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Friend or Foe?

Defining the Enemy in Franco's Spain from 1936 until 1959

Introduction

Distraught and aggrieved, American Daniel Fitzgerald expressed in a series of letters to his close friend his suspicions that the United States military was discriminating against him by denying his application to become an Air Force Flying Cadet in World War II. The basis for discrimination, he claimed, was not race or class - rather, Fitzgerald contends that he was discriminated against because of his previous experience fighting against fascism in the Spanish Civil War. At the height of World War II, a war in which the enemy was obviously and clearly the fascist forces of Hitler and Mussolini (and to a lesser extent, Franco), Fitzgerald argues that he was denied promotion because of his antifascist views. "Definitely and concretely here," he confidently writes, "is a concrete case of discrimination - my own."¹

Fitzgerald had been a passionate antifascist for practically his whole life. At only eighteen years of age, he dropped out of school at the University of New Hampshire to fight alongside the Spanish Republicans in their efforts to stave off the the fascist insurgency led by Generalissimo Francisco Franco during the Spanish Civil War.² As a member of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, the infantry in Spain comprised of American volunteer soldiers, Fitzgerald mainly served in combat as a skilled machine gunner.³ Shortly after his return, Fitzgerald opted to enlist in the United States Army and have a second go at eradicating fascism. However, throughout the process of applying to be a Flying Cadet with the Air Force, he experienced

¹ Letters from various members of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade citing discrimination when they enlisted in the army during WWII, 1941-1945; Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Records; ALBA 069; Box 1; Folder 4; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

² Tamiment Archives, Volunteer Biographies: Daniel Andrew Fitzgerald. Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives. Accessed April 15, 2019. <http://www.alba-valb.org/volunteers/daniel-andrew-lee-fitzgerald>.

³ Ibid.

blatant discrimination. In one letter to his friend Arthur, he recalls being notified that his application had been approved and he was scheduled to leave to his new post when “a melodramatic last minute phone call from the main post ordered my name to be removed from the list of fellows who were leaving the following day.”⁴ In follow-up correspondence, he writes “My application for the Air Force Flying Cadet is still blacklisted. That’s what one gets for shooting fascists before the open season is declared.”⁵

Daniel Fitzgerald is one of many veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade who reported experiences of discrimination when they tried to enlist in the United States military during WWII. Other veterans described being assigned positions as cooks and launderers, despite their extensive combat experience from fighting in Spain. Some even claimed they were kicked out of service because of their political views. Amidst a war against fascism, these men were certain that they were denied promotions, removed from service, and assigned to menial labor because of their ardent antifascist beliefs and their previous role in fighting against fascism in Franco’s Spain. Whereas their service in the Spanish Civil War was seen within the government as patriotic and honorable only a decade prior, it was now considered a liability.

Fitzgerald’s experience marks an important turning point between the Spanish Civil War and the early Cold War. The Spanish Civil War represented an era in American history where broad agreement existed that fascism was the “Other” of democracy, and that men like Fitzgerald who went abroad to protect the Spanish Republic from Franco and his fascist forces were the epitome of what it meant to be American. By the 1950s, however, the circumstances of the Cold War had turned these brave military men into pariahs in their own country. The story of Fitzgerald and so many others during World War II represents the beginning of this shift. My

⁴ Letters from various members of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade citing discrimination. Fitzgerald, July 14, 1942

⁵ Ibid.

paper aims to uncover how in the span of only a few decades, the perception of Franco, and fascism more broadly, was monumentally redesigned to the point where the Abraham Lincoln Brigade soldiers, who were once admired and respected, suddenly became the targets of FBI investigations into un-American activities. How did the Cold War change America's opinion of Franco from being a repugnant fascist dictator on par with Hitler and Mussolini, to being a good, benevolent leader and worthy friend by 1959? At what point did the Abraham Lincoln Brigade become the enemy, and Franco the ally?

Throughout my final paper I attempt to answer these and other questions. My research complicates the assumptions about the Cold War binary, and presents a more comprehensive look at the geopolitical tensions present during this era. I argue that the Cold War was as much a struggle to understand and define American values and ideals as it was to defend the world against the communist forces trying to undermine them. Fascism was initially seen as incompatible with the American way of life. However, as the Cold War developed, the American public had to find ways to harmonize their role as the leaders of the free world with their need to ally themselves with undemocratic leaders in order to beat the Soviets. I argue that their methods included restructuring the concept of fascism into two separate definitions: the benign Spanish 'fascism' which became synonymous with paternalism, and the authoritarian, brutal German/Italian fascism that the Americans fought so valiantly to destroy in World War II. By the height of the Cold War, this brutal fascism gets rebranded as totalitarianism, and expanded to include communism in its definition. Meanwhile, the Franco regime remained blissfully free from any criticism.

While an excess of literature exists about American support of dictators during the Cold War - namely in the context of Latin America and Southeast Asia - very little has been written

about the Cold War relationship between the United States and Francisco Franco, an unfree dictator right in the middle of the so-called “free world” that America professed to be protecting during this time. Even less has been written about how this support was rationalized to a proud American people that purported values of freedom and democracy, values that directly contrast with fascism and dictatorship. The limited canon concerning Franco and fascism during the period between 1936 and 1959 is fragmented. There is the historiography of the Spanish Civil War from 1936 until 1939, then the historiography of World War II from 1939 until 1945, and finally the historiography of the early Cold War that starts from 1945 onwards. No scholar has yet to fuse these time periods together. My essay, however, aims to understand these three seemingly distinct and separate periods of time as one important moment of American history. Through in-depth archival research, I will weave together these three periods to tell a fascinating story about what it meant to be American before the Cold War, and how that completely changed as tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union heightened during and after WWII.

Scholars of the Spanish Civil War claim that it is a turning point for the understanding of fascism in America. Before the mid-1930s, fascism was actually not such a negative word in the American vocabulary. Historian Benjamin Alpers, for example, explains that there were groups of Americans in the 1920s and early 30s who actually thought a fascist dictatorship was an attractive form of government for the United States and abroad.⁶ These groups were often elites or businessmen who thought an authoritarian state would be more beneficial to the free market.⁷ However, as Alpers notes, the era of the Spanish Civil War changed that. It was during this time that “dictators and dictatorship [became] the absolute Other of democracy in U.S. political

⁶ Alpers, Benjamin. *Dictators, Democracy, and American Public Culture*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

⁷ *Ibid.*

culture.”⁸ It’s when it became taboo to openly support a dictator. World War II is then described by scholars as the time in which antifascism was at its peak. Historian Gilbert Allardyce writes that during the war, “Fascists were fascist, and Mussolini and Hitler were their prophets.”⁹ He describes how fascism evolved during WWII from being a uniquely Italian political philosophy to becoming a global phenomenon.¹⁰ Whereas before the war, fascism was associated only with “either Blackshirts or Nazis,” WWII “created an international fascist model” that applied to multiple governments in Europe, including Spain and Germany.¹¹ The period after WWII is remembered in the literature mainly in the context of the Red Scare and the global shift towards Cold War geopolitics. Historian Abbott Gleason argues that the concept of totalitarianism was developed during this time as a way to describe the new enemy that arose in the 1950s. It applied to both Nazism and Soviet communism, while leaving out more strategically important governments, like dictators in Latin America or Franco in Spain.¹²

Through letters like those of Daniel Fitzgerald and his comrades, an entirely new narrative of the Cold War is revealed from the perspective of military participation. Focusing primarily on the personal correspondence of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, my essay paints a more intimate picture of how the American people were grappling with the changing political environment between 1936 and 1959, focusing on the actors most closely involved with initiating these changes: soldiers. My archival research begins with letters that were written by members of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade while they were fighting in Spain. In these letters, they articulate their personal feelings about Franco, about fascism, and about what it meant to be a patriot. They wrote freely about their hatred for the fascists, and liberally applied the term to

⁸ Ibid, 16.

⁹ Allardyce, Gilbert. “What Fascism is Not: Thoughts on the Deflation of a Concept.” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 84, No. 2 (1979): pp. 367-388.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid, 370.

¹² Gleason, Abbot. *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Franco and the insurgent army. Their writing brings a human element to the scholarship, and it also demonstrates the lengths that individuals were willing to go in order to protect their country from the clearly defined enemy of fascism. Many of these same individuals came home from the Spanish Civil War and eagerly signed up to return to Europe to battle the fascist foe again, this time in Germany. Their letters from World War II are a continuation of my archival material. In these letters, veterans of the Brigade, like Daniel Fitzgerald, write in detail about incidents of discrimination. These letters serve as evidence of the changing objectives of the State, as experienced by this distinct group of soldiers. They were able to witness and record first hand the evolution of the enemy from being fascist in nature, to being communist.

Finally, my additional archival material includes scholarly materials that are contemporaneous to the early Cold War period. I draw upon a variety of newspaper articles, a speech by a politician, and even a history book in order to contextualize the stories of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, and to demonstrate the growing favor that Franco was accumulating among the American people. Editors, writers, academics, and of course politicians were all involved in the project to recraft the concept of fascism and the perception of Franco in order to make them both more palatable to history. The shifting opinion of Franco, as altered by Cold War circumstances and rhetoric, was so pervasive so as to invade nearly all facets of society, from academia to media to politics, producing an interesting and diverse archive. All of these changes unsurprisingly occurred in tandem with evolving American policies towards Franco. As American dollars and political support started to flow into the country and prop up the military dictatorship of Franco, suddenly the narratives in the United States began to transform to match this new sentiment. The American people had to find a way to justify and rationalize the new fondness that their government demonstrated towards Spain – which replaced the animosity that

was there only ten years earlier – and this process is illustrated quite plainly in the historical record.

Fascism and the Spanish Civil War

The 1930s was a decade of immense importance globally. In the United States, the Great Depression had wreaked havoc on society, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt was reshaping the political landscape through New Deal policies in an attempt to solve the economic woes of America. This decade marked what historian James Sparrow called the zenith of the “welfare state” in America.¹³ Driven by growing poverty and mass unemployment, FDR implemented some of the most radically leftist policies of any government up until that point in American history. Included in the New Deal were projects to redistribute wealth (most notably through Social Security), to create support for the unemployed, and to strengthen labor unions against unfair business practices.¹⁴ Roosevelt was able to push through so many of these policies because ideologically, the American public was shifting leftward. Democrats maintained a majority in Congress for the entire decade. In fact, towards the end of the 1930s, they achieved a supermajority in both chambers.¹⁵ The Popular Front was gaining ground, and the Communist Party of America was growing, with around 85,000 members by the start of the 1940s.¹⁶

With this in mind, it is not surprising that when civil war broke out in Spain in 1936, the American government was largely sympathetic to the left-wing coalition of loyalists. These loyalists represented the forces of the democratically-elected government of the Spanish Republic, labelled the Republicans for short. Philosophically, the Republicans were a mixed bag. Their ranks were comprised of people from across the liberal political spectrum, from the

¹³ Sparrow, James T. *Warfare State*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

¹⁴ Lambert, Frank. "Religious and Political Liberalism: The Rise of Big Government from the New Deal to the Cold War." In *Religion in American Politics: A Short History*, 130-59. Princeton University Press, 2008.

¹⁵ Jeffreys-Jones, Rhodri. *The American Left: Its Impact on Politics and Society since 1900*. Edinburgh University Press, 2013.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

devoutly communist to the narrowly centrist.¹⁷ In fact, one of the most interesting aspects of the Spanish Civil War was just exactly how diverse each side was. Historian Edward Malefakis, for example, notes that most other civil wars “can be interpreted essentially as struggles by the peasantry against other social groups,” but in Spain, “the peasantry, instead of lending the bulk of its support to one side or the other, remained so divided within itself that it is impossible to determine which side a majority of its members favored in the conflict.”¹⁸ As diverse as they were demographically, they were equally manifold in the issues they championed. What held this motley coalition together was not any one social characteristic or policy goal. Rather, it was the much more powerful belief they all shared in the evils of their political enemy: fascism.

Fighting against the Republicans was the nationalist insurgency led by former military prodigy, Generalissimo Francisco Franco, and supplied with weapons by Hitler and Mussolini. Politically, this group was mainly comprised of *falangistas*, or members of the fascist *Falange* party of Spain.¹⁹ Their immediate goal was to put an end to the Republic, a form of government that they saw as dangerous and ineffective, and to install an authoritarian regime.²⁰ As Sheelagh Ellwood writes so succinctly, the war between these two factions “was not, in essence, a struggle for territory; nor for religious supremacy; nor for independence; nor against external aggression; nor about the rights of minorities... it was essentially a *political* war... above all, a conflict about ideas and opinions.”²¹ Taking sides in this war, therefore, could be simplified down to taking a side either in favor of fascism as a viable governing philosophy, or against it. Supporting the Republicans didn’t automatically suggest communist sympathies, just as supporting the nationalists didn’t automatically suggest the will for a military dictatorship (many of Franco’s

¹⁷ Bolloten, Burnett. *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991.

¹⁸ Ibid, 10.

¹⁹ Ibid, 16.

²⁰ Ibid, 17.

²¹ Ellwood, Sheelagh. *Franco*. New York: Longman Group, 1994, pg. 77.

allies were *alfonsists*, and supported a hybrid of fascism and the restoration of the monarchy).²²

Rather, the main point of contention was whether or not Spain should be guided by fascist principles, or more democratic ones.

Officially, the Roosevelt administration did not pick a side in the conflict. With World War I fresh in the minds of most Americans, taking any kind of military action, no matter how noble the cause, would have been political suicide. However despite an embargo against arms sales to either side, unofficially the government supported the antifascist, Republican cause.²³ In 1938, one year after the embargo was enacted, Roosevelt was involved in a covert plot to ship American aircraft to France, which would subsequently be sent to the Republicans in Spain.²⁴ According to the written records of Assistant Secretary of State Sumner Welles, during a meeting between Spanish Republican Ambassador, Fernando de los Rios, and FDR, the president stated that “one could not count on a lifting of the embargo, but he promised to give directives not to hinder the export of any weapons to France and not to enquire about the further destination of the cargo...”²⁵ In another show of Republican support, the Treasury Secretary, Henry Morgenthau Jr., led an undercover scheme to buy 55 million ounces of devalued silver peseta coins from the Republican government in return for hard-currency dollars that could be used for wartime efforts.²⁶ Although Roosevelt was not directly involved, it is very likely he was aware of the transaction, seeing as “among those in the cabinet, no one was closer to the

²² *Alfonsists* were political allies of Franco, and they supported the nationalist forces during the Spanish Civil War. Their goal was to reinstate King Alfonso under philosopher Charles Maurras’ conception of monarchy. Maurras was a French ethnic nationalist, who combined elements of autocracy and traditional monarchism to create the political movement, *Action Française*. His work was a precursor to fascism and greatly influenced National Catholicism, a major tenant of Francoism.

²³ Tierney, Dominic. “Franklin D. Roosevelt and Covert Aid to the Loyalists in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-39.” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (2004): pg. 299-313.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 299.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 301.

²⁶ Chapman, Michael E. “Pro-Franco Anti-Communism: Ellery Sedgwick and the ‘Atlantic Monthly.’” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (2006): 641-662.

President” than Morgenthau.²⁷ Despite the conservative official policy, the State clearly took the side of antifascism.

The Abraham Lincoln Brigade: America’s Patriots

In another breach of the United States’ neutrality, about 2,800 Americans showed up on the shores of Spain to fight with the Republican forces against Franco’s insurgency in 1936.²⁸ These men were volunteers, unaffiliated with the United States military. They were largely young and inexperienced, but what they lacked in skill they made up for in passion and drive. The most well-known of these volunteer soldiers were the men who comprised the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. In their personal correspondence, written while they were amidst battle during the civil war, these men elucidate their fears, their motivations, and provide important insights into how antifascism was operationalized in the understanding of Americanism and patriotism during this period of time.

Fear, in particular, is a frequent topic that these men discuss in their correspondence. They write in gruesome detail about their experiences in battle and about losing their comrades in the field. One man, Bill Sennett, who was just 23 years old, vividly recounts the terror he experienced when faced with aerial attacks. He writes:

“Then the enemy planes came over and for 4 hours we had to find holes and what little cover an open field afforded -- Wow -- What a helpless feeling you have with the planes overhead. They drop bombs you hear them release it then they whistle thru space and you just hope for the best. You sort of have a little sigh of relief when the bombs drop on the other side of you. They kept coming and dropping bombs and we had to lay and take it. After all the bombs were dropped, the most horrible thing is the strafing by machine guns. The planes swooped down right over us and let loose with machine gun fire -- then more planes and more bombs -- Those hours seemed like days...”²⁹

²⁷ Ibid, 656.

²⁸ Smith, Eric R. *American Relief Aid and the Spanish Civil War*. Columbia: University of Missouri, 2013.

²⁹ Letters from various members of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade while they were fighting in Spain, 1936-1939; Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Records; ALBA 019; Box 18; Folder 14; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

Sennett clearly experienced extreme fear during battle, and he was even injured in the attack he describes above. Yet, in his letter, he laments the fact that he was forced to rest and recover rather than move on with the rest of the troops to continue the offensive against the fascists in Madrid. Another soldier (and friend of Ernest Hemingway), Milton Wolff, describes a similar attack:

“Planes carry tons of explosives, death, that falling anywhere in a crowded city is certain to wreak cruel punishment. Huge aerial bombs rip through six floors of a modern building with ease... They detonate with terrifying force, shock hangs for an age suspended and all originality is drowned in the roar of sound and flames. Can you visualize thousands of people scurrying like so many panicked sheep... tripping, jostling, pushing their way to safety?”³⁰

What is most interesting about Wolff is that he was originally assigned to a much safer and more secure post as a medical assistant, but “moved by the enthusiasm of the other volunteers,” he opted to switch to the front lines as a machine gunner.³¹ He actively chose to be in the horrific situations he outlined in his letters. In fact, so dedicated was he to the cause of fighting fascists, that by just 22 years of age, after all of the other leadership was killed in a bombing in Argon, he took over as commander of his battalion.³² From these descriptions, it is hard to understand why any of the hundreds of American volunteer soldiers would choose to subject themselves to such circumstances to fight a war in which they seemingly had no stake. These young men were not conscripted, they were not forced to go across the world to engage in dangerous battles on foreign soil. They chose this. When faced with terrifying aerial attacks and constant machine gun fire, these men did not just go home - even though that was a very real option. They chose to stay, and they chose to fight. What force, then, was so strong that it could drive these men across

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Tamiment Archives, Volunteer Biographies: Milton Wolff. Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives. Accessed April 15, 2019. <http://www.alba-valb.org/volunteers/milton-wolff>.

³² Ibid.

the Atlantic to voluntarily join in a bloody, violent war, and then convince them to continue fighting on, despite the horrific conditions of battle?

A sociology professor at Yale University, Dr. John Dollard, sought to answer that very question in 1941. With American participation in World War II imminent, Dollard, along with the FBI, were interested in the psychology of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. Specifically, they wanted to understand how such inexperienced, untrained men overcame their fears of battle to become internationally recognized for their superior morale and courage. The results, they hoped, would inform improved training methods for American soldiers in WWII. What Dollard found was that more than anything else, their strong sense of political ideology contributed to greater confidence and better outcomes in battle.³³ “In a rare display of unanimity,” historian Peter Carroll writes of the study, “the Lincoln veterans asserted that an understanding of the anti-Fascist nature of the war and a personal identification with the cause of Republican Spain improved their battlefield reliability.”³⁴ It was their overwhelming belief in the evil of fascism that motivated the soldiers of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade to hide in a hole for four hours to stay safe from aerial fire, like Bill Sennett did, or to leave the safety of the medical unit for the uncertainty of the front lines, like Milton Wolff did. “Hatred and anger towards the enemy,” writes Carroll, “lay at the center of the Lincolns’ celebrated esprit de corps. That is why they accepted the discipline of their officers, fought against overwhelming military superiority, and maintained their commitment to defeating the Fascist foe.”³⁵

The correspondence from the Brigade members reflects Dollard’s findings. The letters were almost always rife with anti-fascist sentiment. Bill Sennett, after describing those truly terrifying battlefield conditions, concluded his letter with reference to an antifascist bulletin that

³³ Carroll, Peter. "Psychology & Ideology in the Spanish Civil War: The Case of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade." *The Antioch Review* 52, no. 2 (1994): 219-30, pg. 221.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 222.

was handed around to the soldiers, which he said was “really an inspiring thing to read and started everybody off in the right spirit.”³⁶ Milton Wolff, after writing about how frightening enemy aerial attacks were, emphasizes how much he enjoys the company of his literary friends after a battle – including Hemingway, Matthews, and a few others – because “they are part of the fight... they are working hard and *know why*” (emphasis added).³⁷ He enjoyed company and conversation about antifascism with his peers as a remedy to battlefield woes and to reinforce his faith. Wolff goes so far as to say that the suffering he describes in Spain should be enough to encourage his friend El to join the war despite the risks. He concludes with a call to action, saying “for Christ’s sake, kid, get up and fight!”³⁸ Even more convincing are some of the more emotional outbursts, like that of Harold “Harry” Malofsky. He wrote a powerful letter expressing his outright disgust for the fascist enemy. “I hate you fascists,” he exclaimed:

“for you are responsible for this war, you are responsible for the death of my closest comrade, for the murder of so many thousands of innocents, for blood and destruction and the return of barbarism. I hate you with the most intense fever possible. *What matter, sun and sweat, bombs and shells, explosive bullets; nothing but dead muscle can get me out of this fight now. Our victory means too much...*” (emphasis added)³⁹

Another soldier, Harry “Bozzy” Fisher, draws an even more direct line between his hatred for the fascist enemy and his motivation to keep fighting. He writes:

“The running of the fascists gave me joy. The falling fascist planes gave me joy. The [Fascist] deserters gave me joy. I thought that such courage existed only in books. But I’ve seen acts of bravery I’ll never forget... *It’s these things that give you confidence in a final victory. It’s these things that make you fight on in spite of the horror and brutality. It’s these things that give you courage.*” (emphasis added)⁴⁰

³⁶ Tamiment Archives, letters from William Sennett, July 10, 1937.

³⁷ Tamiment Archives, Milton Wolff, August 14, 1937.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Tamiment Archives, letters from Harry Malofsky. July 16, 1937.

⁴⁰ Tamiment Archives, letters from Harry Fisher. July 19, 1937.

It was clear to these men who the enemy was. Malofsky himself used the term fascist eight times in the span of only a few paragraphs to describe the opposing army.⁴¹ In fact, rarely is any other term used as a label for Franco's forces by Malofsky or any other soldier.

Antifascism was even so strong as to be a source of strength for the soldiers when they were particularly sentimental about home or when they were especially missing their loved ones. In a letter to his beloved, Leo Rosenthal, for example, writes:

“Honey I hope that you are trying hard to be patient – we are doing important work now and the better we work the sooner will the fascist camp crumble – *the hardship of being separated from each other is part of the sacrifice we all must make in this gigantic, decisive battle of the 'final conflict.'* Keep thinking of our victory, of what it will mean to everybody and continue your splendid work for Spain” (emphasis added).⁴²

Rosenthal had every reason to give up and go home. He was clearly longing to see his beloved, emphasizing multiple times throughout the correspondence how much he wished to see her and how much he loved her. He also describes some dismal conditions in Spain – there was a scarcity of clean water, uncomfortable straw beds, extreme heat, and of course fighting and death. Yet, despite all of these things, Rosenthal comforts himself and his lover with reassurances of the importance of beating fascism. Their separation is just “part of a sacrifice” that they need to make for the greater good: eliminating Franco and fascism, and protecting the freedom of the Spanish people. To the brave soldiers in Spain, fascism was the enemy, and defeating the horrid political system was the motivation that kept these men going. Never was there disagreement among the Brigade about what they were fighting for. So strong was their antifascist faith that it was what they turned to in order to get through times of particular distress and hardship.

What is so remarkable about these letters is that they were written while these men were physically on the battlefield or quickly scribbled while they were in between offensives. The

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Tamiment Archives, letters from Leo Rosenthal, September 2.

soldiers wrote on anything they could find – notepads if they were available, but more often than not they only had small, ripped up slips of paper from who knows where. The handwriting is sloppy, written as if they were in a rush and only had a few minutes to spare – which is likely the case. Yet despite all of those things, despite having limited time and resources, the message that these men most wanted to send back home was one rooted in antifascism. They had little space to write, but they almost always managed to include some reaffirmation of their faith in antifascism. This shows just how valuable and important their political ideology was in their lives and how powerful it was as a means to grapple with their circumstances. It was the one thing they almost always included in their letters, even when pressed with time and facing enemy fire. It is what helped them make sense of the war and of their role in the larger geopolitical picture. To them, being in Spain and battling fascism first hand was the most patriotic, American thing a man could do and they made sure to explain that in their correspondence. Among the American public back home, that sentiment was generally shared.

The Reception of the War in America

Fascism was an unpopular political philosophy in the United States, and became increasingly so throughout the late 1930s. The autocratic, unfree nature of the fascist system held little appeal for a people that believed passionately in democracy and self-determination. Although in the early years of his rule, Mussolini and his brand of fascist governance maintained a small base of fans in the United States, overall, fascism and dictatorship were seen among society as the direct antithesis to democracy.⁴³ Alpers notes that by 1936, “dictatorship was nearly universally unpopular in the United States,” even among those groups who sympathized with the idea of a dictator only a decade prior.⁴⁴ The events of the 1930s, like the Italian invasion

⁴³ Alpers, 3.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 77.

of Ethiopia in 1935 and most notably, Franco's insurgency in 1936, "made the dangers of dictatorship more vivid for Americans."⁴⁵ Alpers writes how the Spanish Civil War was especially important in forging antifascism sentiment among the American population, and he claims that "by 1939, the Spanish conflict gripped America," with "a large majority favor[ing] the Loyalists," with whom they could sympathize politically.⁴⁶

This is not to say that there wasn't a community of Franco supporters in the United States during the conflict. There was certainly a small but powerful minority of Americans who openly advocated for the fascists and lobbied the government to recognize Franco as the legitimate ruler of Spain. In the New Deal era, with the economic problems of America having seemingly no end, an elite group of individuals "idealized Franco and Nationalist Spain [as a] benevolent corporatist state."⁴⁷ They saw the Franco form of government as being less harsh than Hitler's or Mussolini's, and they viewed his ability to make decisions quickly and unilaterally as the antidote to the economic woes that seemed incurable under a democratic state.⁴⁸

One of the most scandalous pro-Franco advocates was Ellery Sedgwick, the wealthy editor of the popular publication, *Atlantic Monthly*. Utilizing his powerful position at a popular magazine, Sedgwick attempted to garner support for the fascist forces in Spain by printing different stories that demonstrated clear Franco sympathies.⁴⁹ His standing as a social elite also gave him a platform to push his agenda to some of the nation's most influential professionals and leaders. Sedgwick "recognized fascism as a proven antidote to communist infection," which is what led him to so ardently lobby for Franco.⁵⁰ He was "not interested in Franco per se, but promoted his cause because [he] sought to demonstrate the danger that international communism

⁴⁵ Ibid, 78.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 79.

⁴⁷ Chapman, 655.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 649.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 642.

posed to American national identity during a period of unprecedented insecurity.”⁵¹ Sedgwick’s close friend and fellow elite, W. Cameron Forbes, expressed similar sentiment, claiming that Franco “was the kind of God-sent leader that often appeared in a nation’s hour of crisis, as had Julius Caesar, George Washington, Giuseppe Garibaldi, Porfirio Díaz, and shall we say Mussolini?”⁵² The public was quick to criticize both Forbes’ and Sedgwick’s propaganda efforts. In response to a report praising nationalist Spain written by Sedgwick himself, 66 members of the League of American Writers wrote a letter to the publication expressing their shock and disappointment at the content, 115 educators wrote their own condemnation claiming that the facts of the piece were outrageously incorrect, and even the religious community got involved when 61 bishops drafted a public denunciation.⁵³ So bad was the censure that by 1939, after being called the “chief defender of the child-murderer Franco,” Sedgwick was forced to resign from the *Atlantic*. The immense fallback that Sedgwick received for vocally supporting Franco - despite his claims to patriotic motives of protecting America against communism - speaks to the strength of antifascist attitudes in the United States.

Another even more illustrative case of antifascism sentiment in America is the story of John Eoghan Kelly. Kelly was a vocal Franco supporter, and became the premier lobbyist for nationalist Spain in Washington, D.C. He argued that Franco was necessary to keep Spain out of the clutches of Soviets, who he believed were “intent on overturning the American system and destroying Americans’ very identity as God-fearing practitioners of capitalist endeavor.”⁵⁴ Kelly claimed that “if Americans needed proof of this, then they only had to look at Spain,” and soon,

⁵¹ Ibid, 643.

⁵² Ibid, 648.

⁵³ Ibid, 650.

⁵⁴ Chapman, Michael. *Arguing Americanism: Franco Lobbyists, Roosevelt’s Foreign Policy, and the Spanish Civil War*. Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 2011.

America, look at Spain! became his rallying cry.⁵⁵ It must be noted that his argument for supporting an anti-democratic leader despite America's purported role as defender of the free world was remarkably similar - if not verbatim - to the argument that would be posed during the Cold War era to justify support for Franco and all of the other ruthless dictators worldwide. In the 1930s, however, this view was incredibly unpopular. So outrageous were his claims, in fact, that in 1938, Kelly became a target of investigation by J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI. The judge opined that the Kelly was a foreign agent as defined by the Foreign Agents' Registration Act, because his work was subsidized by the nationalist Spanish government.⁵⁶ He was charged with essentially being a spy and promoting "the dissemination of propaganda aimed toward establishing in the United States a foreign system of government."⁵⁷ In other words, because Kelly was working as pro-Franco lobbyist, he was considered by the United States of America to be infiltrating society and trying to undermine democracy on behalf of a foreign government. John E. Kelly, an overzealous anti-communist, was charged and imprisoned for being un-American because he advocated for fascism. A decade later, when the McCarthy fervor began to grip American society, the thought of trying this man would have been laughable. Chapman describes the situation quite succinctly when he writes: "Caught in a unique historical moment, pro-Franco anti-communists of 1938 were patriots to themselves, but un-American to their state."⁵⁸ Before long, though, these men would become patriots to their state, too.

Although supporting Franco was a very unpopular stance throughout the United States at this point, these elites represent the earliest iteration of pro-fascism in America that was justified on the basis of containing communism. While Sedgwick was forced into retirement and Kelly was jailed for their beliefs, only a few decades later, those same opinions would be mainstream.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 35.

⁵⁶ United States v. John Eoghan Kelly, 51 F. Supp. 362 (D.D.C. 1943))

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Chapman, "Pro-Franco Anti-communism," 643.

Soon it would be the critics of Franco, men like the veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, who would be subject to ostracization and persecution and FBI investigation into un-American activities. During World War II, these shifting priorities begin to reveal themselves within the ranks of the United States military.

The Enemy in World War II

When World War II began, the only shift in the American public's opinion of fascism was that they were even more ardently against it than ever before. The Sedgwicks and Kellys of America were effectively silenced in the national conversation, because now a new enemy had emerged under the auspices of fascism that was more horrific than ever: Nazism. In order to convince a war-weary nation to buck up and prepare for yet another Great War, there had to be just one enemy to unite under and concentrate hatred towards. Fascism was this enemy, and it became shorthand for all of the Axis powers.⁵⁹ Never before had the nation agreed so unanimously that fascism was the greatest threat to American democracy and the survival of the free world - or so it seemed.

It is true that the American public became more united than ever in their distaste for fascism. Benjamin Alpers writes that “dictatorship became an almost entirely negative concept in American political culture.”⁶⁰ The early manifestations of support for fascist dictators like Franco and Mussolini had been justified by fear of communism and mob rule, but “over the course of the late 1930s dictatorship came to represent, even for most American conservatives, not the solution to these problems, but the very embodiment of them.”⁶¹ From the perspective of the military, however, things looked much different. It would seem that because the United States was engaged in war against fascist Germany and Italy that they would agree on fascism as

⁵⁹ Allardyce, 370.

⁶⁰ Alpers, 82.

⁶¹ Ibid, 83.

being the most pressing threat to America. However, despite the fact that the Soviet Union was officially an ally in this war, they came to dominate the concerns of the military and replace fascism as America's greatest enemy. The stories of Daniel Fitzgerald and other veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade exemplify this change.

Unsurprisingly, many of the veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade were eager to volunteer for service in World War II. They had fought fascism unsuccessfully once before in Spain, and they were excited by the second chance that the war represented. Milton Wolff, for example, wrote a telegram to President Roosevelt stating:

“We who fought the Fascist Axis in Spain proudly volunteer to march shoulder to shoulder with our fellow Americans for the final crushing of this menace to the independence and democracy of America and all peoples.”⁶²

This and other correspondence during WWII reflect the same kind of raw idealism that the Brigade members expressed while fighting in the Spanish Civil War. Clearly, antifascist sentiment played as big a role as before in their decisions to fight. In a letter to a fellow veteran about the increasingly imminent American intervention in the war, Nathan Gross expresses the same sentiment: “And if the opportunity should arise, I would like to be one of the many (I'm sure) firsts to march with the Lincoln Battalion into battle for a final showdown with Fascism.”⁶³ Gross, however, was unable to realize his dream of fighting on the front lines of the great rematch between fascism and democracy, as was the case with many of his former comrades. Even though Gross became a skilled machine gunner during the Spanish Civil War, he was assigned the position of grocery clerk upon enlisting in the army.⁶⁴ He expressed extreme unhappiness in this role, writing that he much preferred to be amidst the action. Gross tried to get a transfer, but in follow-up correspondence nearly a year later, he writes: “Sorry I can't admit

⁶² Tamiment Archives, Abraham Lincoln Brigade records, Milton Wolff.

⁶³ Tamiment Archives, letters from Nathan Gross.

⁶⁴ Ibid, October 27, 1941.

having started my second crack at fascism as yet, but I hope and believe that the day will soon arrive.”⁶⁵ That day did not come.

Another former Brigade member, Bill Aalto, experienced similar discrimination from the military. While fighting in Spain, Aalto volunteered for dangerous guerilla operations and developed valuable combat skills, rising through the ranks to become an impressive and capable lieutenant.⁶⁶ With a military record as outstanding as that of Aalto, one might think that the U.S. military would be quick to assign him to the front lines. However, in personal correspondence dated March of 1942, one year after Aalto enlisted, he reveals that he remained unassigned despite persistent requests to be sent to combat.⁶⁷ Frustrated, he complains: “I want to get at the enemy, I’m experienced, but I am a veteran of the Lincoln Brigade and so not eligible.”⁶⁸ Aalto believed that the military was so reluctant to incorporate him into their ranks because he was too antifascist for their liking, despite the war being fought against fascism. In his letter he observes: “It seems here at least, that if you fought against Hitler in Spain, you are regarded as the enemy.”⁶⁹ Aalto was never allowed to serve in combat for the length of his tenure during World War II, and was instead assigned to supervise demolition work at Camp Ritchie in Maryland until he was injured from an accidental grenade explosion and discharged from service due to disability.⁷⁰

Perhaps one of the most extreme cases of discrimination against veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade was that of Irving Fajans. Fajans decided to join the army right after the attack on Pearl Harbor, and he was at the top of his class in officer candidate school at Camp

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Tamiment Archives, Volunteer Biographies: William Aalto. Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives. Accessed April 15, 2019. <http://www.alba-valb.org/volunteers/william-oliver-aalto>

⁶⁷ Tamiment Archives, letters from William Aalto. March 6, 1942.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Tamiment Archives, Volunteer Biographies: William Aalto.

Benning.⁷¹ Despite his stellar performance in training and his impressive experience from Spain, Fajans was assigned to laundry work after graduation.⁷² In one letter addressed to Irving during this time, his friend and fellow veteran, Jerry, writes in response to what was most likely a rant about being assigned a menial post: “Of course your talents will be wasted if they let you ‘sharpen pencils’ and ‘shine shoes’ for the duration, and I still think the least they should do is give you a platoon or a company because of your experience.”⁷³ Fajans unsurprisingly requested to be transferred to combat, but following the pattern of many other Abraham Lincoln Brigade veterans, he was denied. He was persistent, following up with superiors and requesting an explanation for the denial of his requests. “I had gone up the complete chain of command as far as I could go,” he writes in one letter, “They all had the same tune. ‘You’re being held up by ‘higher command.’ We don’t know why.’”⁷⁴

Eventually, Fajans uncovered why he was being denied transfer to combat: military intelligence labelled him as a possible security threat, citing his Spanish Civil War service as the cause for alarm.⁷⁵ Growing up, Fajans harbored radically leftist views, joining the Young Communist League at age 17.⁷⁶ These views are in part what drove him to fight with the Republicans in Spain, many of whom were also quite leftist in their politics. These views are also what worried military officials during WWII. They claimed that Fajans had an “unsafe” background, referring to his service in Spain, and argued that his views were “subversive.”⁷⁷ They worried he might spread his “dangerous doctrine” to the other soldiers and that it would

⁷¹ Tamiment Archives, Volunteer Biographies: Isidore Irving Fajans. Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives. Accessed April 15, 2019. <http://www.alba-valb.org/volunteers/isidore-irving-fajans>

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Tamiment Archives, letters of discrimination, Irving Fajan.

⁷⁴ Ibid. January 1943.

⁷⁵ Tamiment Archives, Volunteer Biographies: Isidore Irving Fajans.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Tamiment Archives, letters of discrimination, Irving Fajan

somehow compromise their ability to fight.⁷⁸ So incensed at the blatant discrimination, Fajans requested a court martial to, in his words, “be given an opportunity to know the charges and a chance to clear up the almost impossible situation I find myself in.”⁷⁹ The result of this inquiry is not available in the archival material, but Fajans remained in the military until the end of the war.

The stories provided above, particularly that of Irving Fajans, sound strikingly similar to tales from the McCarthy era. They seem out of place - whereas this kind of discrimination based on political ideology is expected during the Red Scare, it defies the hegemonic narrative of the Cold War to acknowledge that it also took place during World War II. One would assume that antifascism would be the most important political prerequisite to serve on the front lines in a war against fascism. The kind of devotion that the veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade demonstrated to the cause of antifascism would seem like an asset in WWII, where maintaining a high morale was key to victory. Yet, for the mere association with parties thought to harbor communist or socialist sympathies, like the Spanish Republicans, the military became suspicious and restricted combat privileges. Even though to the American public, the Abraham Lincoln Brigade soldiers were just as American and patriotic as they were a few years prior when they were engaged in the first great fight against fascism, to the American military apparatus, they were a serious threat to national security. That is because, despite the assumption that the Cold War did not begin until after WWII, by the early 1940s the United States military was already more preoccupied with the Soviet Union than they were with the fascist enemies they were fighting in Europe. Fajan provides evidence of this in one of his letters where he describes being interviewed by a Post Intelligence Officer. He writes that he was asked “the same old standby” question - meaning it frequently came up during his experience with the military: “What would

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid, November 8, 1943.

you do if the United States went to war with Russia?”⁸⁰ Clearly, the military was more concerned with defections to their communist ally than to their fascist foe. To be a true patriot to them was not to be antifascist, but to be anticommunist. The American public may have waited until the 1950s to experience the effects of Cold War tensions, but for the veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, they were in full force much earlier.

The National Security State and Post-War Politics

After World War II, the attitudes that guided the military to discriminate against Abraham Lincoln Brigade veterans began to spread to other facets of the government. The great fascist foe of Hitler was defeated, and so a new enemy took his place: the Soviet Union. Outlined in the infamous National Security Council Report, NSC-68, the Soviet Union became the utmost threat to American democracy and the survival of the free world.⁸¹ The conflict was framed as a binary between “the idea of freedom under a government of laws,” and the “idea of slavery under the grim oligarchy of the Kremlin.”⁸² This binary wasn’t able to account for the other subverse forms of government that engendered a form of “slavery” for its people, however, an argument one could make for life under Franco. As the United States assumed the mantle of defender of freedom globally, it continued to support and legitimize Franco’s rule in Spain, an entirely unfree regime in the heart of the free world. Even though the authors of NSC-68 made it very clear that “a defeat of free institutions anywhere is a defeat everywhere,” this was only applied practically in the context of free institutions defeated by communism, not by fascism.⁸³

Rather than expressing the same kind of hostility that was often employed in relations with unfree communist countries, with respect to fascist Spain, the United States adopted a

⁸⁰ Tamiment Archives, letters from Irving Fajan. April, 1943.

⁸¹ “National Security Council Report, NSC 68, 'United States Objectives and Programs for National Security',” April 14, 1950, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, US National Archives.

⁸² Ibid, 7.

⁸³ Ibid, 8.

policy of amnesty. It is not an exaggeration to state that Franco's regime owes its survival and success almost exclusively to the United States and the advent of the national security state. Franco would not have remained in power for so long had it not been for the economic and military aid he received from America in exchange for allowing military bases to be built on his soil. This occurred in spite of the policy of diplomatic isolation that had been applied to Spain by the international community as a result of the fascist regime's sympathies towards Hitler and the Third Reich, and its assistance to the Axis powers, albeit only slightly, in WWII only a few years prior.⁸⁴ It was President Truman who initiated bilateral negotiations with the Franco regime. The first tangible result of these negotiations was the passing of the General Appropriations Bill of 1951, which gave \$100,000,000 to Spain for "economic, technical, and military assistance."⁸⁵ In 1953, a series of agreements were passed that became known as the Madrid Pact which established the creation of four strategic American military bases in Spain in exchange for significant military and economic aid to the country in amounts on par with those allotted to European allies under the Marshall Plan.⁸⁶ Not only did the United States appropriate more than \$1 billion to a fascist, unfree dictator in the name of securing freedom around the world, but the agreement also legitimized Franco among the international community.⁸⁷ With the support of the United States, Spain was able to secure entry into the premier global institutions that had initially denied its membership because of its unfree, fascist governing system. In 1955, Spain entered the United Nations.⁸⁸ In 1958, Spain joined the World Bank and the IMF.⁸⁹ Although membership into the newly-formed European Community (the precursor to the EU) and NATO was far off,

⁸⁴ Termis Soto, Fernando. *Renunciando a todo: El régimen franquista y los Estados Unidos desde 1945 hasta 1963*. Madrid: Editorial Biblioteca Nueva, 2005, pg. 17.

⁸⁵ H.R. Res. 5686, Sess. of 1951 (United States, 1951).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

these organizations did begin to enter into treaties, initiate trade, and extend diplomatic relations with Spain during the 1950s.⁹⁰ The Spanish Economic Miracle, a period of incredible economic growth within Spain that was a result of the financial assistance provided by the United States, as well as the revenues from the new trade partnerships that were also established as a consequence of American support, served to strengthen Franco's legitimacy as a competent ruler throughout the international community, all in spite of his brutal and unfree governance.⁹¹

Only twelve short years after men like John E. Kelly were persecuted and imprisoned by the American state for advocating that Franco be recognized as the true leader of Spain, the United States single-handedly achieved international acceptance for his rule. As a result of the new consensus on Americanism adopted by the government, of which the main tenet was anticommunist beliefs instead of antifascism, men like Ellery Sedgwick and John E. Kelly were no longer on trial for un-American activities. Rather, it was men like the Abraham Lincoln Brigade veterans who were now faced with accusations of being traitors to their own country. Steve Nelson, for example, was a celebrated soldier in the Spanish Civil War, but in 1950 he was charged with multiple counts of sedition by the FBI for his association with the radical left.⁹² After a long and sensationalized trial, he was convicted of attempting to overthrow the state and federal government and install a communist regime.⁹³ Nelson was guilty of nothing more than adherence to the antiquated definition of Americanism, where leftist ideology was respected, not criminalized, and where fascism was condemned, not openly celebrated.

Franco Wins the Hearts and Minds of America

It is unsurprising that the state adopted a more favorable opinion of Franco during the Cold War, since it was evident as early as World War II that defeating the Soviet Union at all

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid, 87.

⁹² Tamiment Archives, Volunteer Biographies: Steve Nelson.

⁹³ Ibid.

costs was more important to national security than maintaining the democratic principles of antifascism. What is more surprising, however, is the speed with which the American public forgot their long-standing hatred for fascism and Franco and decided to accept him as an ally. By 1948, the *Los Angeles Times*, a popular publication with slightly liberal bias, published a piece written by Bill Henry on Spain in his daily “By the Way” column that portrayed Spain as an essential ally, despite its adherence to “that indefinable thing called Fascism.”⁹⁴ Henry outlines the strategic importance of Spain in the larger narrative of the Cold War, claiming that the value of the country as a military asset outweighs any potential qualms people might have about its government. “Communists will scream bloody murder against it,” he writes, “but the people who honestly face the responsibility of making Europe strong economically and militarily believe that participation of Spain is absolutely essential.”⁹⁵ Henry articulates clearly that to be a good American, one must put the security of his nation and of Europe above any political disagreement with fascism. He claims that any potential dissenters must be communists. Only three years after the end of the war in which fascism was the great enemy, it was believing in communism that became the ultimate un-American thing to do.

By 1949, the question began to shift to whether or not Franco and his brand of fascism was even as incompatible with American values as once thought. The political environment had been so greatly altered that Democratic Senator Patrick McCarran felt confident enough in the support for Spain among his electoral base to publically assert that “all democratic, God-fearing, liberty-loving nations” wanted to lift the boycott on Spain.⁹⁶ He went on to ask “Why should we give the cold shoulder to a *great nation and a great government* at a time when this government

⁹⁴ Henry, Bill. “By the Way... With Bill Henry.” 1948. *Los Angeles Times* (1923-1995). October 10, 1948.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ “U.S. Boycott of Spain Hit by Connally.” 1949. *Los Angeles Times* (1923-1995), May 11, 1949.

is reaching out for everything that will keep us out of war” (emphasis added).⁹⁷ McCarran did not fear any backlash from his constituency, or else he would have been more conservative in his statements. Therefore, his constituency of left-leaning Democrats must have been on the same page about the “greatness” of the Spanish government, despite its fascist philosophy. The American public, struggling with how to justify the support of a man who embodied all of the things they had fought against less than a decade ago, found solace less in the argument laid out by the state that the strategic importance of Spain outweighed Franco’s unpalatable politics, and rather turned towards the reconfiguration of Franco as the good, benevolent leader of a great nation.

Nowhere is this new perspective on Franco articulated better than in an article published in the *Daily Boston Globe* in 1955. The opening line reads “Is Spain still Fascist? Was Spain ever Fascist?”⁹⁸ The author, Edward Sheehan, spends the entire article basically rewriting the history of fascism in Spain. He claims that it is unfair to label Franco as a real fascist, arguing that it is “an elastic label which Marxists reserve for all dissenters” and has been applied to “anything from private property to Bikini bathing suits.”⁹⁹ As Sheehan demonstrates in this assertion, by the 1950s, anyone who disagreed with Franco was labelled as a Marxist, as someone who was against basic American values like private property. Being anti-Franco meant being anti-American. To justify this frame of thought so as to not go back on the decades of American history during which antifascism was championed and fascism was considered to be the absolute opposite of democracy, people like Sheehan reconstructed fascism so as not to include Franco in its definition. Rather, as Sheehan writes, Franco abided by *falangism*, which during this decade becomes something different than fascism - even though during the Spanish

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Sheehan, Edward. 1955. “Falange Party Losing Ground in Spain.” *Daily Boston Globe (1928-1960)*, Mar 25.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

Civil War, they were understood by the world to be one in the same. According to Sheehan, Franco is simply “paternalistic,” and his government is most definitely “not a fascist regime.”¹⁰⁰

This new way of thinking about Franco and fascism becomes memorialized in history books. In 1953, historian James Cleugh wrote what was meant to be an objective history of Spain titled *Spain in the Modern World*. With the authority and credibility of an author and an academic, Cleugh records into history the narrative of Franco as a paternalistic leader, unassociated with fascism. In writing about Spanish politics and government, he claims argues that Franco is the kind of leader that all Spaniards want, going so far as to say that democracy is not compatible with Spanish society. “A ‘free’ Spain,” he writes, “is now generally understood by Spaniards to mean free from the dissensions of north, south and centre, as well as from ruinous ideological dispute,” and not free in the sense of self-determination.¹⁰¹ In this way, Franco is depicted as the savior who brought freedom to Spain by criminalizing political dissent, instead of being the very man who undermined democracy and eliminated freedom. According to the history produced by Cleugh, “the idea of a republic is hardly less distasteful to most Spaniards.”¹⁰² As a people, they are too simple-minded and “do not understand democracy,” but rather are only amenable to a form of government that includes a strong Church and a strong military, both of which are important aspects of Franco’s rule.¹⁰³ In this sense, Franco represents the government that is in the best interest of the Spanish people. By placing quotation marks around the term fascism or fascist throughout the book when referring to Franco, Cleugh solidifies the point that Franco was never *really* fascist the way Hitler or Mussolini was, but instead he was a misunderstood ruler who was only trying to do the best by his people.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Cleugh, James. *Spain in the Modern World*. New York City: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953, pg. 146.

¹⁰² Ibid, 156.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 241.

During the era of the Spanish Civil War, writing a book with the same assertions as Cleugh would have been criminal. Men like John E. Kelly could testify to just how un-American it was to be a Franco apologist. While the state would have been less likely to take action during World War II, the American public surely would have turned Cleugh into a social pariah. Supporting Franco was akin to supporting fascism, and that was decidedly unpatriotic during a time in which American soldiers were dying in the name of antifascism. Contemporaneous critics of Cleugh were, however, much more mild. One reviewer said of the book that although it is evident that Cleugh “has an axe to grind... he grinds gently.”¹⁰⁴ According to this reviewer, Cleugh only mildly betrays a pro-Franco agenda, despite making inaccurate and exaggerated statements about the greatness of the Franco regime and the overwhelming support of all Spaniards for their leader. Another reviewer writes that while “Mr. Cleugh allows his bias to run away with him” in the section on the civil war, “on the whole, it can be consumed with pleasure and profit.”¹⁰⁵ The section on the Spanish government receives no mention in this review. The lack of genuine critique only lends even more credibility to the novel as an accurate and objective account of Spanish history when it is evidently biased. The absence of backlash reflects the changing public opinion of Franco during the Cold War era, and the growing consensus that Franco was not *really* fascist, and that he is actually a skilled ruler. By divorcing Franco from fascism, Americans could openly support the man without supporting the institution that was associated with Nazi Germany and the Holocaust.

Totalitarianism: The New Enemy

In order to definitively distinguish Franco from his fascist contemporaries and to reshape him into a palatable ally, new vocabulary had to be developed. The enemy of the Cold War

¹⁰⁴ Pendle, George. *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 28, no. 4 (1952): 511. doi:10.2307/2604252.

¹⁰⁵ Matthews, Herbert L. 1953. “One Man’s Spain.” *The New York Times* (1923-current file). Aug 2, 1953.

wasn't fascism, but that did not mean that fascism had suddenly become an acceptable philosophy. That is why people like Cleugh and Sheehan and McCarren tried so hard to promote support for Franco by eliminating his association with fascism. If Franco was still linked to fascism, then he would always be linked with Nazism and the atrocities of Hitler. Even though there was a new enemy - communism - the American people could not just forget the old enemies of World War II, who were responsible for mass genocide and who incited such repugnancy in public culture. This struggle to find a way to forge one, singular enemy out of two separate situations precipitated the birth of the concept of totalitarianism.

Totalitarianism emerged as a concept that was equally adept at describing both Hitler and Stalin. As Abbott Gleason writes, "totalitarianism was the great mobilizing and unifying concept of the Cold War," because it "channeled the anti-Nazi energy of the wartime period into the postwar struggle with the Soviet Union."¹⁰⁶ It was perfectly tailored to fit both of America's greatest foes, while excluding more important strategic partners. Totalitarianism was understood to mark a new, separate governing philosophy that was markedly different from the old dictatorships.¹⁰⁷ Gleason explains that the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany "were dictatorships of a new and terrible kind, violent, ideologically inspired, endlessly aggressive, and possessed of extraordinary new technological means to dominate their helpless subjects utterly."¹⁰⁸

Totalitarianism became the new "other" of democracy. It was the perfectly crafted enemy to unite the American people against, and it made possible alliances with other ruthless dictators who didn't quite fit the bill of totalitarian - like Franco and many Latin American leaders. Politically, it was also employed as a tool of the right-wing in America. Gleason argues that "the concept of totalitarianism was ideal" for attacks against left-wing political adversaries "because

¹⁰⁶ Gleason, 3.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 143.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 4.

by using it, the conservatives could not only polarize the political spectrum, but also suggest that if their opponents were under the influence of Soviet Communism, they were also in favor of a state and a system that has much in common with Nazism.”¹⁰⁹ By the 1950s, the American landscape had changed so drastically that to be communist, or even just left-leaning more generally, was enough to invite accusations of pro-Nazi sympathies and un-American activity. The manipulation of political concepts like totalitarianism was incredibly effective in normalizing the extreme Cold War attitudes and policies.

Conclusions: The Implications for Historical Memory

In March of this year, the President of Spain, Pedro Sanchez, announced his intention to exhume the body of the infamous Spanish ruler, Francisco Franco.¹¹⁰ He is currently buried in the style of an honorable statesman: encased in the main altar at the Valley of the Fallen, which is a monumental memorial dedicated to the memory of the Spanish Civil War. It might seem that the exhumation of the nation’s most notorious dictator and his reburial in a less extravagant and ostentatious manner would be uncontroversial. Yet, the decision has become a polarizing national debate.¹¹¹ Why would a significant number of Spaniards fight to protect the gravesite of a man who represents the darkest days of their country’s history?

After the death of Franco in 1975, Spain struggled to rebuild itself in a more democratic image. During this time of great change and uncertainty, unity was absolutely necessary for a successful transition to democracy. As a result, the architects behind the transition ran a revisionist campaign to incite a collective political amnesia about the Franco era.¹¹² They “highlight[ed] the the economic progress under [his] watch,” and left out the violence and

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 144.

¹¹⁰ Cué, Carlos E. “El Gobierno aprueba la exhumación de Franco el 10 de junio y su traslado al cementerio de El Pardo.” *El País*. March 15, 2019.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Hahn, Jonah. “Franco’s Forgotten Crimes,” *Jacobin*. January 13, 2019.

devastation in order to “sanitize” his legacy.¹¹³ Until President Sanchez announced his intention to exhume Franco’s remains, the Spanish people never had the opportunity to contend with their past. The consequences of trying to forget this moment in time for so long is visible in the thousands of Franco supporters who have protested the decision by waving Francoist flags and giving fascist salutes at public demonstrations.¹¹⁴ This neo-Francoism is not a fringe movement, either. Members of the rightist Partido Popular, one of the major political parties in Spain – and the party of the President until recent elections – have expressed their opposition to the exhumation. In the congressional vote to approve the action, the entire party decided to abstain.¹¹⁵ The president of PP even described the action as an abuse of the law, claiming the governing party – PSOE – is actually responsible for causing harm to the people, as opposed to Franco, because of what he describes as their incapacity to govern.¹¹⁶

These neo-Francoists have forgotten the hundreds of thousands of innocent people who were killed by Franco. They have forgotten the constant state of fear that plagued society and the grave oppression of freedoms and crimes against humanity that he was responsible for. They have forgotten because history was rewritten to serve larger political interests rather than the interests of the victims. If no one is willing to talk about this painful past, then these narratives will soon be lost to time. In their place is the state-manufactured narrative, which is told and retold time and time again. It is the version of the story where Franco wasn’t actually a fascist, where his economic accomplishments were great enough to excuse the mass murder and oppression that otherwise characterized his rule. If we continue to accept this revised account of history, we will allow those Franco supporters to get stronger, to get louder, and to reach positions of power again. We will allow Americans to conveniently forget that their nation was

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ “El PP se abstendrá ante la exhumación de Franco.” *El Pais*. 27 August 2018.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

the defender of unfreedom as much as it was freedom. We will allow them to continue living their lives believing that their country was never complicit in the atrocities committed by Franco during this time, when in fact much of his tyranny could not have continued without American support. If people cannot remember the darkness of this era, they will forget why it is so important to prevent it from happening again.

That is why the stories of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade veterans are so important. The shift from praising these soldiers to villainizing them occurred over just twenty-three short years – the length of one generation. In their lifetime, this one generation saw antifascism go from being the only acceptable political ideology in America, to being cause for investigation and imprisonment. History was being rewritten practically as quickly as it was being made. Their stories serve as a warning to us all: words and concepts can too easily be manipulated to serve the political agenda of the state and to absolve the collective guilt of the public. When events are rewritten and history misconstrued, the fallout is severe. As cliché as it sounds, those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it. In this case, history has been so effectively tampered with that people aren't even fully aware they are repeating it. The neo-Francoists in Spain are just one example of this. The Abraham Lincoln Brigade, however, reminds us about the truth of this era. They remind us of the terror that fascism created, and they remind us of the fervor and zeal that antifascism inspired. They remind us who the enemy was, and they remind us why it was so important to keep fighting. The evolution of the stories of the Brigade members – from being hailed as heroes to being denounced as criminals only a decade later – serves as a poignant example of just how quickly history can be revised to adhere to the agenda of those in power. Harry Malofsky wrote in 1937 that “Our victory [over fascism] means too much” to quit, and in

2019, as authoritarian, neo-fascist leaders begin gaining ground across the world, his words ring as true as ever. Victory in the present starts with remembering the past.

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