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# The Volunteer

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## Justice for Spain

Emilio Silva, New York, May 2015. Photo Len Tsou.

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## Dear Friends,

Why should we care about the past?

This is one of the essential questions we ask when we work with students and teachers. We believe it is a question worth pondering, and worth answering thoughtfully.

It is also the question that has driven Spain's Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory since its founding in 2000. Like ALBA, the Association believes it is not a theoretical or academic question. It is an ethical and political question. It is a question that invites activism.

What is historical memory and what does recovering it involve? No one has shown this better than Emilio Silva and the thousands of Spaniards who have devoted their time, energy, and spirit to that task. They have located and exhumed mass graves of civilian victims killed by General Franco's fascist regime, set up DNA databases to identify victims' remains, returned them to their families for proper burial, presented the victims' case to the United Nations and to Spanish and international courts in the search for justice. They have written books, shot documentaries, mounted exhibits. They have organized protests and public events—all the while educating Spain and the rest of the world about the violations of human rights committed during and after the Spanish Civil War.

The recovery of historical memory as defined by Emilio Silva and his Association is about truth, and it is about justice. But not just in relation to the past. It's a struggle for truth and justice in the present and the future.

The principles that drive the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory are remarkably similar to ALBA's. We, too, engage with history not just for its own sake, but to intervene in the present. Using our unique archives as primary source material, we bring the past into classrooms around the country to encourage young people to address moral questions in their own lives today. We believe that issues like intervention in foreign wars, civilian casualties, or treatment of refugees and veterans should be at the forefront of public debate. Not just in Spain or the United States but around the world.

This belief distinguishes all our Human Rights Activist award winners over the past five years. It informs everything that ALBA does. And we have found that teachers and students take inspiration from our classroom materials, which allow them to grapple with essential questions in a tangible and meaningful way. We are proud of our accomplishments in education and human rights—and delighted to receive the endorsement of New York's Chancellor of Education (see page 13).

But we know—and hope you do, too—that we can only do this good work with your help.

Thanks for your continued support.

Salud,



*Sebastiaan Faber*  
Chair Emeritus



*Marina Garde*  
Executive Director

## JUSTICE FOR FRANCO'S VICTIMS

# ALBA/Puffin Prize Supports Exhumations



Emilio Silva, founding president of Spain's Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory, was in New York to receive the fifth ALBA/Puffin Award for Human Rights Activism. Spain's transition to democracy, he said, failed to address the country's moral debt to the thousands of victims of violence during the Spanish Civil War and the Franco regime.

*"Since its founding in 2000, the ARMH has made an extraordinary effort toward the promotion and defense of human rights in the area of truth, justice and reparation for the victims of the Spanish Civil War and the Franco regime. Thanks to the work of the ARMH we have managed to knock down the wall of silence that shrouded the victims of that terrible period, who have yet to receive reparations or the restitution of their rights."*

—Judge Baltasar Garzón, first ALBA/Puffin Award recipient

"BY EXHUMING THE MASS GRAVES WE ARE NOT RIPPING OPEN OLD WOUNDS, AS SOME HAVE CLAIMED. RATHER, THE GRAVES ARE AN OPENED MOUTH, ALLOWING THE PAST TO SPEAK WITH US," Emilio Silva said during an animated, informative and at times emotional conversation with Emma Daly of Human Rights Watch, and CUNY's Stephanie Golob, at the annual ALBA reunion in New York City on May 9.

Silva is the founding president of Spain's Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory (La Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica, ARMH). He was in New York to receive the fifth ALBA/Puffin Award for Human Rights Activism. Since its founding in 2000, the ARMH has exhumed more than 150 mass graves, allowing victims of Francoist violence to rebury the remains of their loved ones. After government subsidies were cut off in 2012, the Association was almost forced to close shop. The \$100,000 award will allow the ARMH to continue its important work.

Silva was sharply critical of Spain's transition to democracy, which he said failed to address the country's moral debt to the thousands of victims of violence during the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) and the dictatorship of Francisco Franco (1939-1975). The Franco regime exhumed and honored those who died fighting the Spanish Republic, leaving those who defended it strewn across the country in thousands of unmarked mass graves.

Professor Golob outlined the legal intricacies facing those who have taken to the courts to seek redress. In 2008, judge Baltasar Garzón—the winner of the first ALBA/Puffin Award—undertook an attempt to investigate the thousands of Spanish disappeared. After Garzón's disbarment, the Argentine courts have taken on the case under the umbrella of universal jurisdiction. "It is true that Spain declared an amnesty in 1977," Golob said. "But the Argentine judge argues that the acts of violence that occurred

during the Civil War and the dictatorship constitute crimes against humanity, which cannot be amnestied—according to international law that Spain has ratified. Moreover, a forced disappearance is a crime that is ongoing until the body is found."

At the award ceremony, Alyce Barr, founding principal of the Brooklyn School for Collaborative Studies and the daughter of Lincoln Brigade veteran Reuben Barr, read a letter from the New York City Chancellor of Education, Carmen Fariña. The Chancellor congratulated the award winners and gave a ringing endorsement of ALBA's work. "My parents were refugees of the Spanish Civil War," she said, "and sought to keep alive the memory of the fight for a democratic Spain. As a first generation American, I grew up listening to my father's stories about his life in Spain and the politics and history of his home country. He believed, as I do, that remembering the past is critical to paving a brighter and more just future for all of us." (See pages 12-13 for the complete letter.) Other speakers included ALBA's executive director, Marina Garde, and outgoing chair, Sebastiaan Faber.

As always, there was music. The young Spanish folk artist Pedro Pastor sang two songs, and the event—held this year at the Japan Society—closed with an energetic performance of Spanish Civil War songs by Brooklyn-based Barbez (Dan Kaufman, Peter Lettre, Danny Tunick, John Bollinger, and Peter Hess) and featured the San Francisco vocalist Velina Brown. Pastor and Faber joined as well.

Designed to sustain the legacy of the experiences, aspirations and idealism of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, the ALBA/Puffin Award for Human Rights Activism supports current international activists and human rights causes. The Award was created by philanthropist and visionary Perry Rosenstein, President of the Puffin Foundation, which in 2010 established an endowed fund for the ALBA/Puffin Award for Human Rights Activism. ▲

*"Congratulations on this well-deserved award and the incomparable work on behalf of Historical Memory in Spain. Thanks also to ALBA for keeping alive the legacy of the International Brigades."*

—Pedro Almodóvar, Spanish filmmaker



# New York Celebration Photo Album

Photos by Tony Graves, Nancy Saleme and Len Tsou

The Internationale



Dan Kaufman with Barbez and Velina Brown



Alyce Barr, volunteer, and Velina Brown



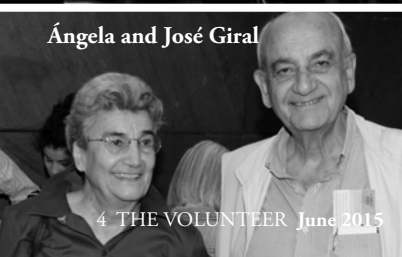
Diane Drentlaw



Marina Garde and Pedro Pastor Guerra



Ángela and José Giral



Bookstore with volunteer Patricia Cazorla

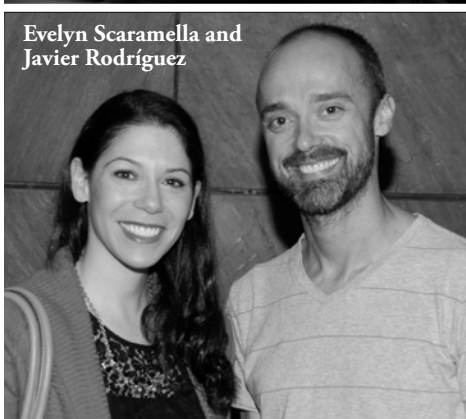


Emma Daly, Emilio Silva, Stephanie Golob, and Marina Garde

Sebastian Faber



Evelyn Scaramella and Javier Rodríguez



Velina Brown and Pedro Pastor Guerra



Neal, Gladys and Perry Rosenstein with Emilio Silva and Marina Garde



# AN UNDERGROUND LANDSCAPE OF TERROR

Anthropologist  
Francisco Ferrándiz  
on Spain's Civil War  
exhumations



By Sebastiaan Faber

Cultural anthropologist Francisco Ferrándiz has spent the last 13 years of his life studying the impact of Civil War exhumations in Spain, working in close collaboration with groups like the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory. Thanks to their efforts, Spanish citizens have exhumed more than 6,000 bodies since 2000—most of them civilian victims shot by Francoist troops.

**"I'M EXHAUSTED.** The work has been fascinating, but let me tell you: thinking about death all the time, day in day out—that's tough." I speak with Ferrándiz on a wintry Sunday afternoon in *Círculo de Bellas Artes*, one of Madrid's iconic cafés. As the country's political landscape is shifting under our feet, Ferrándiz looks back on the road traveled so far.

"Over the years we've had to manage very difficult situations. An exhumation of a mass grave generates a lot of problems and family tensions. While a death in any family causes suffering, people generally have resources and rituals—even if they are not religious—to process a death by accident or illness. But the appearance of

a dead body from 70 years ago, bullet-ridden, finished off with a shot in the head, with all the added political pressure—that's not something many families are prepared for. We have helped to establish protocols that have eased some of that tension. Still, there have been plenty of complications: marriages between descendants of victims and victimizers, right-wing relatives who refuse to acknowledge that grandpa was an anarchist, and so on.

"We are part of a team of experts that includes forensics and archeologists. But while our partners work in the grave itself, as anthropologists we move around, talking to the people. We deal with very complicated circumstances, trying to put

things in perspective. I think our academic analyses have helped everyone involved with the exhumations to gain a richer understanding of the process. Conversely, we have also learned a lot from the victims, our team partners, like the great forensic scientist Francisco Etxebarria, and from people like Emilio Silva. Back in 2002, when we were just starting out, we honestly had very little idea of what all this was about. Nor could we have imagined the scale it would take."

*Hasn't attention for the historical memory of the Civil War waned since the economic crisis of 2008?*

FF: It's true that there is less media attention for exhumations than there was.

But that's normal. Memory is cyclical. And truth be told, in Spain we've had something of an overexposure. Images of bodies and bones were all over the newspapers, television, and social media, to the point of saturation. Still, the fact that the mass graves were so prominently present in the media for a decade is extraordinary. The image of the Civil War grave has established itself firmly in Spain's optical unconscious. By now anyone can conjure up a picture of an exhumation.

The recent drop in media attention is actually not a bad thing. Anyone who has studied trauma can tell you that you can't be permanently agonizing over the same thing. It's not healthy. And as a result, the ongoing exhumations take place in an environment that's much more tranquil. These things are tense enough without the presence of five television cameras and 18 journalists. For the people involved, being out of the spotlight is probably much better.

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During a brief six-year period, between 2006 and 2012, the Spanish government subsidized some of the exhumation efforts. When Spain's conservative Partido Popular returned to power in 2012, it refused to honor the Law of Historical Memory passed five years earlier. Since

then, government funding has been zero. But exhumations have been continuing on a shoestring, with volunteer labor and private donations. "Thanks to the ALBA-Puffin Award, the Association's technical team can work for another two years," Ferrándiz says. "They are highly experienced, and there is a waitlist of people who have requested their assistance to find loved ones. We have continued our research as well. One of our people, for example, is now looking at the long-term effects of exhumations on small-town communities, 10 years later."

*Some writers have argued recently that the focus on historical memory is a distraction: that while Spain was obsessed with excavators digging up bones, the country failed to notice the political corruption that inflated the real estate bubble which burst in 2008. The novelist Javier Cercas claimed that historical memory became an industry of its own.*

FF: Cercas is full of it. Is there a memory industry in Spain? Sure. And is there one in Argentina? Also. And the same is true everywhere else in the world. That's simply the way capitalism works. Ironically, Cercas himself has sold millions of books about the Civil War, in dozens of languages. No, the real scandal is not the memory industry. It's the way the Span-

ish state chose to handle the financing of exhumations starting in 2006. Not only did the government outsource work that it should have taken responsibility for, but its allocation of subsidies was irresponsible and opaque. They never consulted with us or with other experts. Nor was there proper oversight of the projects that were financed. It was a disaster.

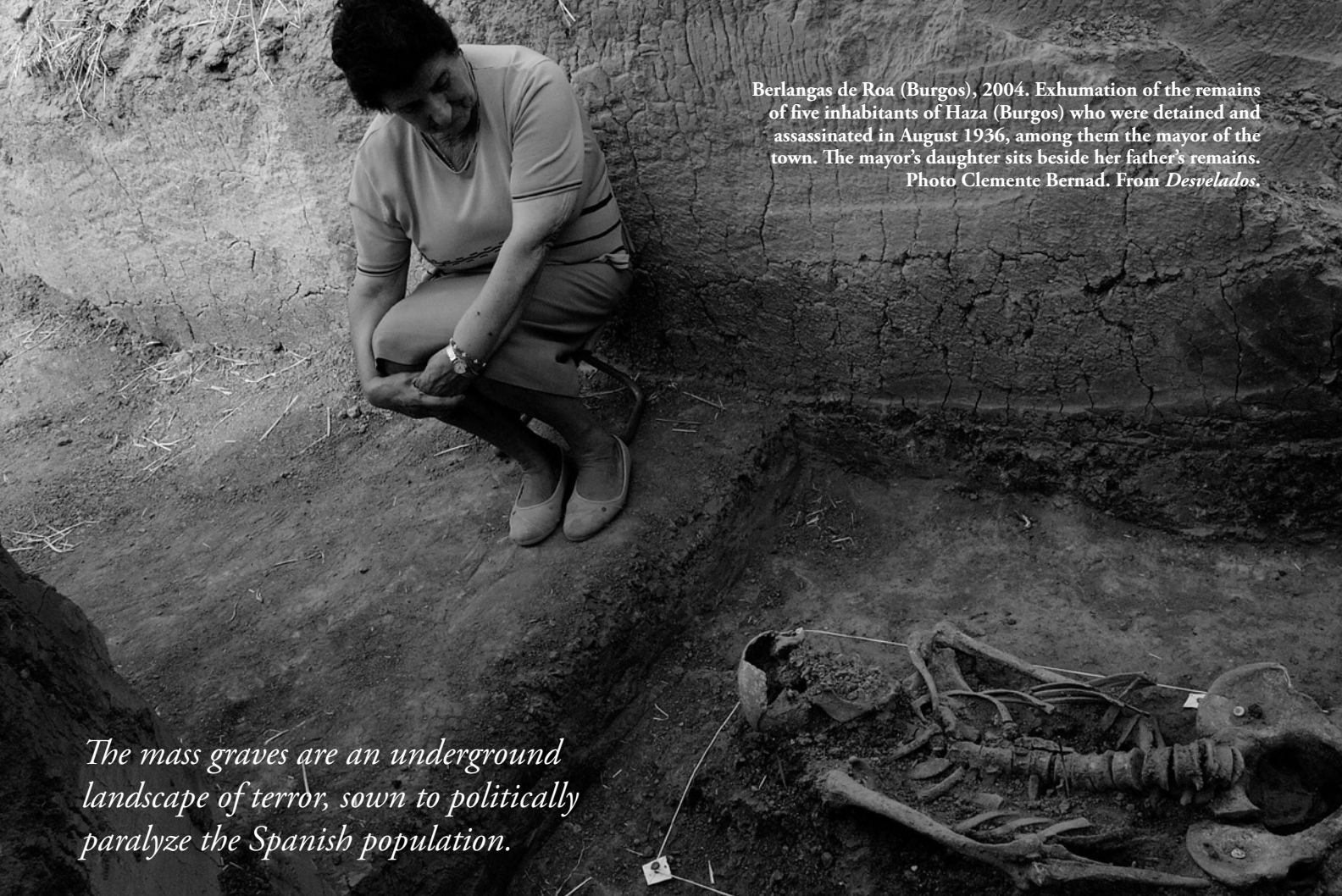
*You work in an interdisciplinary team. What specifically can cultural anthropology contribute to our understanding of the ways a country like Spain comes to terms with its past?*

FF: One of our most important contributions to the public debate, I think, has been to historicize the graves. The graves we are exhuming now are the left-overs: these are the bodies of civilian victims on the Republican side, largely murdered in the rearguard. There were plenty of exhumations right after the war, when the Franco regime took care of its own. Tons of bodies were moved in those years. In the early 1960s, another 30,000 bodies were transferred to the Valley of the Fallen from all over the country. It was a chaotic operation. There's a lot we don't know yet about those episodes. But we suspect that more than a few bodies have no relation to the Civil War at all, and that some of them are executed Republicans who

FRANCISCO FERRÁNDIZ is one of the world's leading experts in the anthropology of exhumations. Since 2007 he has worked at the national research council in Madrid (CSIC), where he leads an interdisciplinary team of 16 scholars. After earning his Ph.D from UC Berkeley, he worked in the Netherlands, Mexico, and the Basque Country. Last year he published *The Buried Past* (*El pasado bajo tierra*), an extensive reflection of his work in Spain, along with a widely-read English-language essay on the topic in *American Ethnologist*. He is now branching out into comparative work. With Tony Robben he has co-edited *Necropolitics: Mass Graves and Exhumation in the Age of Human Rights*, which has just been published by the University of Pennsylvania, and which gathers a series of case studies from around the world. "It's the first book to appear in the United States that deals with the anthropology of exhumations," he says. "It will open up a whole new field of study."







Berlangas de Roa (Burgos), 2004. Exhumation of the remains of five inhabitants of Haza (Burgos) who were detained and assassinated in August 1936, among them the mayor of the town. The mayor's daughter sits beside her father's remains. Photo Clemente Bernad. From *Desvelados*.

*The mass graves are an underground landscape of terror, sown to politically paralyze the Spanish population.*

ended in the Valley without their family's knowledge.

Your work seems to confirm two points: that the process of exhumations is absolutely necessary for a country like Spain to be able to move forward, and that we can only really understand this process in a global context. You wrote recently: "the Spanish case shows that societies eventually need to confront head-on the most disquieting elements of the past", and you add that "sweeping such history under the rug" has long-term negative effects on societies.

FF: Yes. The mass graves are an underground landscape of terror, sown to politically paralyze the Spanish population. To dismantle that landscape is an absolute necessity. We cannot allow "progress"—the construction of business parks or airports, for example—to just bulldoze the graves.

Yet some established historians in Spain reject the legitimacy of the historical memory movement and the notion that the Spanish situation can be understood through

other countries, like Chile and Argentina. Why is that?

FF: Honestly, I don't get the historians who hold these views. As an anthropologist, I tell them: my work begins where yours stops. You believe that the significant pieces are the facts you describe in your books. That's fair enough. Yet for me, the most interesting part is the next phase: the ways societies process those facts.

Still, I can think of two explanations for these historians' reactions. One is professional: they are simply incapable of understanding the depth of the phenomenon of the exhumations. To them, the whole thing seems gratuitous, a necrophilic whim. "I already talked about those victims in my book," some of them say; "we have already published those lists of victims." What they don't realize is that they have obviously not been able to transfer that knowledge to the rest of society in a significant manner.

The second explanation is biographical. If you are someone who's had a hand in the design of the transition to democra-

cy, who's believed in it, supported it, seen its benefits; if you are a full professor, and suddenly these nobodies appear out of nowhere, people who don't even hold an academic post, and they tell you that it's all been useless—well, then you are forced to rethink your own biography. And that meets with resistance. Which is why they clamp up and say: "You're all just obsessed with those bodies and bones."

And how about the international context? Some have argued that reading Spain through the lens of, say, Chile or Argentina, is a big mistake, that to speak of the Spanish victims as "disappeared" creates a false analogy.

FF: It's complicated, and took me a while to figure things out. But I've concluded that it does make sense to think of the Spanish victims as disappeared, although they are a different kind of disappeared than those of Chile and Argentina.

When Judge Baltasar Garzón issued his famous writ in October 2008, in which he spoke of 114,266 Spanish disappeared, I thought he was insane. For one, where the

*"You can open up doors toward the future but you cannot sweep the past under the rug."*

hell did he get that number? It's based on lists drawn up by local and national associations, but there's lots of confusion there, no unified protocol and no double-checking. There was no agreed pattern as to who "counted" as executed, for example. Others were not counted at all.

Still, I believe the term "disappeared" is the correct one, despite what critics like Javier Pradera have said. The term doesn't just turn up in the Spanish context through a simple act of copying. Its route is more complicated. It starts in Chile and Argentina, yes. But then the term is taken up by the Inter-American Court, which establishes a Convention in 1994 that labels forced disappearance as a crime against humanity. Later, the UN's General Assembly approved the International Convention for the Protection of All People from Forced Disappearances in New York in 2006. That Convention has been ratified by a large number of countries. From that point on, any country in the world can anchor its historical experience in that universal concept.

In Spain, the change was huge. Think about it: when we laid eyes on the first mass graves, what we saw were victims of executions. When we look at a grave now, we see victims of forced disappearance. In legal anthropology we talk about the "social lives" of rights: the ways a right enters the public's imagination, or social space, independent of its judicial routes. In that sense, in Spain the notion of forced disappearance has really struck a chord. It's a crime against humanity that has no statute of limitations and that continues to be committed every day until the disappeared person is found.

Now, are the Spanish victims really *desaparecidos* in this sense? At first I wasn't so sure. For a while I spoke of *quasi-disappeared*. But I've changed my mind. The truth is that many Spanish families don't know, or only vaguely know, what happened to their loved ones, and where they might be buried. We don't know the identity of many of the exhumed corpses. Isn't that a pattern of forced disappearance, too? Of course it is, without a doubt.

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*You talk about an underground landscape of terror. But there are also plenty of structures above ground. I'm thinking about the massively monumental Valley of the Fallen, the mausoleum for Spanish Civil War victims constructed over 20 years' time by political prisoners, where almost nothing has changed since Franco inaugurated it in 1959, except for the fact that Franco himself was buried there. In 2011 you were a member of a specially appointed commission charged with rethinking the Valley.*

FF: Yes, the *Valle de los Caídos*. There are few places in the world that amass such an amount of sheer terror and surrealism. In the commission we came up with very interesting ideas, including a non-religious memorial with an educational component. When the Partido Popular came to power the report was tossed into a drawer. But my research team has also made it available online.



We thought it was essential to dismantle the monument's funeral hierarchy, which is still profoundly Francoist. What do you see in the middle of the main nave? The tombs of Franco and José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the founder of Spanish fascism who was executed in jail in 1936. Well, you can't democratize the monument while respecting that hierarchy. So we figured we'd start with a red line in the sand, separating those who died in the war from those who did not. Did Franco die in the war? No. So, out with him! Just like that, you break the Franco-José Antonio tandem. Next, you can't have José Antonio, the martyr of Francoist martyrs, right there in the middle. So we proposed moving his body to the lateral crypts, behind the walls with the 30,000 others. We presumed, of course, that his family would never ac-

cept that, and rather remove him from the Valley altogether. All the better, good riddance.

Without Franco and José Antonio there, the central nave would have totally changed. But then we came up with a third ploy. The Valley is now marked as a religious cemetery, consecrated by the Benedictine Monks who occupy the monastery there, and who bless it in their daily mass. Now what would happen if you turned it into a secular cemetery? Then it would pass from the Church's care into that of the state. But in that case, the Benedictines' blessings would simply bounce off the walls. Instead of saying mass over 33,841 bodies, they'd say mass over exactly zero bodies!

*Working through the Civil War and Francoism, it seems, is not a process that is going to end any time soon—if it can ever truly end.*

FF: No, it doesn't end. But there are milestones. If we manage to drastically rethink the Valley of the Fallen, for example, we would have crossed a new frontier. Still, even that has to be a democratic process. You can't have some guy come in and impose a monument. The only way to build consensus is through Parliament and public debate, in which different voices have to be heard and balanced. And from an anthropological point of view, the process does not stop once the monument is there. It always continues.

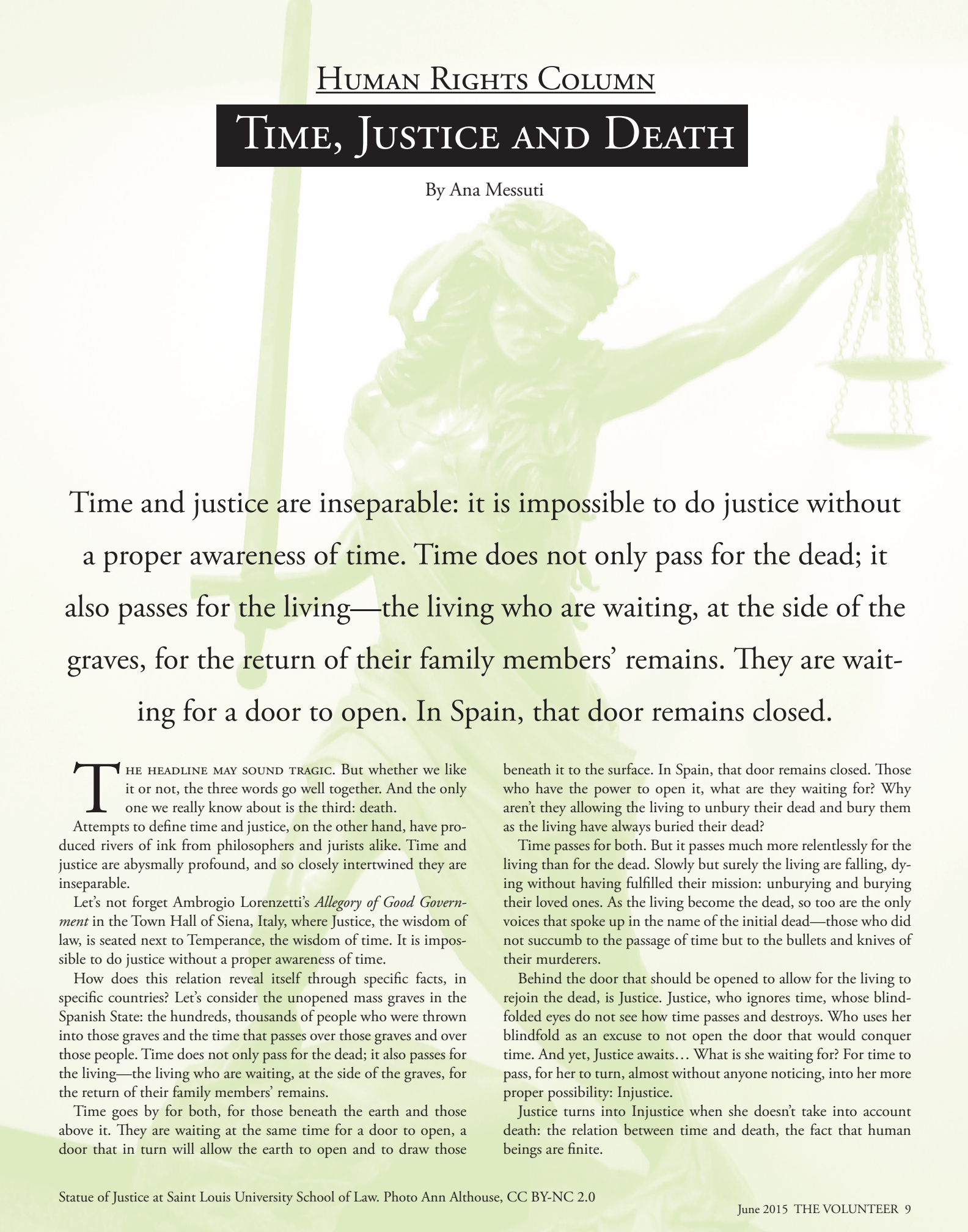
What you cannot have, however, is false closure. You can open up doors toward the future but you cannot sweep the past under the rug, as happened for so long with the mass graves. This is why I have my doubts about transitional justice. Truth commissions can work, but they can also impose a false sense of closure. It all depends. You can't predict their symbolic effect. A huge truth commission might have a minimal impact on society, while a small gesture can be enormously efficient. That's something not even the experts can predict. ▲

*Sebastiaan Faber chaired ALBA's Board of Governors from 2010 to 2015. He teaches at Oberlin College.*



# TIME, JUSTICE AND DEATH

By Ana Messuti



Time and justice are inseparable: it is impossible to do justice without a proper awareness of time. Time does not only pass for the dead; it also passes for the living—the living who are waiting, at the side of the graves, for the return of their family members' remains. They are waiting for a door to open. In Spain, that door remains closed.

**T**HE HEADLINE MAY SOUND TRAGIC. But whether we like it or not, the three words go well together. And the only one we really know about is the third: death.

Attempts to define time and justice, on the other hand, have produced rivers of ink from philosophers and jurists alike. Time and justice are abysmally profound, and so closely intertwined they are inseparable.

Let's not forget Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Allegory of Good Government* in the Town Hall of Siena, Italy, where Justice, the wisdom of law, is seated next to Temperance, the wisdom of time. It is impossible to do justice without a proper awareness of time.

How does this relation reveal itself through specific facts, in specific countries? Let's consider the unopened mass graves in the Spanish State: the hundreds, thousands of people who were thrown into those graves and the time that passes over those graves and over those people. Time does not only pass for the dead; it also passes for the living—the living who are waiting, at the side of the graves, for the return of their family members' remains.

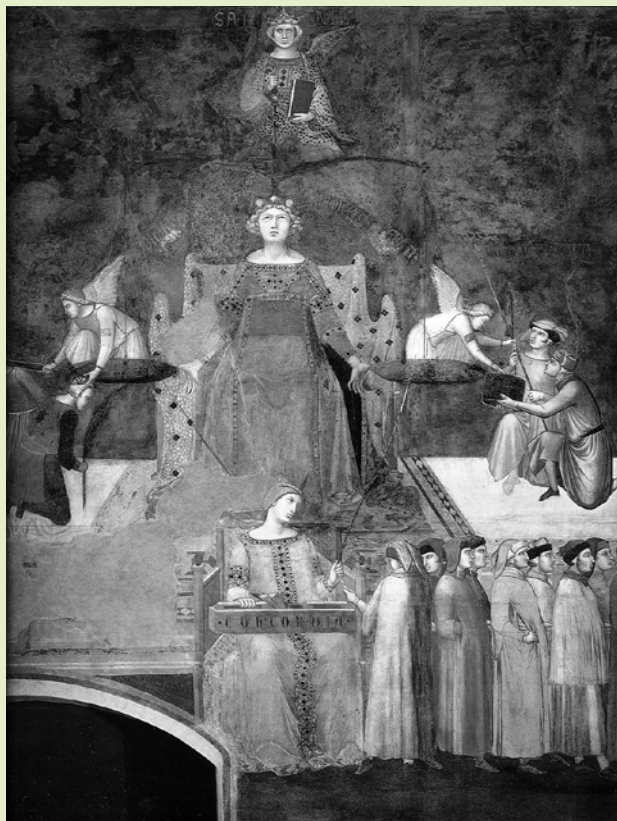
Time goes by for both, for those beneath the earth and those above it. They are waiting at the same time for a door to open, a door that in turn will allow the earth to open and to draw those

beneath it to the surface. In Spain, that door remains closed. Those who have the power to open it, what are they waiting for? Why aren't they allowing the living to unbury their dead and bury them as the living have always buried their dead?

Time passes for both. But it passes much more relentlessly for the living than for the dead. Slowly but surely the living are falling, dying without having fulfilled their mission: unburying and burying their loved ones. As the living become the dead, so too are the only voices that spoke up in the name of the initial dead—those who did not succumb to the passage of time but to the bullets and knives of their murderers.

Behind the door that should be opened to allow for the living to rejoin the dead, is Justice. Justice, who ignores time, whose blindfolded eyes do not see how time passes and destroys. Who uses her blindfold as an excuse to not open the door that would conquer time. And yet, Justice awaits... What is she waiting for? For time to pass, for her to turn, almost without anyone noticing, into her more proper possibility: Injustice.

Justice turns into Injustice when she doesn't take into account death: the relation between time and death, the fact that human beings are finite.



It is not the dead who call for justice, but the living, who will also soon be dead. On the one hand, Justice seems to transcend death, as if it thought human beings were eternal, and that we can wait indefinitely. On the other hand, she seems to speculate on death: "one day they'll die and stop calling for me."

When this occurs, we have a system of law that, instead of administering justice, administers injustice. A system of law that decides when it is too late, that denies access to justice when there is barely any time left to demand that access. A system of law that knows more about keeping doors shut than about opening them, more about half-opened mass graves than about proper burials. A system of law that, instead of conquering time, patiently waits for it to pass until death catches up with the living, so that they will never be able to reunite with their dead. Not even in death.

It's a powerful Law, this one which goes beyond life so that everything may be death. It's a weak Justice, this one which allows time to turn it into Injustice. It's a powerful Time, this one that conquers Justice and brings us Death.

This is a reflection on the horror that Spain is living today. A horror that doesn't stop, and gets worse as time passes. Thousands upon thousands upon thousands of people thrown or buried wherever, who are not returned to their families, not even when they're nothing but a handful of bones.

We don't know where our dead are.

They want us to continue walking, when we don't even know on whom it is that we are walking. ▲

*Ana Messuti holds a law degree from the University of Buenos Aires, earned her doctorate in Salamanca, Spain, and has worked for the United Nations. She is working on behalf of the victims of Francoism in the case before the Argentine courts. Among her books is Time as Punishment (2008).*



## ¡Sí se puede! Podemos Strikes Again

IN THE FIRST OF TWO MAJOR ELECTIONS THIS YEAR, Spanish voters went to the polls on May 24 to elect city and regional governments. The country gave a decisive pull to the left, ousting the conservative Partido Popular (PP) from almost all its major power bases—including the cities of Madrid and Valencia, where the PP had ruled for 24 years. The new progressive party Podemos, led by the young political scientist Pablo Iglesias (featured in our September issue), came in strong at the regional level, becoming the third largest party in almost all of Spain's autonomous communities—signaling an end to 30 years of two-party domination. At the city level, Podemos forged or joined broad left coalitions of "popular unity" whose programs, like that of Podemos, proposed zero tolerance for corruption, a stop to austerity and privatization of public services, and a general regeneration of democracy. In Barcelona, a coalition led by 41-year-old anti-eviction activist Ada Colau, "Barcelona en Comú," won the elections. In the capital a similar coalition, "Ahora Madrid," led by the retired judge and long-time activist Manuela Carmena (71), came in a close second. As this issue is going to press, everything indicates that Colau and Carmena will be the new mayors of Madrid and Barcelona. National elections will likely be held in November. ▲

Top: Colau in Barcelona, November 2013.  
Photo Fernanda LeMarie, CC BY-SA 2.0

Bottom: Carmena in Madrid, May 2015.  
Photo Félix Moreno, CC BY-SA 2.0



# New Photos of the Chapaiev Battalion

By Benedikt Behrens



Photo spread from Kantorowicz's 1939 book about the Chapaiev Battalion.



An image from the exhibit.  
Photo Benedikt Behrens.

*An exhibit in Hamburg displays images of the Chapaiev Battalion taken by soldiers and Gerda Taro, from the collection of Alfred Kantorowicz and the ICP.*

AN EXHIBITION OF PHOTOS OF THE CHAPAEV BATTALION, part of the XIII International Brigade, opened at the Instituto Cervantes in Hamburg, Germany last November. The show included some 50 photos from the estate of German writer and interbrigadista Alfred Kantorowicz taken by soldiers as well as by the young war photographer Gerda Taro, loaned from the International Center of Photography, New York. The Henri Cartier-Bresson silent documentary film *With the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in Spain* that contains sequences shot by Taro or Robert Capa on the Córdoba front, loaned from ALBA, was also on exhibit.

The images focused on the Chapaiev Battalion on the Córdoba front near the mining town of Peñaroya where it was engaged in battle from April-July 1937. Other pictures portray the battalion from its foundation in November 1936 to the Brunete offensive of July 1937. Alfred Kantorowicz, a German Jewish writer and member of the German communist Party, exiled in France since 1933, joined the battalion in 1937 assuming a position as information officer. After Brunete, he edited a book titled *Chapaiev* with narratives by his comrades-in-arms. This book contains photographs taken by the combatants that show their day-to-day life. Recently a large

number of additional pictures taken by *Chapaiev* combatants were discovered in the Kantorowicz estate in Hamburg shown now for the first time.

Gerda Taro, a young Jewish exile from Leipzig, Germany, who like Kantorowicz was exiled in Paris since 1933, arrived with her partner Robert Capa at the end of June 1937 to shoot fascinating photos that were published in the international press. Taro took dozens of photos showing the front life of the battalion. Taro's pictures also show the life of the civilian population near the front-line and the relation between them and the combatants, who helped the peasants harvesting wheat, one of her favorite subjects during the war. The negatives of this photos were discovered only recently in the

famous "Mexican Suitcase" that is now located at the International Center of Photography in New York. The exhibition also shows pictures by Taro at Brunete, which were her very last ones. She died tragically as a result of an accident during the retreat of the Republican troops in late July 1937. ▲

*Dr. Benedikt Behrens is a historian from Hamburg, Germany*

# ALBA Teacher Institute Travels to Massachusetts and Ohio

In March and April, ALBA's Peter N. Carroll and Sebastiaan Faber worked with more than two dozen high school teachers in Newton, Massachusetts, and Columbus, Ohio to develop human-rights lesson plans based on primary materials from the Spanish Civil War. The March workshop, hosted by Michael Kozuch at South Newton High School, was organized with Rich Cairn of the Northampton-based Collaborative for Educational Services, with Kelley Brown as master teacher. The April workshop was co-sponsored by Ohio Humanities (a division of the National Endowment for the Humanities), the Ohio Resource Center, the Ohio Council for the Social Studies, and Oberlin College, and hosted at the Goldberg Center (Ohio State University). Tracy Blake and Bobbi Mucha served as master teachers. For the summer and fall, the ALBA institute is planning sessions in Detroit, Michigan; Bergen County, New Jersey; New York City; Columbus, Ohio; and Boston, Massachusetts as well as other sites still to be determined.

Columbus Institute.  
Photo Janelle Henderson.



Newton Institute. Photos Rich Cairn



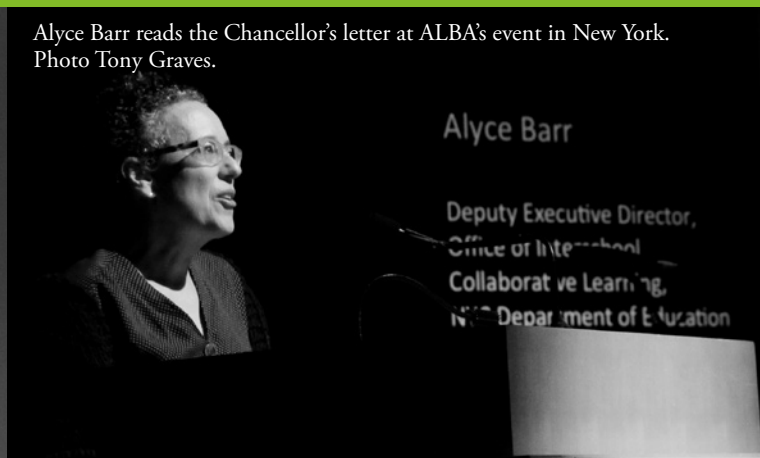
## A Letter from the NYC Chancellor

The letter printed to the right, from New York City Chancellor of Education Carmen Fariña, was read at the ALBA/Puffin Award ceremony on May 9 in New York. Presenting it was Alyce Barr, the daughter of Lincoln Brigade veteran Reuben Barr, who currently serves as deputy executive director in the Office of Interschool Collaborative Learning in the city's Department of Education. Chancellor Fariña (b. 1942) is the daughter of Spanish Republican exiles who fled their native Galicia after the Civil War. She grew up in Brooklyn and was the first in her family to go to college.

Carmen Fariña



Alyce Barr reads the Chancellor's letter at ALBA's event in New York.  
Photo Tony Graves.







May 9, 2015

Dear Friends,

On behalf of the New York City Department of Education, it is my pleasure to welcome you to the 79<sup>th</sup> Annual Celebration of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives (ALBA) and to congratulate this year's recipient of the ALBA/Puffin Award for Human Rights Activism, the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory (ARMH) in Spain.

Since its establishment in 1978, ALBA has done exemplary work educating young people about the value of social activism and the importance of defending human rights. Its mission to raise awareness of the fight against fascism during the Spanish Civil War is dear to my heart. My parents were refugees of the Spanish Civil War and sought to keep alive the memory of the fight for a democratic Spain. As a first generation American, I grew up listening to my father's stories about his life in Spain and the politics and history of his home country. He believed, as I do, that remembering the past is critical to paving a brighter and more just future for all of us.

I am especially moved by the human rights efforts of the ARMH and its founder, journalist Emilio Silva, who labored to exhume the remains of his grandfather after his execution in 1936. Since its establishment in 2000, ARMH has recovered the remains of more than 1,300 victims of the Franco regime. Their work is an affirmation of the importance of family to Spaniards, and a great kindness and service to the families victimized by Franco's brutality.

The history we share has informed my 50-year career in education. As a social studies teacher, I infused the story and lessons of the Spanish Civil War into my classes. As Chancellor of the largest school district in the nation, I am committed to teaching our 1.1 million New York City students the importance of history and social justice. I encourage families to use dinner time conversations to disseminate oral history, as my father did with me; we learn as much by tapping into our rich pasts as we do from text books. It is imperative that our students become educated global citizens.

I am thrilled to know that ALBA is helping hundreds of high school teachers around the country to incorporate the story of the Spanish Civil War and the Lincoln Brigade into their lessons, encouraging young people to think about the values they hold, and what it takes to stand up for what they believe in.

I regret that I could not attend today's celebration, and I thank Alyce Barr, the Deputy Executive Director of our Office of Interschool Collaborative Learning, for reading this letter on my behalf. I wish you well in your journey to keep our history alive and in the news.

Sincerely,

Carmen Fariña  
Chancellor

# Art vs. Tyranny

Pierre Daura, John Rossen, and Herman Bottcher—a Catalan painter, an American factory worker and a German carpenter—forged a close friendship in the trenches of Spain. A Japanese mortar round, a poem, and a painting united their lives, leaving a lasting artistic legacy.

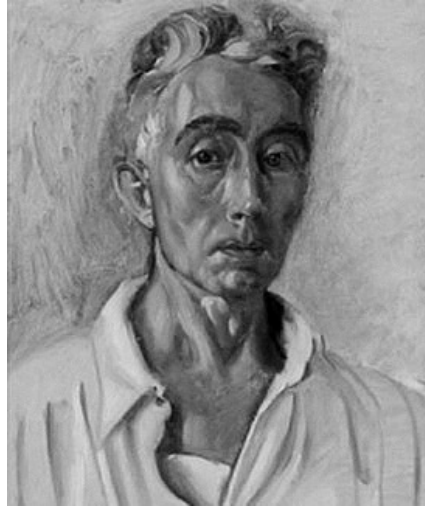
By B. Scott Crawford

**I**N 1937-1938 three men's lives intersected in war-torn Spain. The Spanish Civil War pitted Spaniard against Spaniard, and also brought together foreign volunteers. Within the International Brigades, three men—Pierre Daura, a Catalan, John Rossen, an American, and Herman Bottcher a German—apparently met, became friends, and influenced a remarkable work of art, prompted by their hatred of fascism.

Prior to the war, Pierre Daura was an artist living in France with his wife and daughter. When he went to Spain to fight Franco, he served as a forward observer for an artillery unit. Daura had a difficult time finding a unit to accept him. Due to an injury he sustained in the 1920s, the nerves to his left hand had been severed, leaving the hand permanently clenched. This disability resulted in his not being able to directly join the Republican forces. However, an officer in an anarchist unit fighting Franco met Daura in a café and indicated that the forward observer for his artillery had recently been killed. He was looking for a replacement. Daura mentioned he had served as an artilleryman prior to his disability. The officer immediately offered him the opportunity to join his unit. Two days later Daura was on his way to the front.

As for John Rossen and Herman Bottcher, both men had been living in the United States prior to the Spanish Civil War. Rossen was born in St. Louis, Missouri, while Bottcher was born in Landsberg, Germany and moved to the United States in 1931. Rossen worked in an automobile factory and Bottcher was a student and carpenter prior to volunteering with the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. Presumably, it was through their service in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade that they knew each other.

Pierre Daura, Self-Portrait in White.



It is not known how and when Pierre Daura met Rossen and Bottcher. What is known is that the three men became linked upon Bottcher's death during World War II and, going forward, Bottcher is remembered through Rossen's and Daura's intricate commemoration of him in poem and painting. In essence, a Japanese mortar round, a poem, and a painting united these men in a unique and quite fascinating manner.

Herman Bottcher lost his life on December 31, 1944, when a Japanese mortar round exploded on Leyte Isle in the Philippines. Bottcher had been operating with a

*A fellow soldier  
recounted that Bottcher  
cried out: "They blew my  
leg off!"*

group of American soldiers behind enemy lines, attacking Japanese supply depots and laying ambushes. They had been living

off the land, eating wild game, vegetables, and coconut milk provided by Filipino natives. On December 30, 1944, Bottcher had been ordered to return with his men to HQ. At 2:35 a.m., December 31, approximately 300 Japanese soldiers stumbled onto Bottcher and his men as they attempted to retreat to the coast so that they could evacuate the island. The ensuing combat resulted in the Japanese firing a mortar round that exploded near Bottcher. It did not take his life immediately. Fellow soldier, Edwin Essman, recounted that Bottcher cried out: "They blew my leg off!" Bottcher told his men to retreat and leave him, but they refused and were able to extract him from the area. Ultimately, the medics were not able to save him, and around 6:00 a.m., December 31, 1944, reported "no sign of life could be detected."

In September 1945 John Rossen composed a poem to honor Bottcher and his struggle against fascism and tyranny during the Spanish Civil War and World War II. This poem reached Pierre Daura, and sometime in late 1945 or early 1946 he painted *Pax Pacific*. According to Daura's daughter, Rossen's poem directly inspired Daura in his artistic effort.

In Rossen's poem, titled "Herman Bottcher, Summa Cum Laude," Rossen chronicles Bottcher's heroism and ultimate sacrifice (see <http://cenphilsoc.brinkster.net/paxpacificpoem.htm>). Using a formal education setting and the graduation ceremony as an extended metaphor, Rossen reveals how Bottcher serves as a model "for us the living" as he fought against fascism. Just as Bottcher "passed with flying colors" as his "Graduation exercise went off with a bang" (some gallows humor), we too are expected to graduate in a similar manner and die, if necessary, fighting fascism. As Rossen writes, referring to Bottcher:



## *Symbolic elements in Daura's painting reinforce an overall message of sacrifice: Bottcher sacrificed his life so others could live free from tyranny.*

*We heard you say once to a frightened  
Spanish youngster*

*'A real anti-Fascist must know how to die  
when necessary'*

*You were a real anti-Fascist, Butch*

*And you knew how to die when it became  
necessary.*

Rossen also notes that Bottcher "is an 'A' forever and ever in the subject of anti-Fascist Geometry." Bottcher received his "A" due to his heroic death and his consistent and dedicated struggle against fascism in two wars. The poem invites the reader to learn from Bottcher, who, in Rossen's words, was "a great teacher" of "anti-Fascist Geometry."

Knowing from Pierre Daura's daughter that Rossen's poem directly influenced her father when he created *Pax Pacific*, the painting takes on a deeper meaning. Knowing that the poem serves to commemorate Bottcher, we can comfortably surmise that the mourner in *Pax Pacific* is kneeling over Bottcher's grave. We know that the setting is Leyte Isle. However, possibly most noteworthy is that certain symbolic elements in Daura's painting may reinforce an overall message of sacrifice; that Bottcher sacrificed his life so others could live free from tyranny.

Several images included in the painting contain possible allusions to Christian iconography. The palm leaf stretched across the grave could be more than a simple reference to where Bottcher died, referring perhaps instead to Palm Sunday and Christ's entering Jerusalem before his crucifixion. The cross, in addition to its placement at a soldier's grave as a helmet rests on it, is a symbol for sacrifice and resurrection and a direct reference to Christ. The grey background may be a reference to Christ's tomb. Through this symbolism Daura may be suggesting that Bottcher is a Christ-like figure. Interestingly, and possibly yet another reference to Christ, the mourner's right hand is relaxed while his left is clenched.

Daura's work strongly resembles depictions of Christ in works of art related to the last judgment. In Renaissance and Baroque last judgment paintings Christ generally forgives and offers salvation with his right hand while condemning sinners with his



left. The mourner also looks to his right, upward, toward Heaven, possibly suggesting a favorable judgment upon Bottcher's soul. I had the pleasure of interviewing Daura's daughter, Martha, and she noted her father, being Spanish, had been raised as a Catholic and was intimately familiar



with Christian iconography, and quite often included such symbolism in his work. It is likely this is the case with this painting.

However, as for the hands of the mourner, Martha thought the reference to Christ was possible—but she noted something that I think is more plausible. She told me how her father had lost the use of his

left hand when a scaffold collapsed in the 1920s. When I told her how the mourner's left hand is clenched, she literally gasped and stated that she had not noticed that before and that the mourner could be in some way a self-portrait of her father. The mourner's left hand is clenched in the same manner as Daura's left hand had been clinched since his accident. Coincidentally, in a manner that breaks with many of Daura's paintings, where he signs his paintings in the bottom left or right corners, Daura signed *Pax Pacific* just to the right of the mourner's left hand. This possibly provides another element indicating that the mourner is Daura himself. So is *Pax Pacific* a heretofore-unidentified self-portrait?

When I first examined the painting seven or eight years ago, I never imagined how my thoughts related to it would grow and change. The label that once hung next to the painting suggested the work somehow simply reflects on the loss that war brings. An almost pacific interpretation playing off of the title's play on words, as both words relate to "peaceful" and "tranquil," dominated the museum's understanding of the work. Martha Daura's sharing of an unpublished and basically unknown poem composed by John Rossen changed that. With this one important piece of the puzzle, a whole new interpretation and path of discovery was opened, resulting in the possibility that the painting is an abstract self-portrait.

At some level *Pax Pacific* accomplishes something Daura may not have intended. *Pax Pacific* provides a vehicle to inspire questioning which in and of itself is a stand against fascism and tyranny. To question is to challenge. Tyranny cannot allow this. And either consciously or subconsciously, through *Pax Pacific*, Daura created something that begs viewers to stand up to tyranny. The painting begs us to question. ▲

*B. Scott Crawford is an adjunct history instructor with Virginia Western Community College in Roanoke, Virginia.*

# Faces of ALBA-VALB

Meet the members of the ALBA community | By Sebastiaan Faber

Kelley Brown,  
Social Studies Teacher

Kelley Brown at ALBA's  
Institute in Newton,  
Massachusetts, April 2015.  
Photo Rich Cairn



Master Teacher Kelley Brown speaks about her experience teaching with ALBA's materials in Massachusetts.

**F**EW PEOPLE IN WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS are busier than Kelley Brown. A full-time History and Social Studies teacher at Easthampton High, she also heads up her department and coordinates professional development activities at her school. On top of that, for the past nine years she has served as a master teacher in dozens of workshops on topics ranging from incarcerated youth in Massachusetts to Teaching American History. She has taught an ALBA institute twice.

***You've been in the classroom for 15 years. How has the field changed since you started?***

For the past 10 years, many of us have been pushing to move away from a model of history and social studies teaching that focuses on students learning information—which they memorize and quickly forget—to one that teaches students to *think like historians*: to ask the kinds of questions that historians ask, and to answer those



## *If we are not training young people to become good citizens, we can't have a participatory democracy.*

questions by analyzing and evaluating sources. This means we are focusing much more on skills than we used to. It also means we are trying to strengthen the connection with academic historians, for example by bringing them into the classroom.

### ***How have the different waves of state and federal standards helped or thwarted this change in focus?***

Recent shifts in standards have some positive aspects, but they also have some real negative effects on the way that we teach social studies. The Common Core State Standards that Massachusetts and many other states have adopted do incorporate reading and writing skills that align with some of the disciplinary skills we are working on. The problem is that the Common Core standards are based in English Language Arts and Math, while the skills for social studies and other subjects are relegated to an addendum. Being able to read and write is obviously very important in all those fields, but history and civics are pushed to the side. This is problematic. Social studies are a core discipline. If we are not training young people to become good citizens, and to at least know the structure of their own government, we can't have a participatory democracy. That is bad news for the United States and, given our country's global importance, it's bad news for the rest of the world.

This deeper trend in standards is disconcerting to me. If schools are only going to be held accountable for English and Math, that's where they will put their resources. Right now, if middle schools have to make cuts, they are cutting social studies teachers and distributing the subject among teachers in other departments. Why? Because social studies is not tested. In elementary schools, too, there is less and less time to spend on social studies and history.

The more you move decisions away from state and local communities, the more you sacrifice quality for uniformity. The people most directly affected—the teachers, the parents—lose their voice. They lose their ability to advocate for what they think is best for the students they are working with and the communities they are working in. Participation in government is important—and schools are the one place in which we all have experience. People *want* to be part of a decision process. But the trend in nationwide standards disempowers them. If people do not believe they can affect change, they disengage and that is bad for all of us.

### ***How do you see the ALBA workshops?***

The ALBA workshops provide exactly what busy teachers need. There are three things I like in particular. First, the ALBA approach allows teachers to learn in depth about an area they are unfamiliar with. There is a definite dearth of knowledge about the Spanish Civil War among social studies teachers. Second, ALBA has a wonderful set of resources that are accessible and interesting, and directly transferrable to the classroom. The set of letters,

for example, are incredibly useful because they are short, they are readable for any student, and they create a great hook. The same is true for the images, especially the posters. Third, ALBA has teachers who have actually used the resources, show how they have done that, and work with their colleagues to develop lesson plans that they can apply immediately.

Teachers are very excited about shifting from pure content coverage to more disciplinary work. But that doesn't mean they are necessarily good at it yet. The ALBA workshops help them see that they can in fact do it. Teachers' first reaction often is: I would like to do this, but I cannot fit anything else in. We tell them this is not about fitting yet another thing in, but about integrating skills into the learning of history. And to that the ALBA resources lend themselves very easily.

### ***Tell me about your own experience using the ALBA materials in the classroom.***

As a preparation to teach World War II, we spend some time looking at two of the ALBA letters, from Canute Frankson and Hyman Katz, and practice historical thinking skills. We start with a brainstorm around an historical question: Why are people willing to risk their lives to help other people, particularly in a situation that doesn't directly affect them? High school students like to think about ideas like this. The letters make that question come alive. They are very accessible and hook students into the lesson—but they also have good evidence to help students answer our question. From there, we move into skills: identifying and organizing evidence, and of course writing. ▲

*Sebastiaan Faber teaches at Oberlin College and helps coordinate ALBA's Teacher Institutes.*

Check out ALBA's  
Teacher Resource Site at

[resources.alba-valb.org](http://resources.alba-valb.org)

Lesson Plans · Letters · Posters  
· Videos · Photos · Slide Shows

# César Covo

## (1912-2015)

Photo Jorge Amat.



The last known International Brigade veteran in France, César Covo, died in March in Rennes, France, just a few weeks from his 103rd birthday. His death marks the silent turning of a historic page as he was most certainly the last surviving IB veteran of the battle of Madrid.

Born in Sofia, Bulgaria in 1912, his family immigrated to France in 1930. An active member of the French Communist party, he headed to Spain in October 1936 and joined the Balkan company of the Thaelmann battalion of the XII IB, participating in the defense of Madrid in November 1936, as well as other battles around the capital.

Of Sephardic origin, upon arriving in Spain he spoke Ladino, French, Bulgarian and a bit of Russian. Ladino is the language that many Sephardic Jewish families retained after their expulsion from Spain in 1492, in the same manner that Yiddish is the traditional household language

in many Jewish families of Central European origin. To the Madrileños of 1936 Ladino sounded archaic, but Covo immediately took to contemporary Spanish. In January 1937 while attending a training course for cadres, he was noticed for his linguistic abilities and military knowledge, having completed his service in France prior to departing to Spain. The Russian advisor who had led the training course transferred Covo with him to the 1st Mobile Brigade of the 46th Division, under the command of Valetín González, *El Campesino*. Seriously wounded during the battle of Guadalajara in March 1937, Covo spent the next year and a half in Spanish and IB hospitals including, the Hotel Palace in Madrid, Murcia and Mataró.

Repatriated in late 1938, a year later he was again called up for service in the French army despite his debilitating limp. An angry army officer countermanded the doctor's decision at the induction center stating: "If you could fight for Spain, you can fight for France." Managing to escape capture following the debacle of 1940, he later joined the FTP MOI (Franc Tireur Partisan Main d'Oeuvre Immigrée) branch of the French Underground where he turned to his printing trade and worked in the static yet fundamental role as a forger of official papers and documents. On the morning of August 25, 1944, having heard of the approach of the Allies, he found his way from the working class suburb of Saint Ouen, on the outskirts of Paris, to the rue de Rivoli in the center of Paris. There, he had the uncanny luck to once again hear Spanish. In an interview, he recalled witnessing the attack on the Hotel Meurice, headquarters of the German commandant of Greater Paris, General Von Choltitz, where from under the arcades he distinctly perceived the Spanish Republicans of the Leclerc Division calling to each other during the assault.

He published a memoir of his time in Spain, *La Guerre, camarade!* in 2005 (Biarritz: Atlantica). His experience was indeed extraordinary in several ways, and not only the fact that he participated in and survived one of the epic moments of the International Brigades in the early fight for Madrid. His text is a vivid and candid account of the day to day life of the early brigades, with all their enthusiasm, comradeship, victories large and small, as well as difficulties, sacrifices and dysfunctions. Remarkably, he was a witness to the death of Hans Beimler on the Madrid front. Covo was friends with another remarkable member of the early brigades, Theodule Rol, the courageous French medic who eventually rose to the rank of infantry captain in the XIV Brigade and was killed during the Ebro offensive of 1938. The XIV Brigade political commissar, Henri Tanguy would later adopt the nom de guerre, "colonel Rol" while commanding the French Underground of Paris in 1944 as a tribute to their fallen comrade.

American and British readers of Covo's memoir can appreciate his glowing description of Dr. Hart who took over the direction of the IB hospital in Murcia while Cesar was a patient. In Mataró in 1938 he came in contact with American medical staff for the first time. He depicts them as closely knit, devoted and very efficient. Accustomed to the no-nonsense treatment by Bulgarian and Yugoslav nurses, it seems that Covo and his comrades were disconcerted by the friendly and carefree attitude of the Americans. They were completely flabbergasted to see the same competent American nurses play extravagant roles with conviction and spontaneity in a show put on by a group of patients.

After World War II, Covo worked in the Bulgarian Embassy of Paris, before breaking with the party in 1952 and returning to his trade as a printer. He is survived by three daughters as well as several nieces and nephews. A second volume of his memoirs was published in 2010 : *Guerre à la guerre: Parcours engagé dans l'Europe du XXe siècle*. (Biarritz: Atlantica).

—Robert Coale



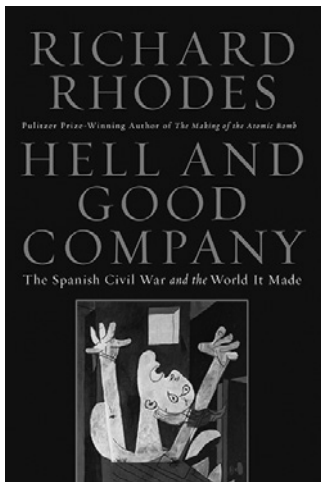


# Book reviews

## Politics As Sidelight

Richard Rhodes, *Hell and Good Company: The Spanish Civil War and the World it Made* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015).

Reviewed by Joshua Goode



IN THE 40 YEARS SINCE THE END OF THE FRANCO REGIME, scholarly work on the Spanish Civil War has plumbed its international significance as the first clash of the political ideologies of the twentieth century, as the first instance of targeting of civilians in aerial bombardment, or as the harbinger of new uses and abuses of propaganda. Writers have also examined a variety of local issues as well. What motivated the Spanish soldier

and civilian to fight, or not to fight? How did one side win the war; how did the other lose it? Was the nature of violence unique to Spain or the product of a more comparative understanding and treatment of “the enemy” in this moment in world history? And what role does the Spanish Civil War continue to play in setting contemporary politics in a national “coming to terms with the past” that has defined so many other postwar experiences?

According to Richard Rhodes in his new work, *Hell and Good Company*, such historical complexity has left behind key components of the war: the “human stories that [have] not yet been told or [have] been told only incompletely.” For Rhodes, historians apparently remain far too embedded in the politics of the era, asking only simplistic questions: “who was a communist, who was a fascist, who connived with whom in the Spanish labyrinth are questions for academics to mull.” Unfortunately, this is a false premise, a simplistic dismissal of historians who continue to “mull” the war.

Rhodes’ book, distilled almost entirely from English language sources, actually approaches the war in a quite traditional way. It is a cinematic portrait governed by the rules of a cinematic portrayal: a worldwide event understood entirely through a group of characters who move about the narrative, appearing, disappearing and then re-appearing for a final time

at the end of the book in a series of “what happened to them” vignettes.

What we are left with is a kind of anti-interpretive interpretation, replete with human drama but stripped of the very meaning of the war for the people who did fight in it, both international volunteer and Spaniard. Surely, the reasons that dragged international volunteers to the war were not to experience hell and good company alone, as if war were an inevitable endeavor people just find themselves in, both horrible and romantic at the same time. Certainly, some of the reasons people fought, like party affiliation and ideological affinity, were what contributed to and actually produced the hell and the good company in first place. To treat their politics as a sidelight in the midst of a very ideological war is to tell a portion of the story, and a portion that purposefully eliminates human complexity.

To be sure, Rhodes provides a good and well-told story for an audience that wants to be inside Picasso’s studio as he paints his antiwar masterpiece, *Guernica*, or that enjoys peering into the closet in Hemingway’s Madrid hotel room to see the stores of ham, cigars, soap and alcohol that bolstered the writer’s fame for wartime ingenuity and moxie. And in the most interesting parts of the book he gathers some less famous characters into the portrait. Rhodes includes nurses and doctors, Spanish and international alike, who perfected blood transfusion for wartime medicine. Rhodes is drawn to the dedication of medical professionals and their resourcefulness, all of which assuredly kept this war from being worse. Rhodes’s stories are often successful in this character-driven work. One cannot quickly shake off the *New York Times* correspondent, Herbert Matthews, confessing to eating cats “for want of any other meat” during the first months of the war, or a touching scene during the retreat from Teruel in 1938 of exhausted soldiers facing one more impassable obstacle, a herd of sheep blocking the entire convoy. The American surgeon Edward Barsky, one of the heroic recurrent characters of Rhodes’ story, must choose between plowing through the sheep or prolonging the suffering of the living and dying soldiers while they wait for the animals to trudge along their way. Barsky cannot bring himself to drive through the flock and instead shepherds them into houses that line the road, deploying one soldier in each house to mind the sheep while people and ambulances pass. Rhodes portrays these moments with a writer’s expert hand.

But amid the enjoyment with which one consumes these chapters, the reader does not lose the feeling that using these details to paint a broader portrait of the war as mere human drama between fighters, writers, soldiers, lovers, and comrades, offers a numbing political statement about the war and its significance. There is a danger in burying the meaning of past events by dismissing dense but real ideological contests and political fights that sparked them. As a result, Rhodes’ book in its desire to uncover some aspects of the past tends to bury others that are equally, if not more important. Losing the ideological forest for the romantic trees leaves us with an all too neutral account. ▲

*Book Review editor Joshua Goode teaches history and cultural studies at the Claremont Graduate University.*

## Puerto Rico's Volunteers in Spain

José Alejandro Ortiz Carrión with Teresita Torres Rivera, *Voluntarios de la Libertad. Puertorriqueños en defensa de la República Española 1936-1939* [Freedom Volunteers: Puerto Ricans in defense of the Spanish Republic 1936-1939] (San Juan: Ediciones Callejón, 2015).

Reviewed by Christopher Brooks



IN 1999, JOSÉ ALEJANDRO ORTIZ CARRIÓN contacted ALBA requesting information on Puerto Rican volunteers in the Spanish Civil War. His letter and the response, which included a list of the known Puerto Rican volunteers from the ALBA database, were published in the Spring 2000 edition of *The Volunteer*. In the ensuing years, Ortiz Carrión continued his research, broadening his definition of volunteer which

resulted in the identification of numerous additional Puerto Ricans involved in the Spanish Civil War. In his most recent work *Voluntarios de la Libertad, Puertorriqueños en defensa de la República Española 1936-1939* Ortiz Carrión identifies 73 Puerto Ricans participants in the Spanish Civil War.

Ortiz Carrión defines Puerto Rican participants primarily as individuals who were born in Puerto Rico; born in New York of Puerto Rican descent; and select individuals who had lived in Puerto Rico at some point prior to going to Spain. Most participants served in a military capacity in the militia, the Republican Army, the International Brigades or medical services. Others served as civilian volunteers, government employees or civilian exiles.

*Voluntarios de la Libertad* is divided into five parts, or themes, including the reaction to the war in Puerto Rico and New York; early volunteers on the Madrid Front; Puerto Rican volunteers from New York in the International Brigades; POWs and other prisoners; and Puerto Rican participants in postwar concentration camps and exiles. Within these subgroups each participant's biographical information is presented along with supporting documentation. Numerous photographs of volunteers and primary source documents reproduced within the text. An extensive notes section ends each part, providing additional supporting information.

Back matter includes a chronological table comparing events within the Second Spanish Republic with parallel events worldwide. An appendix lists the 73 Puerto Rican volunteers and presents key information including date and

*Most of the 73 Puerto Ricans served in the militia, the Republican Army, the International Brigades, or the medical services.*

place of birth, education, battalion, repatriation and times and places of death, and a comments field.

Although *Voluntarios de la Libertad* is written in Spanish, much of the primary source material is in English. ALBA will update its biographical database to include additions and corrections presented in the book. ▲

Christopher Brooks is director of ALBA's biographical research project and database, which can be consulted online at [www.alba-valb.org/volunteers](http://www.alba-valb.org/volunteers).



### ALBA Elects New Officers

Fraser Ottanelli, *Chair*  
James D. Fernandez, *Vice-Chair*  
Gina Herrmann, *Vice-Chair*  
Ellyn Polshek, *Vice-Chair*  
Joan Levenson Cohen, *Treasurer*  
Aaron Retish, *Secretary*  
Peter N. Carroll, *Chair Emeritus*  
Sebastiaan Faber, *Chair Emeritus*

### Meet ALBA's New Chair



My formative experiences took place in Italy within a political culture deeply shaped by the values of international solidarity, social justice, and antifascism

that motivated the women and men of the International Brigades. One of my first "political" memories is marching with my parents to protest the execution of the Spanish Communist leader Julián Grimau in Madrid in 1963. Thirteen years later in Florence, on the occasion of the commemoration of 40th anniversary of the onset of the Spanish Civil War, I met and served as an unofficial guide for my first Lincoln vets: Steve Nelson, Hy Wallach, John Rossen, and Julius Deutsch. The stories of the women and men of the International Brigades in Spain have inspired me both as an activist and academic. I am currently a professor of US history at the University of South Florida where I teach and publish on topics related to radicalism, migration, and ethnicity along with human rights. I have been a member of the ALBA board since the mid-1990s.

--Fraser Ottanelli





## Lessons of History

I wasn't even born,  
never saw a soldier point a rifle  
into the face of a woman, her hair  
beginning to gray, run red.

I witness from a distance  
the dark-eyed girl in Capa's photo  
snuggled on a rice sack  
in a train station.

Her pose wistful: to where railroad  
tracks began and will end,  
longing for her parents  
who for no personal fault  
but only the hazards of a war  
misplaced their daughter.

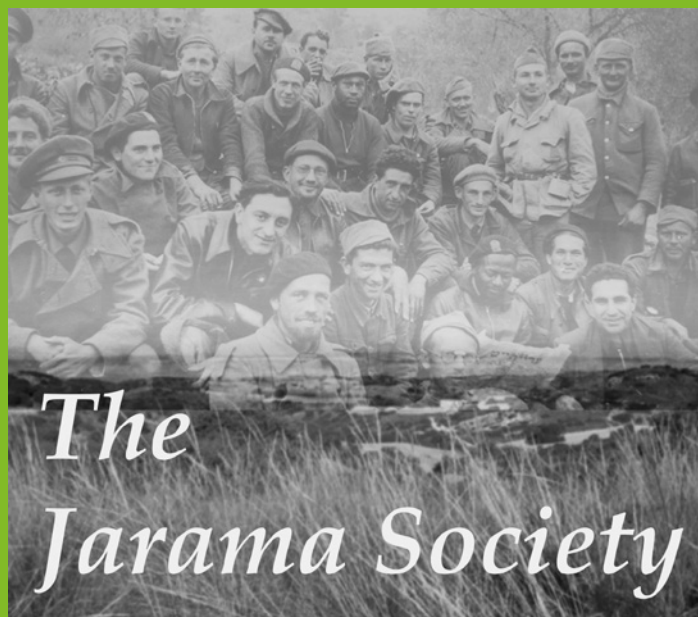
Her eyes alive  
as a child dreams alive.  
it's unlikely  
so many years later  
she's alive anywhere else.

Behind me, quick footsteps,  
children coming close, asking  
children's questions.

Who is she? Where did she go?  
What will we do next time?

--Peter Neil Carroll

Reprinted from *The Mas Tequila Review*, #10 (Winter 2015).



## MONTHLY PLEDGE PROGRAM A SIMPLE WAY TO MAKE A HUGE IMPACT...

☒ Yes, I want to join the Monthly Pledge Program and help support ALBA's continuing educational work and programs.

To donate, please call 212 674 5398  
or mail the enclosed envelope checking the  
recurring donation box.

## NEWS AND EVENTS

### 79th Annual Celebration Honoring the Abraham Lincoln Brigade – Bay Area

**Saturday, October 17, 2015 (TBC)**

1:00pm – 3:00pm

Freight & Salvage Coffeehouse

2020 Addison Street

Berkeley, California

For tickets and information: [www.thefreight.org](http://www.thefreight.org)

### Essay Competition Opens: 2015 George Watt Prize

Graduate and undergraduate students world-wide are invited to submit an essay or thesis chapter about any aspect of the Spanish Civil War. Two prizes of \$250 each will be awarded. Submission deadline is August 1, 2015.

For guidelines and information:

[www.alba-valb.org/participate/essay-contest](http://www.alba-valb.org/participate/essay-contest)

### Call for Entries: 2015 ALBA'S Human Rights Documentary Film Festival

**Welcome filmmakers!** *Impugning Impunity*: ALBA's Human Rights Documentary Film Festival will take place from 26 to 28 October, 2015 in New York. Submit your film by August 1, 2015.

For requirements and information: [www.alba-valb.org](http://www.alba-valb.org) or email [filmfestival@alba-valb.org](mailto:filmfestival@alba-valb.org)

What you leave to friends and loved ones--and the causes you champion--are ways of expressing your hopes and dreams for the future. Help perpetuate your part in the story of the Lincoln Brigade. As you make your plans, please consider including ALBA in your will or living trust, or naming us as a beneficiary of your estate. ALBA can accept legacy gifts in any amount, large or small. Please help us to continue to expand our horizons, and your beliefs, and help us to carry our shared legacy to the next generation and beyond.

If you have additional questions or would like to discuss your choices, please call 212 674 5398 or email [info@alba-valb.org](mailto:info@alba-valb.org).

*Special thanks to board members Julia Newman for designating ALBA in her will as the recipient of the royalties from her documentary film "Into the Fire: American Women in the Spanish Civil War" and Gina Herrmann from Seattle for joining The Jarama Society.*

**The Volunteer**



# CONTRIBUTIONS

received from 2/1/15 to 4/30/15

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The Puffin Foundation, LTD

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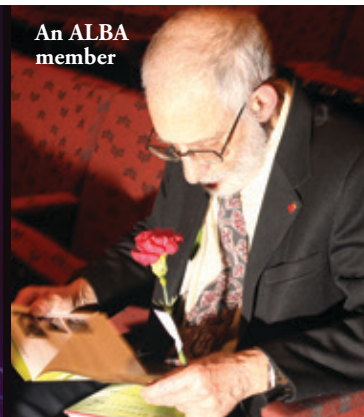
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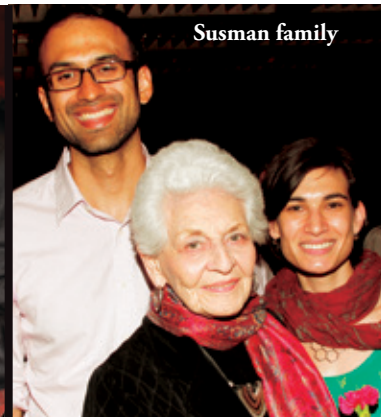
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and Marina Garde



An ALBA  
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and María Villar



Ellyn Polshek and Helen Searing  
with friends



The ARMH delegation



Eunice Lipton  
with friend Ken



Kim and  
Sebastiaan Faber

Photos from the New York Celebration  
Photos by Tony Graves, Nancy Saleme and Len Tsou

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