

**Abraham Lincoln Brigade: African American Internationalism
Manifested**

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“The earth bounced under my rubbery legs like the deck of the ship that had brought me across the Atlantic. Each bomb tore open a new hole. Mounds of earth and white-hot shrapnel flew about me. Suddenly I felt a sudden stinging in my legs, but with so much happening I didn’t think any more about it. At moments the entire world seemed to be flying upwards, further darkening and polluting the already thick sulfurous air,” wrote James Yates in his memoir *Mississippi to Madrid*.¹ To the average person, this might sound like a scene from World War Two: the brave American soldier charging fascist lines. However, this took place during the middle of the Spanish Civil War, around three years before the outbreak of the Second World War, and James Yates was not fighting for the United States Armed Forces. Instead, he was one of around ninety African Americans fighting alongside 2700 white Americans in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, an International Brigade composed of volunteers from the United States of America, 3300 miles away from home.² The intersectionality present on the Republican side of the Spanish Civil War led to one of the most diverse locations in the world in 1936. International Brigades, volunteer battalions consisting of anti-fascists from all over the world, broke down racial, class, and gender barriers. Republican International Brigades had 40,000 volunteer troops from fifty-three countries, some of the furthest coming from China, Palestine, and Costa Rica.³ People of every ideological background, from social democrats to anarcho-syndicalists, to Stalinist communists, all flocked to fight against fascism. In the trenches, poor laborers, college-educated workers, and upper middle-class members all fought together without any notice given to their social status. The Abraham Lincoln Brigade was one such International

¹ James Yates, *Mississippi to Madrid* (Seattle, WA: Open Hand Publishing, 1989), 138.

² William Lorenz Katz, "June 12, 1937: Oliver Law Became Brigade Commander," Zinn Education Project, accessed May 28, 2019, <https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/law-oliver/>.

³ "African Americans in the Spanish Civil War," Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives, accessed May 29, 2019, <http://www.alba-valb.org/resources/lessons/african-americans-in-the-spanish-civil-war>.

Brigade that assimilated these radical ideas, and because of the internationalist ideal of the Communists and Socialists that served, it was also the first fully integrated brigade in United States military history. While the contribution of African American soldiers in World War Two, especially when divisions were briefly integrated during the Battle of the Bulge, are often cited for their contribution to desegregation, the Abraham Lincoln Brigade was the first military unit that significantly shattered racial borders and would lead the fight against segregation.

The Spanish Civil War was a brutal foreshadowing of the next world war. Many historians consider it to be the testing ground for World War Two. Both Hitler and Mussolini sent volunteer corps, developed new military techniques, and utilized modern equipment to help the Nationalists under Generalissimo Francisco Franco in their fight against the Spanish Second Republic. The situation on the Iberian Peninsula had been simmering for a few years before the outbreak of civil war. Spain at the start of the 20th century was largely agrarian. More than seventy percent of her population was involved in agriculture, yet thirty percent of her arable land still lay unused, and the yield per acre was one of the lowest in Europe due to lack of modern farming implements.⁴ Spain's industry was also weak and anachronistic compared to the rest of Europe; the only real manufacturing centers lay in the iron and steel works in Basque and the textile industry in Catalonia. Urban centers were no better than the rural regions; cities were unorganized, and the populace was generally illiterate. Inequality and class divide was rampant, exacerbating an already tense environment. Land ownership was one of the defining issues of Spain in the early 1900's: two million agricultural workers owned no land compared to fifty thousand upper class members who owned half of Spain's entire acreage.⁵ Like the patricians in

⁴ Pierre Broue and Emile Temime, *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain*, trans. Tony White (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972), 32-33.

⁵ Broue and Temime, *The Revolution*, 34.

Ancient Rome, *latifundia*, large estates worked by local laborers, dominated the landscape, especially in the province of Andalusia. Similar to the Russian Empire in 1917, Spain was the weak link in capitalist Europe and thus vulnerable to the ideological tensions threatening to tear it apart.

Even though Spain peacefully transitioned from a Monarchy to a Republic in 1931 with the abdication of King Alphonso XIII, the problems that caused the drastic class divide still existed.⁶ Meanwhile, conservatives and new right-wing political parties inherited the traditional supporters of the Monarchy: The Church and the Army. Francisco Franco, leader of the Nationalists and future *caudillo* of Spain, first gained notice in the Army, rapidly rising up the ranks due to his actions during the Rif War in Morocco. He served as a general in the army of the Spanish Second Republic and would help Emilio Mola and Jose Sanjurjo, both fellow fascists who had fought in Africa, carry out their coup. He would later become the leader of the rebels and the fascist Falange party. After the Popular Front, a loose coalition of Spanish leftist parties achieved a narrow victory in the recent elections, far-right supporters in the armed forces and populace began plotting to overthrow the fledgling republic. When the *pronunciamiento*, the term used to refer to coups in Spain, Portugal, and Central American countries, broke out in 1936 however, Franco was isolated in Morocco. Though he was able to quickly maintain control over Spanish Morocco and the battle tested Army of Africa, the rest of the coup had not gone to plan.⁷ The most important industrial regions such as Madrid, Basque, and Asturias remained in the hands of the Republic. Workers' militias, such as the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist CNT-FAI,

⁶ F. White, *War in Spain* (London, Great Britain: Longmans, 1937), 3.

⁷ Franco was notorious for his harsh measures. He executed his own cousin, a Republican officer of the Army of Africa who remained loyal, in order to consolidate control. ("Francisco Franco," in *New World Encyclopedia*, last modified April 25, 2017, http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Francisco_Franco.)

quickly launched counteroffensives on the rebels, their ideological enthusiasm spurring them forward. Basque nationalists formed a separate army allied with the Popular Front government. The vast majority of the navy and a modest portion of the air force had remained loyal to the Republic. Franco and his all too important troops were cut off from the Spanish mainland. It seemed that the coup was would have been crushed before it even got off the ground. However, the importance of ideological volunteers was for the first time in history going to have an important role in determining the victor. The Spanish Civil War, and with it the dawn of a new era of warfare, had just begun.

Germany and Italy heeded Franco's call to arms with overwhelming support. The German and Italian air force and navy successfully transported Franco's Army of Africa to mainland Spain. Franco's Army of Africa would play an important role for the Nationalists and the participation of large numbers of "moors" transported over from Morocco would deal a major blow to Republican morale. Germany, Italy, and Portugal also sent significant amounts of troops and war materials. 14,000 German Condor Legion troops, 70,000 Italian Corpo Truppe Volontarie (CVT) troops, 34,000 Moroccan Regulares and Spanish Foreign Legion troops, and 20,000 Portugal Viriatos would provide the inexperienced Nationalist Army with large numbers of state armed troops, pilots, tank crews, artillerymen, and military advisors.⁸ Support for the Spanish Second Republic however was much less substantial compared to their fascist enemy. The democracies of the United States, Great Britain, and France, fearful of the increasingly Communist oriented government, declined to help their fellow democratically elected government. As Douglas Little puts it, "This doctrine in theory appeared impartial, but in

⁸ Andy Durgan, "Freedom Fighters or Comintern Army? The International Brigades in Spain," *International Socialism*, no. 84 (Fall 1999): accessed May 28, 2019, <http://pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/isj84/durgan.htm>.

practice it amounted to a kind of “malevolent neutrality” that tipped the balance decisively against republican Spain.”⁹ The negative viewpoint that the rest of the democratic world held to Spain’s left wing Popular Front government made a Nationalist victory preferable to them. They believed that a Republican win would further the cause of world revolution, as well as ruin the economic potential of Spain. The Soviet Union, however, was much more willing to help. When it became clear to Stalin that Franco would not be able to achieve a quick victory, he decided to mobilize the Third International, better known as Comintern, to start organizing International Brigades while providing the Republicans with Soviet military aid.¹⁰ While volunteers had already been arriving at Spain’s shores before the international recognition, Comintern was able to rally Communist parties worldwide to support the Republican Government. Though the 40,000 International Brigadiers of questionable quality weren’t comparable to the 138,000 military grade fascist foreign troops, their belief and defense of the Internationalist ideal were admirable.¹¹ The American Abraham Lincoln Brigade, however, differed from the other International Brigades. Unlike the German Thaelmann Battalion and Italian Garibaldi Brigade, the Abraham Lincoln Brigade were not composed of political exiles. As Brome summarizes, “These men were volunteers in a different sense from many other nationalities. They were not refugees and they had not been driven out of America by a ruthless dictatorship.”¹² It was in this brutal outbreak of war that caused American volunteers from all backgrounds to flock to the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. This unexpected moment in history where men and women of different racial, class, and political backgrounds fought side by side

⁹ Douglas Little, *Malevolent Neutrality* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 221.

¹⁰ Soviet air and tank crews brought with them the technologically advanced ‘Katiuska’ SB Bombers, I-15 and I-16 fighters, and T-26 tanks. (Alpert, p. 235)

¹¹ "African Americans," Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives.

¹² Vincent Brome, *The International Brigades* (London, Great Britain: William Heinemann, 1965), 105.

would embody the radical internationalist ideal of Communism in its most basic form. African American volunteer Albert Chisholm summarizes this best, “The Communists told me I couldn’t fight the battle alone. When you’re a Communist, that’s the greatest type the human race can have. You think of the best interest of the human race.”¹³

America was somewhat similar to Spain during the early 1900’s. The Ku Klux Klan terrorized African Americans in a largely agrarian South. African Americans during the 1930’s still lived in a segregated society dominated by Jim Crow laws. The Great Depression hit vulnerable African Americans particularly hard. In urban areas, thirty six percent of Black males were unemployed.¹⁴ A large wage gap was also present between whites and African Americans, in the rural South, the average yearly income of Black families was \$556 compared to \$1535 for whites.¹⁵ It was better in the North, but a significant inequality still existed. Because of these troubles, the 1930s had some of the highest numbers of African American activism before the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. During this time, African Americans also became very active in the Communist Party (CPUSA). White communists frequently helped African Americans who had been evicted and communist lawyers helped defend African Americans in the American legal system, such as in the trial of the Scottsboro boys. African Americans, both communist and not, had also followed the Second Italo-Ethiopian War closely. The Italian invasion of Abyssinia by Mussolini from Italian Eritrea and Italian Somaliland was a great cause of concern for African Americans. The Ethiopian Empire was one of just two countries that were not under Western colonial rule (the other being Liberia). Italian aggression in Ethiopia had stirred the black community in America to action. Black communists held large

¹³ Collum, *African Americans*, 146.

¹⁴ James Yates, *Mississippi to Madrid* (Seattle, WA: Open Hand Publishing, 1989), 97.

¹⁵ Yates, *Mississippi to Madrid*, 97.

rallies in major American cities to protest Mussolini's invasion. When Mussolini redirected his fascist troops to Spain, African Americans started to join the International Brigades as well. Many of the volunteers were already Communist Party members and were thus in contact with Comintern. Many more would join the Communist Party in Spain. However, to African Americans, the fight in Spain was not only an ideological struggle, but a personal fight against fascist Italy.

Underlying racial tensions in the United States inspired a majority of the African Americans to fight in the Spanish Civil War for a society that seemed more just than the one in America. James Yates, an African American volunteer, left for Spain with three dollars and his passport. He was one of three hundred men that left onboard the "Ile de France" for Le Havre, France, where they would then illegally cross the border into Republican Spain.¹⁶ However, it was James Yates' early life that shaped his political beliefs. His grandmother was a slave and his family lived down South. They were constantly terrorized by the Ku Klux Klan when he was a child; his uncle had accidentally hit a white man with a piece of lumber at the sawmill and had barely escaped from his worksite alive. That night, the whole family armed up. "I can remember Grandma Lizzie pacing the floor through the afternoon. Aunt Belle, my uncle's wife, was almost speechless. He would die fighting rather than be hung by the Kluxers."¹⁷ Many African Americans who joined the Abraham Lincoln Brigade experienced similar run-ins and threats with the Ku Klux Klan and constant racial harassment. As a teenager, Yates was able to get to Chicago, where he was introduced to a radically different political environment than that in the South. After some time in Chicago he went to New York and it was there that he got

¹⁶ Yates, *Mississippi to Madrid*, 102.

¹⁷ Yates, *Mississippi to Madrid*, 21.

involved with the Communist Party and met his friend Alonzo Watson. New York opened his eyes to the world and it was in New York that Watson convinced him to join the fight in Spain.¹⁸ He had learned about the Second Italo-Abyssinian War and while he could do nothing to stop it, he and many other African Americans in the party held a vendetta against Mussolini for his invasion of Ethiopia. Spain was the next best thing, and African Americans were in positions to take part. James Yates elucidates this perfectly,

I had been more than ready to go to Ethiopia, but that was different. Ethiopia, a Black nation, was part of me. I was just beginning to learn about the reality of Spain and Europe, but I knew what was at stake. There the poor, the peasants, the workers and the unions, the socialists and the communists, together had won an election against the big landowners, the monarchy and the right-wingers in the military. It was the kind of victory that would have brought Black people to the top levels of government if such an election had been won in the USA.¹⁹

To James, Spain was a prime example of what a future America could look like.²⁰ He joined the fight in Spain not only because he was a supporter of Communism, but because he was defending what he saw as an ideal government. “Spain was the perfect example for the world I dreamed of.”²¹

The Abraham Lincoln Brigade broke many boundaries that would have been impossible in the United States Armed Forces at the time. Because of the ideology of the volunteers, many International Brigades were democratized. As Alvah Bessie describes,

We were not an army of automatons under the absolute authority of an unquestionable command. We were an army of responsible, thinking men. We elected our political

¹⁸ Alonzo Watson would be the first African American to die in the Spanish Civil War. James Yates would find out about the death of his best friend when he arrived in Spain. (Yates, p. 119)

¹⁹ Yates, *Mississippi to Madrid*, 95-96.

²⁰ Yates' childhood teacher, Mr. Blakeney, would always tell them that the United States of America would eventually have a black president. Yates and his classmates would always laugh at the statement. Yates would die before president Obama took office. (Yates, p. 19)

²¹ Yates, *Mississippi to Madrid*, 96.

delegates-an officer who does not exist in any of the finance-controlled armies of the so-called democracies. This political delegate, known as a commissar, was responsible to us. Meetings were called at his, or our, request, where every problem of discipline, of food, clothing, shelter, military orders, mail, tobacco (or largely the absence thereof), tactics and personal behavior was thrashed out.²²

Many issues, both major and minor, were thus worked out via this democratic process. This democratization also allowed men to be made officers based on merit, rather than race. The fact that many African-Americans were chosen as officers by their mostly white comrades would have been unthinkable at the time in the US Army. Harry Haywood was a prominent labor organizer and was appointed first to the Communist Central Committee before being placed on the Party politburo in 1934, making him the highest ranking CPUSA member to serve in Spain.²³ In Spain he served as an assistant Regimental Commissar, holding the rank of Captain. Haywood would survive the war and remained active in union activities as well as serving as a Merchant Marine during World War 2. Edward Johnson, a World War One veteran from Virginia, was the head of the general food commissary. Thomas Page, a high school dropout, was made third company sergeant and was awarded for bravery after being wounded in the chest during the Ebro offensive. Andrew Mitchell, a volunteer who went missing during the retreats of 1938, held an officer position training recruits. Alvah Bessie, an Abraham Lincoln veteran, recalls, "I remember Mitchell, a handsome Negro who commanded our recruit company for a time and wore lieutenant's stripes."²⁴ Many, many other African Americans served as section leaders, company commanders, and political commissars. All of these African Americans were either elected by their fellow soldiers or chosen based off of merit something not possible in the

²² Alvah Bessie, *Men in Battle* (San Francisco, CA: Chandler and Sharp Publishers, 1975), 59.

²³ Collum, *African Americans*, 76.

²⁴ Bessie, *Men in Battle*, 60.

segregated brigades of the U.S. Army. The U.S. Army of the 1930's would never have allowed an African American to join a white division, much less become an officer.

However, this accepting and democratic environment would lead to the first time an African American, Oliver Law, would lead a regiment consisting of mostly white American soldiers. Law, a black Communist from Chicago, had served in the U.S. Army for six years as a private in the 24th infantry division, a segregated unit that primarily served on the Mexican border. After his discharge, he had frequent run-ins with Red Squads, police divisions trained in infiltrating unions and socialist groups, and was arrested for speaking against Italy's invasion of Ethiopia at a mass protest. His prior military experience was highly valued in Spain. Many International Brigadiers lacked any sort of military experience and the training they received upon arrival was minimal. Law, who was unable to advance any higher than private during his service for the United States Army, was quickly made section leader and then commander of a machine-gun company during the Battle of Jarama.²⁵ His efforts on the Jarama front gained the attention of the current captain, Martin Hourihan, and when Hourihan was reassigned, Law was chosen by a committee of three white officers to become the new battalion commander. Law would lead the Brigade for three months before dying during the Brunete offensive on July 10, 1937.²⁶ He led the charge over the top against dug in fascist positions on Mosquito Ridge and was the furthest out before being cut down by machine gun fire. His men would successfully fight to retrieve his body, and he was buried in a simple grave at the base of Mosquito Ridge.

²⁵ Franco, unable to storm Madrid via a frontal assault, attempted to cut off Madrid from the rest of the Republic by sending troops across the Jarama river into Jarama valley. 350 of the 500 Abraham Lincoln Brigade Members at the time were killed in the battle. (Gerassi, p. 93)

²⁶ The Republican Government, in an attempt to pull pressure off the capital and Northern regions of the Republic, decided to launch a counter offensive toward Brunete. Though good progress was made initially, Franco brought forth his reserve and forced the Republicans to retreat with heavy losses. (Dougadale-Pointon, "Oliver Law (1899-1937)," History of War.)

“Someday, the working class of America will properly acknowledge the role this brave Negro Communist played in the fight for freedom,” eulogized Steve Nelson, the next commander of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade.²⁷ Fifty years later, November 21, 1987, was declared to be Oliver Law and the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in Chicago by the mayor at the time.²⁸ Law had led the fight against segregation in Chicago and led the fight against fascists in Spain and in the end he was indeed given proper recognition.

While Oliver Law smashed through the racial barrier, Salaria Kee broke both race and gender barriers. A Catholic African American nurse, she had been active in the fight against segregation before she volunteered for the Spanish Civil War.²⁹ She organized and fought against racism in the Harlem Hospital’s cafeteria. At Sea View Hospital after her graduation from Harlem Hospital Training School, she and her fellow nurses assisted in delivering two tons of medical supplies, as well as a seventy-five bed field hospital, to the embattled Ethiopians.³⁰ When the Spanish Civil War came, she was ready. She had recently been denied by the Red Cross to help with the floods in the Midwest because of her race. When the Spanish Civil War came, she was more than ready to volunteer at a location where her services were more important than her ethnicity. Assigned to an International Medical Unit in Villa Paz, she helped set up a hospital in a former summer palace of King Alfonso. While there, she, along with two of her injured patients, helped the Republican government eliminate all illiteracy in Villa Paz in the span of six months.³¹ She saved countless lives at Villa Paz as a result of her quick thinking.

²⁷ Yates, *Mississippi to Madrid*, 138.

²⁸ Collum, *African Americans*, 84.

²⁹ Note that the Catholic church in Spain was overwhelmingly supportive of the Nationalists.

³⁰ *Salaria Kea: A Negro Nurse in Republican Spain* (New York City, NY: Negro Committee to Aid Spain, 1938), accessed May 28, 2019, <http://www.alba-valb.org/resources/robeson-primary-resources/salaria-kea-a-negro-nurse-in-republican-spain>.

³¹ *Salaria Kea*.

When an injured man was about to die due to the lack of hot water needed to treat wounds, she sprinted to retrieve a pot of hot soup instead. The soldier quickly stabilized after the procedure. Soon she was reassigned to the front at a town in Pueblo De. After a few days of intense action, her unit was forced to flee when the fascists broke through the Republican defenses. She met up with an American medical unit in Barcelona and there she helped dig out a baby from the ruins of a bombed building. She was finally put out of service after being injured in a bombing raid. At this point she had been cited for bravery multiple times by the Spanish Republic and had been featured in two movies. After her return to the United States, she helped rally support for the Spanish Republic in the final days of the war. She would later serve as a nurse during World War Two and she continued her desegregation activities. Kee was rejected from multiple nursing schools as well as a volunteer position with the Red Cross on account of her race. In Spain however, people placed emphasis on her actions. After the war, Kee would become much more independent in her desegregation activities. While previously she often looked to her older brothers to help her, she now adopted a more independent mindset.

While the majority participated in direct action against segregation, many African American volunteers used their newfound war experience to gain respect back home and push against the idea of segregation indirectly. James Peck, a college educated African American with a commercial pilot's license, was turned down from joining both the U.S. Air Corps and the Navy flying schools. His aviation career frustrated, he volunteered to fly for the Spanish Republican Air Force. After the war, he became a frequent contributor on aeronautics for magazines such as *Popular Aviation* and *Scientific American*. His expertise on military aviation even allowed him to write the book *Armies with Wings*, a comprehensive guide on different airplanes, military aviation theory, and the organization of a modern airforce. Many of his

readers never realized that the impressively knowledgeable author was an African American until *Popular Science* bravely published a portrait of Peck in the September 1945 issue.³² Walter Garland, a machine-gun company commander with prior US Army experience, quickly gained fame for his actions in Spain. After the Spanish Civil War, he rejoined the US Army to help in World War Two and taught classes on mapmaking, scout cars, mortars, and machine-guns, as well as giving a presentation on the Brunete Offensive. While teaching, he would invent a new sight designed for scout-car mounted machine guns that would later be accepted and used by the US Army. These men were able to use their battle knowledge to gain respect back in a segregated society. They showed that race should not be a determining factor in what a man can or cannot contribute to society.

The majority of African American Abraham Lincoln Brigade veterans though continued their resistance to inequality back home. Many of the veterans were reluctant to leave Spain. "Spain was the first time that I ever felt like a free man," remembered Page.³³ A majority of the Spanish Civil survivors would once again join the fight against fascism in World War Two. While serving, they were plunged back into the systematic racism that had not present as an Abraham Lincoln Brigade member. As Frank Alexander, a veteran of the Battle of Teruel, summarizes, "In one army I was completely equal; in the other army I was subordinate, I was not equal."³⁴ To the African American veterans, their reintroduction to racism and segregated military units were hard to adjust to. African Americans that were once led by both African Americans and whites were now only led by white officers, with no chance of advancement.

³² "Contents for September, 1945," *Popular Science*, September 1945, 2.

³³ "African American Anti-Fascists in the Spanish Civil War," Portside, last modified May 2, 2018, accessed May 28, 2019, <https://portside.org/2018-05-02/african-american-anti-fascists-spanish-civil-war>.

³⁴ Collum, *African Americans*, 143.

These veterans were used to equality in battle field strategy as well. They were coming from a battalion in which one of their own commanders had died leading a frontal assault with them, a battalion in which the hardest jobs in the war were shared by all divisions and all soldiers. This was in deep contrast to the segregated units of the US Army. Crawford Morgan, a African American runner and truck driver in the Spanish Civil War, recounts his experience in World War Two, “For the 47 months that I was in there, not only were we Jim Crowed into Jim Crow units, but all of the nasty jobs, all of the worst jobs, were handed to the majority of the Negroes, to my people, when they were in the army.”³⁵ Veterans fought back by proving themselves on the battlefield. Sergeant Edward Carter II was perhaps the most impressive of these veterans. An African American whose family moved to Shanghai, he trained in a Chinese military academy and became a lieutenant in the National Revolutionary Army fighting against the Japanese in the Shanghai incident before being discharged after his commander found out he was only fifteen years old. When the Spanish Civil War broke out, he made his way from China to Spain and joined the Abraham Lincoln Brigade right in time for the Battle of Teruel. There he was captured as a prisoner of war and he broke out of jail to escape to Los Angeles. He enlisted for World War Two and though he both an impressive marksman and a highly experienced military officer, he was shipped to Europe as part of a segregated non-combat unit. He fought for a long time to be moved to a combat unit but it was only during the Battle of the Bulge, when US troops were short of manpower, that he got transferred. He promptly killed multiple German soldiers, captured two, and suffered six wounds in the progress. After his death in 1963, he would be posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.³⁶ Edward Carter was only

³⁵ Collum, *African Americans*, 178.

³⁶ "Edward Carter," Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives, accessed May 29, 2019, <http://www.alb-valb.org/volunteers/edward-allen-carter-jr>.

one of multiple black Abraham Lincoln Brigade veterans to fight against the systemized racism that clouded the US Army for a chance to prove themselves. Men like Carter would prove to their peers and the administration that the racist policies around the base camps and in the battle field was harmful to the overall war effort. Their distinguished service helped break down barriers in the US Army. When in battle, racism was something that could hardly be prioritized.

The progressiveness of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade was extraordinary for its time. US desegregation efforts started in 1945, culminating with the passing of Executive Order 9981, which was supposed to end all segregation in the US military.³⁷ This order was largely ignored at first and desegregation happened very gradually and without much fanfare. The last segregated unit, the 94th Engineer Battalion, was disbanded in 1954, almost twenty years after the first African Americans joined the ranks of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade.³⁸ The lack of any pervasive systematic racism in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade was also a testament to the ideals of the International Brigadiers.³⁹ It was not only the African Americans who were fighting for a society they wanted to see repeated in America, but the majority of the white volunteers truly did as well. The democratized and integrated Abraham Lincoln Brigade was not just an experiment in military theory, but a litmus test on society. African Americans leaped into action to protect the rights of others when their own human rights were little more than promise. They and their white counterparts of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade fought for true democracy not only for others, but also for themselves.

³⁷ Morris J. MacGregor, Jr., *Integration of the Armed Forces, 1940-1965* (Washington D.C., DC: Center of Military History, 2001), 309, accessed May 29, 2019, https://history.army.mil/html/books/050/50-1-1/cmhPub_50-1-1.pdf.

³⁸ MacGregor, *Integration of the Armed*, 452.

³⁹ Racism did exist. However, it was few and far between and was not tolerated at all by the command. The perpetrators were fined and punished very quickly. ("Problems in Red and Black," Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives.)

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