

The Race for Paris

Harper Paperbacks

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ISBN: 9780062354648

Introduction

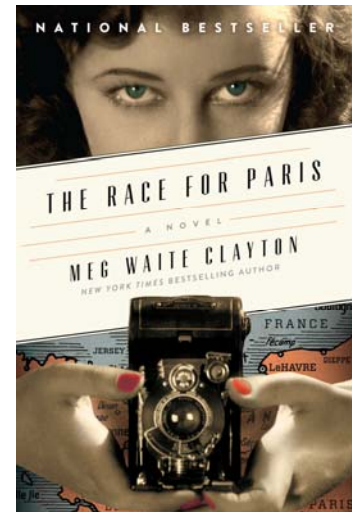
Inspired by the extraordinary female journalists who were among the first to report the Allied liberation of Paris from the Nazis in 1944, *The Race for Paris* follows two war correspondents on their quest to document (and make) history. Jane is a young, single reporter who meets photographer Olivia, “Liv,” on assignment at a field hospital.

Unlike their male colleagues, Liv and Jane are constantly confronted by red tape and derision. Jane is resigned to making the most of her assignment, but Liv is determined to chase a bigger story. After failing to win over her commanding officer, she goes AWOL to Paris—and Jane, seizing the chance to make a name for herself, joins her.

Reluctantly accompanied by a male British military reporter, the two women scramble through the gunfire and carnage scarring the French countryside. Their journey is further complicated by emotional bonds, romantic tensions, and one woman's secret—a secret with the power to end her career and, perhaps, her life.

Questions for Discussion

1. What role did journalism play in the coverage of WWII? What were the responsibilities and limitations of journalists like Liv and Jane and the editors who published their work?
2. Upon seeing her work, Liv's future husband and editor Charles says that she “photographed like a man.” What might he have meant? What does this say about the professional culture Liv worked in?
3. What were the effects of Liv's photos and Jane's reports on the American public?
4. To what extent can one justify the censorship of wartime journalistic reporting? How do Liv, Jane, and Fletcher each react to their honest work being significantly altered or not used at all?
5. What were the American cultural values that kept women journalists from the same wartime accreditation as men? What is your opinion of their acts of defiance? What are other ways to fight for equality?



6. Journalist Martha Gellhorn is quoted from a letter she wrote to Eleanor Roosevelt to say, “It is quite a job being a woman, isn’t it; you cannot do your work and simply get on with it because that is selfish, you have to be two things at once.” What does she mean? How does Liv decide to respond to a similar dilemma?
 7. Jeanne Bohec—a highly skilled sharpshooter who trained male soldiers to shoot—was herself denied clearance to possess a weapon during the war. How does such an illogical situation come to be?
 8. Given the profound change in technology since WWII, how have the roles and responsibilities of the media during wartime changed?
 9. In what ways are written articles and photographs similar or different? What are the particular strengths or limitations of each?
 10. “Gallows humor,” ironic jokes made about desperate or painful situations, has a consistent presence in the novel. How does such humor work? Why does it seem important?
 11. Liv’s mother made a point to teach her about photojournalist Margaret Bourke-White, saying before her photos, “Imagine that, Livvie.” What does she mean? How can such a simple moment end up becoming so important in a person’s life?
 12. In what ways might the circumstances of covering the war have influenced the relationship between Liv and Fletcher?
 13. Jane quotes French poet Charles Baudelaire: “I have more memories than if I’d lived a thousand years.” What are the psychological challenges for those who survive wartime experience? What are the healthiest ways to handle difficult memories?
 14. Often, in times of great stress or fear, Liv and Jane sing together. How does singing help them in such situations? How do singing and music function beyond entertainment or celebration?
 15. In the rubble of the Allied-bombed French city of Saint-Lo, conscientious objector Hank Bend says, “We sure liberated the hell out of this town, didn’t we?” What’s the complexity of what he means?
 16. Discussing Dorothea Lange’s famous photograph of a migrant mother, Liv and Fletcher disagree about whether photography of war or personal hardship should show or blur people’s faces. What argument is made by each of them? Which seems correct?
 17. How might Liv’s tragic loss of her parents have influenced her behavior as a photojournalist covering the war? What other forces influence her?
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18. After learning to shoot a revolver Liv remarks that it felt “similarly empowering” as shooting with her camera. What does she mean? What are the differences in the power of each machine?

 19. What should be learned from the profound efforts of the women who inspired this novel? How might their success as journalists inform thinking about contemporary issues of gender and equality?
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