All these numbers, and others relating to other crimes, can be summed up fairly simply by stating that of the 70 men the U.S. Army hanged for crimes in Europe 55 were African-Americans (p. 53)." Of course,

black people were still being hanged in America without a trial during this period. Jim Crowism was very much alive in the 1940s. But, this is another side issue. The main story here is that African Americans contributed greatly to the success of the United States in Europe by feeding Bradley's 12th Army Group. The Red Ball Express manned primarily by African Americans provided the beans, bullets, and fuel needed to keep the Army advancing. By their behavior black men earned a place for themselves in the U.S. Army and their country. I tell my students the Civil Rights Movement started in World War II. It is hard to deny freedom at home to men who have fought for the freedom of others on foreign shores. A few years after the war, in 1948, President Truman signed an executive order directing the integration of the Armed Forces. This is the big story. The big story should not be obscured by side issues.

There is an accusatory tone throughout this work. Hitchcock seems to believe that the decisions and actions of soldiers and leaders were intentionally designed to cause harm to civilians, or were uncaring of their suffering. Hitchcock writes: "While the Allied powers dithered, thousand of people in western Holland simply wasted away (p. 111)." He concludes that, "Yet it cannot be denied that these thousands of Dutch civilians died in great misery, just a few miles from Allied lines... (p. 122)." The Allies were fighting a very skillful German Army, and working hard to provide for the people of liberated territory. Yes, they made mistake, but the tone of Hitchcock's work makes it sounds like Eisenhower and other allied leaders intentionally caused pain and suffering, and that simply is not true.

General readers of this work should keep a number of factors in mind: First, statistical information can be shocking. The scale of World War II was unprecedented, but the many acts that took place during the war were very human. Second, war brutalizes people. As the war went on the restraints that were prevalent under normal civil conditions were loosened. By 1944-45 people on all sides were willing and able to do things they would not have considered doing a few years earlier. Third, the history of humanity is the history of fight over limited resources. In war-torn areas resources are always limited, and the law of the jungle typically prevails. The types of behavior that characterized war-torn Europe are taking place at this moment. Fourth, this was a new experience for Americans. Soldiers/leaders learned as they advanced. Thousands of mistakes were made. Without doubt there were some who acted out of the desire for revenge or acted maliciously, but that is not the main story. The vast majority of Americans acted with good will, the desire to do the right thing and end the war as soon as possible.

Finally, the results of the war and the aftermath speak volumes about American, British, and Canadian soldiers. The liberation was successful. In the face of growing Soviet strength and hostility, the U.S. and UK restored Germany and made what became the Federal Republic, a prosperous ally, created NATO, supported the United Nations, and contained Communism. In other words, the Allied effort in World War II was a great success story. The atrocities that took place during the war should be known, but readers of this account should not confuse the numerous portrayals of what in some ways were inevitable effects of devastating conflict and in other cases the results of miscalculation and longstanding problems with the general narrative of a ultimately victorious struggle against a regime—Nazi Germany—that celebrated mass murder and megalomania.

Wow! What a stunning book! I underline that "wow!" because it rarely happens for me any longer with new books about World War II, which often end up unread on my shelves or elicit ho-hum reactions if I take them on. There is so much I already know, or think I know, that it takes a lot to catch my eye. Of course the historical experience was so huge that there will always be something new to uncover and something familiar to reassess. Still, one can get inured to the historical experience and to scholarship on it after a lifetime encountering both. William Hitchcock's book broke through my resistance as only a few books recently have: another blockbuster, John Dower's *Cultures of War: Pearl Harbor/Hiroshima/9-11/Iraq* (New York: Norton, 2010), hardly just about World War II, is one; Gerald Linderman, *The World Within War: The American Combat Experience in World War II* (New York: Free Press, 1997), was another.

I was vaguely aware of the dreariness and deadliness of European life at the close of World War II. Early postwar European and American films provided me panoramas of destruction and desperation. Earlier scholarship outlined parts of the story Hitchcock tells so fully. As historian of bombing, I knew another element of that story, the many civilian deaths and large-scale destruction incurred in the British and American bombing of occupied countries like France. The brutality of Soviet forces in Germany and Eastern Europe is old news, if long an inadequately told story that Hitchcock does much to fill in. Still, I did not appreciate the full scale and many manifestations of the postwar Europe story, one imperfectly parallel to the deadly story of postwar Asia, as Dower characterizes it: "The only place in Asia where the guns were really stilled and peace prevailed was Japan."¹ American agency had its role there as it did in Europe, for United States guns and money went (often on American ships) into the hands of imperial powers trying to recover their colonies. War did not rage in postwar Europe as it did in postwar Asia, but in both theaters the war bled into the postwar in profound and manifold ways.

Hitchcock shows that the "human cost of victory" was inflicted on Europe's liberated peoples in good part by the Allied powers' deliberate cruelty, callous neglect, voracious appetite for women and loot, political machinations, and inadequate will and resources. Whether "liberation" is even the right word to encapsulate this history may be doubted given the range of experiences involved, many hardly liberating. But Hitchcock retains the term, perhaps for want of a better one, for this "time of cruel paradoxes." (6). He starts with liberation in Luxembourg, Normandy, Belgium, and the Netherlands, where, in "a vivid testament to the commitment of the Allied forces and the international relief societies... aid did come, in remarkable fashion and with stunning speed." (120). But with much of Holland not freed until near the war's end, and given "the unforgivable cruelty of Germany's deliberate starvation policies," suffering and death remained immense there. (122) Hitchcock then addresses the "Red Storm in the East," the western allies' move into "America's Germany," the treatment of millions of displaced persons, the liberation of

¹Dower, *Cultures of War*, 393.

"Hitler's Camps," and the fraught relations between Anglo-American liberators and Jews surviving in Germany. There the "recovery of... freedom" owed more to "the Jews themselves," who found themselves in "a painful dialogue of the deaf" with "a brisk, businesslike military occupation" whose representatives were often bewildered by or hostile to adrift Jews and other displaced persons, and no happier when those people took matters into their own hands. (310, 311) Aided by deep research into these histories, Hitchcock recounts them in strong, transparent prose, in vivid detail, and with no little dismay about the Allies' contributions to the "human cost of victory," even as he notes the many exceptions to Allied indifference and callousness.

It does justice to a great book to raise concerns about it, rather than merely applaud it, and I have two comments concerning how Hitchcock handles causation and memory.

In its paperback edition, Hitchcock's book is subtitled *The Human Cost of Allied Victory in World War II Europe*, as if that "human cost" was caused by Allied victory. But was that not the human cost of the war itself, spilling over into the "peace," a cost that would have been far larger if the Allies had not won the war? Certainly the Allies raised those costs more and contained them less than most of us had recognized. Still, it seems a curious title that attributes "human cost" to "Allied Victory," rather to all the forces and behavior that also accounted for that cost. To be sure, the subtitle may not carry the weight I attach to it. It might not even have been Hitchcock's choice: the cloth edition is subtitled, neutrally, *A New History of the Liberation of Europe*. But the paperback's subtitle does foreshadow a certain vagueness in the book about who or what was the cause of all the suffering that ensued, leaving it at times unclear how much to see that suffering as inherent in the war, attributable to the behavior of Nazi authorities (and collaborating or resisting local authorities), assignable to the particular methods of warfare employed by the Allies, and due to the various parties and forces at play in postwar Europe.

"Desirable as it was, liberation proved also to be a bitter chapter in the war's history," Hitchcock writes, and "a human tragedy of enormous scope." (2, 3) Such statements are both inarguable and ambiguous: had not a bigger "human tragedy" already occurred? And how well does that grand formulation work given profound differences between eastern and western Europe in the experience of liberation? Liberated Europeans, and not only those in eastern Europe, "often found it difficult to comprehend the destructiveness and rapacious acquisitiveness of their liberators." (3) And it was particularly galling for surviving Jews and other displaced persons that "the western Allies worked harder on behalf of the defeated [German] enemy than they ever did for the liberated people of France, Belgium, the Netherlands, or Italy." (4, 5) That statement seems a stretch given Hitchcock's later assertion that, in the Netherlands, Allied "aid did come, in remarkable fashion and with stunning speed," and other particulars that he offers. And the "ever" in that statement glosses over complexity: Anglo-American sentiments towards Germans were neither uniform nor static. Starting out harsh, they slid toward sympathy by 1947 and 1948. And it was defeated Germany that the Allies had to occupy in huge numbers, so inevitably they brought larger and more stable resources there than they did to more briefly and lightly occupied lands. Indeed, it was the very fear of a resurgent Germany, and the desire to punish it, that helped account for the location of enormous resources in

Germany.

Causation in this history is not quantifiable, of course. Still, careful parsing of the causes of suffering is essential. Chapter by chapter, Hitchcock provides that parsing. In a fine account of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration and other efforts "to save Europe," for example, he assesses UNRRA's performance favorably and finds that the record of private relief agencies "shows plainly that Americans at the war's end were just as ready to work hard, give money and time, and make personal sacrifices on behalf of European recovery as they had been to fight and destroy Hitler's regime." (246) But some of his summary formulations leave me queasy. How much did the Allies cause the suffering? How much did they fail to address and alleviate it?

It might have been helpful to have comparisons: have other wars shown better outcomes? By what benchmarks--beyond Allied promises and self-congratulatory claims--should we measure the postwar record? Certainly the U.S. did no better later on: flawed though the American occupation regime was after World War II, it had impressive scale and competence compared to the post-9/11 version, when, Dower points out, the U.S. government "bore only shadow resemblance to that of 1945."²

I have similar discomfort with Hitchcock's treatment of how his story has been remembered. In part because west Germans' repositioned themselves as the war's victims and the western allies slowly embraced them as Cold War partners, "The war years were allowed to slip away into the past, willfully forgotten," as "Europeans and Americans welcomed a period of collective amnesia about the realities of war." (372) In Eastern Europe, that erasure was more bluntly imposed and total: "In the new postwar Communist mythology, all war crimes were committed by Fascists, all Eastern Europeans had opposed German occupation, all had wished for and welcomed liberation by the Soviet Union"--"nonsense" that "was deployed even in East Germany." (370)

But whose memory is Hitchcock describing? Not, it seems, that of the British and American soldiers whose records he examined, who showed "profound ambivalence" toward their experience or "seemed to hate every minute of it. Fighting on behalf of others, in a faraway land of foreign customs and languages, amid filth, death, and destruction, occasioned in most liberating soldiers a profound distaste and disgust with the whole business of war." (5-6) That "disgust" was acted out sometimes against liberated Europeans and sometimes through sympathy for them, but either way it was, by Hitchcock's own account, indelibly marked on Allied personnel. Although many Americans in occupied Europe were not combat veterans, who were gradually rotated back to the U.S., even the fresh faces encountered the "filth, death, and destruction." And memory for many liberated Europeans surely remained acute, and got conveyed to others--to soldiers and journalists they encountered or to families and friends they might have in Britain or the US, or indeed might live alongside if they emigrated to the US, as many (war brides and others) did. Journalists and novelists also tended to memory, and so too did film makers. It was not a pretty picture

²Dower, *Cultures of War*, 315.

of postwar Germany, or Germans themselves, that was painted by two notable 1948 American films, *The Search* and *A Foreign Affair*--directed respectively by two expatriate Austrian Jews, Fred Zinnemann and Billy Wilder--although they were careful to locate virtue (of a compromised sort in *A Foreign Affair*) in the American rescuers/operators. If "collective amnesia" set in, perhaps it did so later, when a spate of American films and newsreel celebrated the Anglo-American Berlin Airlift and embraced suffering West Berliners. But part of the problem here is that Hitchcock does not much specify when this "amnesia" set in.

I do not doubt that in American politics, the human cost of victory faded away by the early 1950s. But so too, to a considerable extent, did much else, including the human cost of victory to America's own personnel. Nor is politics the only location of memory. Memory--not Hitchcock's main subject or his area of apparent expertise--has a history as complicated as the one Hitchcock tells about Europe's liberation. It should not be reduced to simplistic psychologizing about "collective amnesia," with its hint of traumatized forgetting. Most likely, Hitchcock's fine book will provoke other scholarship that calls into question the very term he embraces.³

³Examples (all including but ranging beyond World War II) of such scholarship already available include: Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War and Historical Memory in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale Press, 2006); Laura Hein and Mark Selden, eds., *Censoring History: Citizenship and Memory in Japan, Germany, and the United States* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2000); Yuki Tanaka and Marilyn B. Young, eds., *Bombing Civilians: A Twentieth-Century History* (New York: Free Press, 2009). For an insightful reading of the politics of memory at stake in Hitchcock's book, see Michael J. Allen, "The Limits and Fears of Flesh and Blood," *Reviews in American History* 38(3): September 2010, 539-47.

All too frequently, historians play it safe. While we may poke holes in the dominant narratives about the past, we rarely take direct aim at a master narrative in its entirety. In *The Bitter Road to Freedom*, William Hitchcock dismantles a triumphalist narrative central to American identity – the idea of the Second World War as the glorious American liberation of Europe. This vision has become increasingly celebrated and central to the national story as each war since the Second World War offers less and less to celebrate. Hitchcock challenges the master narrative of the “good war,” a narrative created after the fact in large part as a product of the Cold War and America’s need to define itself in distinction to the Soviet Union.

In popular and public commemorations of “the good war,” Americans became the liberators, re-inventing the very reason they fought World War II. It is story ripe for problematizing, even if it threatens a core belief about American values and America as the selfless crusader eager to spread freedom and democracy. Hitchcock brings the Anglo-American liberation and subsequent occupation of Europe down to ground level, giving us the experience of liberation from the ground up from the perspective of those who lived through it as soldiers and civilians. In the wake of the American invasion of Iraq, Hitchcock wants to remind us that “a war of liberation is still a war, and no matter how noble the cause, mothers and children will die, houses of worship will be burned, disease will spread, refugees will tramp the roads.” (6) While collective memory may present the end of World War II as a period of unadulterated joy for those freed from Nazi tyranny, in reality, writes Hitchcock, it was a “a time of upheaval and disappointment” for many who survived it. (6)

Hitchcock’s challenge to the politically expedient narrative about the liberation of Europe is a nuanced one: he does not shatter the image of GI Joe the liberator, but humanizes him and makes him much more complex in his motivations and behavior as he fought his way from Normandy to Berlin. This is one of the book’s great strengths. In rejecting the dichotomies surrounding the history of the liberation – dichotomies of rescuer and victim, savior and saved – Hitchcock gives us a new set of subject positions and a set of ambiguities between freedom and slavery. He gives us the grey area, the liminal space between the fall of a regime and the construction of a new one, between the end of hostilities and the beginnings of peace, between survival and, as Primo Levi wrote, returning to life.

So, not surprisingly, *The Bitter Road to Freedom* offers an ambivalent vision of Americans as liberators. The liberators behaved conflicting ways, ranging from insensitive and prejudiced to criminal and brutal, that made the liberated themselves question the meaning of liberation. Some American troops looted, others treated the newly-liberated with disdain and even abuse. The liberations of 1944 to 1945 brought a range of experiences to civilians emerging from Nazi occupation – from civilian deaths in Normandy to widespread starvation in Holland to the continued degradation and incarceration of many of the Jewish DPs in occupied Germany. “In this environment,” writes Hitchcock, “of devastating war, damage and upheaval, soldiers tended to see civilians as simply another feature of a foreign, strange, and frequently bizarre world.” (39)

A second great strength of *The Bitter Road to Freedom* is its transnational approach. Transnational history is all the rage, but it is not always done well. Here many voices with their contrasting inflections and tones across the European continent emerge; Hitchcock gives the reader the words of the survivors of diverse nationalities in the immediate experience of the war's end. The transnational character of the book is what allows us to understand the multiple meanings of living through the Allied advances. While 1945 brought an end to Nazi rule, that meant something very different for those emerging from the rubble of Germany than for those few who survived the Nazi death marches. By comparing the year 1945 in Normandy, Belgium, and Germany, in the death camps and in the displaced persons camps, Hitchcock reminds us that physical liberation did not always mean freedom from fear or escape from psychological trauma.

The Bitter Road to Freedom's transnational approach intersects with its ambitious attempt to bring together multiple perspectives. The liberators, as well as the liberated, came in many guises. In addition to Allied troops arriving from the west and the east; they came in the form of United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) workers and other voluntary organizations; and they came in the form of partisan fighters. By including the voices of the troops and the United Nations workers, in addition to those being liberated, Hitchcock simultaneously gives us history from above and below. He excavates the experience of Allied troops from below: from the "on the ground" racism, sexism and, at times, criminality they brought with them. Some American troops landed at Normandy or Anzio with deep prejudices against and stereotypes towards Southern Europeans and Jews. They came armed with preconceptions about the lack of cleanliness or superstitious nature of local populations. At the same time, many others arrived in defeated Germany with a preconditioned feeling of familiarity with and sympathy for German culture and habits. For some GI's the orderly German homes reminded them of their own homes in the United States. "But it remains a startling irony," Hitchcock argues, "that the western Allies worked harder on behalf of the defeated enemy than they ever did for the liberated people of France, Belgium, the Netherlands, or Italy." (5)

Hitchcock includes in the broader context of the liberation the gendered way in which the end of the war was experienced -- something usually considered only in histories focused on gender. Under the cover of total war, the collapse of the Nazi regime, and the Allied occupation, women's bodies were exchange commodities for the victors and many women used their "market value" to survive famine and disease. The trafficking in women and rape by Anglo-American forces was part of "the good war" as well. As Hitchcock's discussion of the imposition of Gaullist power in Cherbourg demonstrates, women's bodies -- for example, the bodies of the women whose heads were shaved in punishment for their collaboration with the Germans -- became the location for "Cherbourg's men and boys [to] assert their claim to shape the social order." (49) By placing the violence against women and the ways in which women semi-voluntarily used sex to survive, the mistreatment of African-American soldiers by the American military, and American parochial attitudes towards some Europeans in the context of the war, Hitchcock gives us a rich picture that includes gender, race, and ethnicity as factors which shaped the combatants' and the civilians' experience of liberation and occupation.

With even greater long term implications than the ethnic and racial biases of the Allied forces, the liberators, at both the level of the foot soldier and the officer, came to Europe with biases toward a capitalist and liberal social order and in favor of pre-existing social and moral codes. In the places in the west occupied by Allied troops, occupation translated into support for a return to prewar governments and political institutions. And for the Jewish survivors of Nazi death camps the tone-deaf quality of the Allied occupation was particularly cruel. Confined to displaced persons camps in Germany, they were unable to return home, uncertain about where to go next; for them, the fall of Nazism became was yet another displacement, a “missing liberation.” (367) The Jewish survivors felt a “yawning chasm” between an emerging collective understanding of their persecution as Jews and the resolutions and commitment to moving forward offered by Allied troops and aid workers.(324) The DP camps represented another location in Europe for a disconnect between the liberators and the liberators.

For all its many strengths, *The Bitter Road to Freedom* has blinkers and weaknesses and it comes up against the limitations and pitfalls of transnational history. Because of the book’s ambition to encompass the whole of the liberation of Europe, it inevitably covers some aspects better than others. Perhaps because of the need to contend with sources in many languages and Hitchcock’s training in French history, the sections on Eastern Europe and the Eastern Front emerge as the most superficial. Despite his noble attempt to include the voices of the liberated, at many points, the voices of the liberated are drowned out or mediated through the opinions of the Allied Forces or the UNRRA staff and volunteers who left more detailed and consistent records of their work and experiences at the end of the war and the early postwar period.

More disturbingly, *The Bitter Road to Freedom* makes a set of choices about the politics of liberation without being explicit. It glosses over those Europeans, including many of the partisans, for whom liberation was supposed to include a social and political revolution. We know all too well that for the majority of partisans in France, Italy, and Greece, the war against the Nazis was a war for a socialist or communist future. Their voices are silent and the book presents a consensus on what the postwar order would look like that simply did not exist. It also fails to introduce the possibility that “liberty” and “freedom” and “anti-fascism” meant very different things to Europeans the on the ground who represented a broad spectrum of political positions before and after their liberation. Even the aid volunteers and UNRRA workers who arrived behind Allied troops to attend to the material and medical needs of the refugees had differing political visions. While Hitchcock deftly provides the multiple physical and emotional experiences of liberation, the multiple expectations and aspirations for the postwar order disappear into a consensus for an American-inflected conception of society and politics.

The book fails to acknowledge the fundamental way in which the American and British occupations meant a bolstering of an anti-revolutionary social and political order. The liberators in Western Europe came with an agenda to rebuild Europe along liberal-democratic and capitalist lines. As noted, *The Bitter Road to Freedom* neglects the role of the western European left and of the partisans in the liberation and its immediate

aftermath. A truly multi-perspectival approach would have paid attention to the contested nature of the European future in 1945 and to the rapid delimiting of choices represented by the Allied forces and Allied-support postwar governments. Well known survivors of the Nazi concentration and death camps, such as Primo Levi and Robert Antelme, figure prominently in Hitchcock's narrative. But others, such as Jorge Semprun, arrested as a member of the French communist underground and active in the communist underground at Buchenwald are unfortunate omissions.

In the same vein, Hitchcock dismisses the Red Army's liberation of Eastern Europe and of the death camps in Poland, judging the Soviet Union by its later crimes and by what became public knowledge after the fact. He misses a key experience of liberation when he elides the fact that there were many in Eastern and Central Europe who were ecstatic at the arrival of Soviet forces, which for them were their liberators. One of the voices of the liberated that Hitchcock depends upon to convey the multi-valenced nature of liberation is Primo Levi. Hitchcock frames much of his story through Levi's testimony and Levi's description of the slow, painful experience of returning to life. The book quotes prodigiously from Primo Levi's memoir, *The Truce*, of his liberation from Auschwitz and his ten month journey home, first east and then west through occupied Germany. Yet, Hitchcock leaves out Levi's reaction to his liberators -- the Red Army. Levi experienced the Red Army soldiers who found him dying at Auschwitz as the people who gave him back his humanity: He writes in *The Truce*: "the good soldiers of the Red Army, gentle in peace, fierce in war, are going home."

Hitchcock's countering of the unified and sanitized narrative about the Allied liberation of Europe and his brave attention to the underside of "the good war" has produced an innovative and ambitious book. His superb social and political history of Allied interactions and conflicts with liberated Europeans from Brittany to Poland, from the Netherlands to Buchenwald, deepens our understanding of the origins America's postwar relationship with Europe. *The Bitter Road to Freedom*, transnational in orientation, simultaneously gives us American history through a European lens and European history from an American perspective. And more broadly yet, this book offers a timely admonition about the inevitable ramifications of war and occupation, of the violence and suffering that come with the best of intentions.

Response by William I. Hitchcock

I am deeply grateful to Wayne Lee, Michael Sherry, Rob Citino, Marla Stone and Adrian Lewis for their thoughtful comments on *The Bitter Road to Freedom*. I will address their criticisms below, but let me begin with a few general remarks.

Writing this book was by far the hardest thing I have yet tackled as a scholar. It was hard because of the logistical challenge of working in a disparate array of archives across Europe and the United States; it was hard because the material I encountered in this research was terribly moving and depressing; and it was hard because I worried that if I were to write a book that honestly reflected the documentary record – a book that called attention to many unpleasant aspects of the liberation of occupied Europe – I might stir up the kind of animosity and defensiveness so amply demonstrated by Adrian Lewis above.

Still, I felt strongly that this was a book that needed to be written. For all our intense focus on the military dimensions of the Second World War, we know relatively little about the communities of people who endured the intense fighting of the war's last year, from the coast of Normandy up through Belgium, the Netherlands, in Italy or Eastern Europe. These people saw the full blast of war shatter their homes, villages and lives. I wanted to relate this experience and integrate it into a broader understanding of the meaning of Europe's liberation.

Why have historians of the war failed to include this dimension in their accounts? It is not surely for lack of imagination or a failure of methodology: the scholarship on the U.S. Civil War, for example, abounds in brilliant works on the social dimension of the war, its scarring impact on people both on the battlefield and behind the lines.¹ The historiography on World War I is now almost wholly dominated by studies of the human experience of the war, and has given us rich analyses of the traumatic impact of that war on soldiers, communities and nations.²

By contrast, the history of the Second World War seems under-developed in this regard. To be sure, scholars of the Holocaust have focused intensively on the personal experience of destruction and genocide, and have blazed a path for those of us seeking to widen the scope of the war's history.³ National historiographies too – especially in France – provide us

¹ Just a few examples: Drew Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York, 2009); George C. Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: 2001); Mark Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War* (Cambridge, U.K., 1997).

² Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14-18: Understanding the Great War* (New York, 2002); Leonard V. Smith, *Between Mutiny and Obedience* (Princeton 1994); Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, U.K., 1998).

³ Examples might include Christopher R. Browning, *Remembering Survival: Inside a Nazi Slave-Labor Camp* (New York, 2011); Marion A. Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (New York, 1999); Richard Rhodes, *Masters of Death: The SS-Einsatzgruppen and the Invention of the Holocaust* (New York, 2003).

detailed accounts of collaboration and resistance, as well as studies of local communities upended by war.⁴ Scholars of Germany have offered increasingly detailed accounts of the war as it was experienced by a range of peoples and communities across Germany, as well as the ways that Germans chose to construct a certain kind of public memory about the war.⁵ And Eastern European peoples caught between Hitler and Stalin are at last getting the kind of detailed attention they deserve.⁶

But these are threads almost wholly absent from general accounts of World War II, particularly those treatments most likely to be read by a broad American readership. Browse the shelves of any bookstore and peer into the index of the standard histories of the war: entries for topics such as “atrocities,” “black market,” “civilian casualties,” “disease,” “displaced persons,” “dysentery,” “food shortages,” “humanitarian relief,” “looting,” “prostitution,” “sexual violence,” or “venereal disease” rarely appear. As a consequence, American readers are unfamiliar with even the most basic aspects of daily life in Europe during the period of liberation. And not just the general public is unaware: even Michael Sherry, one of our country’s leading historians of war and society, admits to astonishment upon seeing the evidence of the travails of Europeans in the final stages of the war.

Why have historians of war tended to overlook these topics? Adrian Lewis conveniently gives us the answer. Some scholars consider the lives of non-combatants in wartime unworthy of scholarly attention. All that matters, Lewis asserts, is what large armies were doing, and the outcome of their engagements. But what if these large armies, in addition to fighting each other, also killed many civilians, destroyed cities and schools and churches, and spread disease and destruction in their wake? Should these aspects of war be hidden from posterity? For example, Allied bombing killed 70,000 French civilians and half a million German civilians. This seems to me historically significant. But Adrian Lewis would prefer these “minor” details be erased from the historical record, and alas, he is not alone: many practitioners of military history like talking about armies and divisions but don’t like to talk about killing. By contrast, I argue that such aspects of the war must be made visible if we are ever to have a remotely complete account of this catastrophic tragedy that swallowed fifty million lives.

Naturally, the historian who wishes to draw attention to such aspects of the Second World War is always vulnerable to the inevitable rebuttal: “are you saying that the United States should *not* have liberated Europe?” Or this: “How can you criticize the Americans for their conduct during the liberation when the Germans were responsible for the war, and they

⁴ Richard Vinen, *The Unfree French: Life Under the Occupation* (New Haven, 2007); Robert Gildea, *Marianne in Chains: Daily Life in the Heart of France During the German Occupation* (New York, 2004); Fabrice Virgili, *La France virile: Des femmes tondues a la Libération* (Paris, 2000).

⁵ Richard Bessel, *Germany 1945: From War to Peace* (New York, 2009); Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley, Calif., 2003).

⁶ Tim Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York, 2010).

were the real villains of this horrible conflict?" Michael Sherry and Rob Citino raise these questions, which I've heard before. I can only say this: my book insists that Europeans were and still are grateful for the liberation Americans, Britons, Canadians, and others brought to them (see page 7). It also posits that Europeans were tormented by the massive suffering that the liberation imposed on them. This tension to me is historically interesting, and it forms the central concern of the book. The allied cause in World War II was a just one, and thankfully led to the defeat of Hitler's barbaric regime. Having said that, though, we still need to account for the experiences of those unfortunate peoples caught in the vice between German occupation and allied liberation. Theirs is a story that too often goes untold.

The reviewers have been generous in their praise but also offered some thoughtful criticisms. Michael Sherry wonders about my treatment of "memory" and suggests that I haven't been very careful with this term. I think he's probably right about that, since *Bitter Road* isn't what we might call a "memory book," nor did I lay out a precise definition of the term. To have monitored the memory of the liberation after 1945 as it was codified in monuments, films, books, museums, cemeteries, political rhetoric, and so on, would have taken me far beyond the task I set out to accomplish in this book. Many scholars since Henry Rousso's seminal study, *The Vichy Syndrome*, have worked to unearth such postwar constructions of memory, and the work continues.⁷ But does Sherry really doubt my claim that there are significant lacunae in the written record about the war's toll on European non-combatants? If so, I can only invite him to inspect the published record, whose silence on these matters is striking. When confronted with the awfulness of the real war, many historians have turned away in amnesiac denial.

Wayne Lee's review suggests that my book has "more of a purpose than an argument," which is a gentle way of chiding me, I suppose, for not layering the book with more historiographical apparatus. My defense is simply that there has been little written on the topic of civilian casualties in the war's last year and I didn't have many obvious targets to dispute; instead I argued against a way of writing military history that privileges operational analysis and ignores human beings. My purpose was also my argument; I hope readers will allow me to conflate the two.

Rob Citino, who wrote a wonderfully thoughtful and helpful survey of recent trends in military history for the *American Historical Review* in 2007, has celebrated the marrying of social history with military history and has welcomed the focus of historians on non-combatants in wartime.⁸ In his comments here, Citino is gracious in welcoming a new perspective on the liberation that includes civilians of liberated lands. But he still seems keen on inspecting credentials: one must be a "card-carrying military historian" if one is to

⁷ Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991).

⁸ Robert M. Citino, "Military Histories Old and New: A Reintroduction," *AHR*, vol. 112, 4: (October 2007), pp. 1070-1090.

treat battlefield developments or questions of high strategy. Military historians have a natural propensity to protect their turf, of course, but my book would have been less satisfactory, I believe, if I had left all operational history out, and it would only have perpetuated the notion, of which Adrian Lewis apparently is fond, that only military historians should write the history of war, while the rest of us content ourselves with “minor” issues of human tragedy and social upheaval.

Marla Stone approves of my transnational approach, my rejection of dichotomies, and applauds the introduction of gender into the account of the liberation. Yet she wants more on the political history of the liberation of France. Fair enough: I decided to leave the high politics out, since that is well-trod ground (some of it trod by me in an earlier book). The “betrayal” of the left-wing resistance by Allied military forces and French elites is a worn tale, no less poignant for having been told before. I did not revisit it because that story tells us little about the faceless, nameless residents of those coastal hamlets whose lives were forever altered by the “shock and awe” of June 6, 1944, and the months of turmoil that followed.⁹

More surprising –one might say alarming – is Stone’s assertion that the Soviet “liberation” of Eastern Europe was welcomed by “many” in Eastern Europe who were “ecstatic” at finding their homelands occupied by the Red Army; it was only “later crimes” that besmirched Stalin’s unblemished record of freedom-giving. This is a remarkable claim, one confounded by extensive scholarship. Certainly, Eastern Europeans were thrilled to see the German occupation removed: it does not follow that they welcomed the Red Army as its natural successor. The case of Poland may be deployed as evidence (though one could just as easily point to the fate of the Baltic states). Poles had ample warning of what Stalin intended for their nation: had not Stalin divided Poland with Hitler in 1939, claiming half the country as his own and brutally Sovietizing this newly-acquired territory?¹⁰ Hardly an act of liberation! Did not Stalin personally order the execution of the cream of the Polish army at Katyn in 1940? Did he not insist at Tehran in November 1943 that the carve-up of Poland that he had carried out with Hitler be recognized by the Allies after the war? Did he not welcome the destruction of the Polish resistance by the Germans in Warsaw in August-September 1944? Did he not demand at Yalta virtual control of Poland as a Soviet satellite? These were not the actions of a liberator, and the Polish people knew what was coming when the Red Army swept into their country. Indeed, the ragtag remnants of the Polish Home Army continued to fight sporadically against the Sovietization of their country for years after the “liberation” of Poland, suggesting a less than “ecstatic” attitude toward the

⁹ For the main lines of debate, see William I. Hitchcock, *France Restored: Cold War Diplomacy and the Quest for Leadership in Europe, 1944-54* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1998), 12-22.

¹⁰ Jan T. Gross, “The Sovietization of Poland’s Eastern Territories,” in Bernd Wegner, ed., *From Peace to War: Germany, Soviet Russia and the World, 1939-1941* (Oxford, U.K., 1997).

Soviets. No: Eastern Europeans knew no liberation in 1945, and would not taste freedom until the truly “ecstatic” days of November 1989.¹¹

Lastly, a reply to Adrian Lewis. Military historians, it seems to me, stand at an exciting crossroads. The paths blazed by social and cultural historians have finally intersected with our own, and have begun to converge, carrying us in new directions. What some call the “war and society” approach to the history of conflict has produced important, innovative work premised on the view that warfare has dramatic social, economic, cultural and psychological consequences upon people as well as nations. Such new advances in the field of military history need not threaten the work done by an older generation of scholars whose attention was focused on the operational history of armies in the field. Rather, as we push on to new questions and new sources, we’ll have a richer history, a more complex methodology, and perhaps a broader appreciation for the catastrophe that all wars carry within them.

In *The Bitter Road to Freedom*, I reported on the evidence I unearthed about the experience of European peoples during the period of the liberation, much of which showed liberated people struggling with the complexity of recovering their freedom amidst the total destruction of their homes and livelihoods and the deaths of their family members. These findings make for uncomfortable reading. My motive was not to denigrate the accomplishments of Allied armies but to beg for the inclusion in our military histories of rather ordinary people for whom World War II was more than a sand-table exercise. If there is any cynicism or sarcasm on display here, I suggest it comes from historians who sneer at the “minor” episodes of slaughter and destruction that shattered the lives of millions of civilians whose only crime was that they lived in the path of the most ferocious armies ever sent into battle.

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¹¹ See Krystyna Kersten, *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland, 1943-1948* (Berkeley, 1991); and Norman Naimark and Leonid Gibianskii, eds., *The Establishment of Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe, 1944-49* (Boulder, Colo., 1997).