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# The Volunteer

FOUNDED IN 1937 BY THE VOLUNTEERS OF THE LINCOLN BRIGADE.  
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June Gipson at the ALB Monument, August 22, 2021.  
Photo Nancy Tsou.

## From Madrid to Mississippi (via San Francisco)

Watt Award Winners p 10

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In Memoriam Ed Asner & Manus O'Riordan p 20



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Founded by the Veterans of the  
Abraham Lincoln Brigade

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The Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives (ALBA) is an educational non-profit dedicated to promoting social activism and the defense of human rights. ALBA's work is inspired by the American volunteers of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade who fought fascism in the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). Drawing on the ALBA collections in New York University's Tamiment Library, and working to expand such collections, ALBA works to preserve the legacy of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade as an inspiration for present and future generations.

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Dear Friends,

Given the source of our inspiration, it's perhaps no surprise that we've become used to war-based metaphors when speaking about our work. We talk about fighting fascism, about the battle for democracy, and about supporting those who are on the front lines defending human rights. When we work with middle- and high-school teachers throughout the country, we tell them how much we admire their daily work "in the trenches."

The truth is, however, that many of us on the anti-fascist Left are pacifists at heart. The same was true for those who joined the International Brigades to defend the Second Spanish Republic, as you can see in the fascinating letter exchange between two prominent pacifists that Jorge Marco has discovered in British archives (p. 16). It was also true for those who put their lives on the line in the long—and ongoing—struggle for civil and workers' rights in the American South, as Robin D.G. Kelley recalled in his trenchant contribution to ALBA's Bay Area celebration, last September (p. 17). If you haven't seen the video of that great event yet, check it out on ALBA's website or YouTube channel. It includes interviews with the activists of My Brother's Keeper, which received this year's ALBA/Puffin Award for Human Rights Activism, and a wonderful conversation between Bruce Barthol and Barbara Dane about music and progressive politics. (As editors, we can't say we didn't blush when Barbara confessed that she reads every issue of this magazine "from cover to cover.")

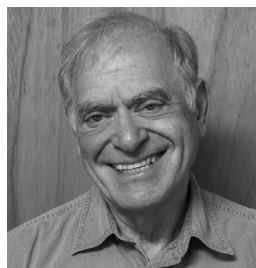
Sometimes, it turns out, very special things happen in those messy classroom trenches. This issue highlights the great work teachers and their students have been doing with ALBA's support. Angela Acosta and Patricia Smith tell us about how they've used ALBA's curriculum in their college classrooms (p. 4 and 5). And the winners of our annual George Watt Essay Award show what young people are capable of when they learn about the antifascist legacies of the past (p. 13).

That's exactly what ALBA's educational mission is about: engaging with history in a critical, politically committed way, encouraging students to think for themselves—and to think of themselves as citizens of the world. Yet that kind of critical work is under serious threat, as Steve Volk explains in his incisive column on recent legislative efforts to outlaw what the Right deceptively labels as "critical race theory" (p. 8). "What the sprint to legislate the discussion of race has made clear," Volk writes, "is that these laws are part of the Right's response to the rising movement for social justice building since the early 2010s."

So yes, the fight continues—we haven't fought our last battle yet. If we're still standing in the face of the unending attacks, it's thanks to your generous and unflagging support. We can't thank you enough for standing by our side. The future depends on it.

¡Salud!

Peter N. Carroll & Sebastiaan Faber, Editors



P.S. Please consider a donation today in support of ALBA's Teaching Institutes!

Check out the online edition of this issue at [albavolunteer.org](http://albavolunteer.org) for additional pieces, extended versions of print articles, slideshows, videos, and hyperlinked content. Help ALBA by sharing Volunteer content with your networks!

# ALBA NEWS

## Announcing: ALBA Workshops for Everyone

ALBA is pleased to announce a new initiative as part of the Perry Rosenstein Cultural Series: Six expert-led interactive workshops about salient, fascinating, or controversial aspects of the Spanish Civil War, the International Brigades, and the U.S. volunteers who joined them. Modeled on our successful institutes for high school teachers, these workshops will be open to the general audience. To ensure maximum interactivity, each 1.5-hour workshop will be capped at 20 participants, who will be asked to do a modest amount of reading or viewing beforehand (appr. two hours' worth). The workshop will combine presentation with discussion. They'll be conducted in English by two experts on the topic. They'll be held on Thursday evenings (5-6:15pm Eastern time). Participants may sign up for any workshop for a nominal fee of \$20 per person. For a discounted fee, sign up for all six workshops for \$100.

The first two workshops will take place this fall:

**November 18**, 5-6:15 pm Hemingway, the Spanish Civil War, and the Lincoln Brigade (with Peter N. Carroll and Sebastiaan Faber)

**December 16**, 5-6:15 pm Eastern: Posters of the Spanish Civil War (with Jordana Mendelson and Sebastiaan Faber)

## Bay Area Celebrates Legacy of Hope and Activism

On September 26, ALBA's San Francisco Bay Area community organized a stirring, 75-minute program that was streamed live to an audience of hundreds. Hosted by Richard Bermack, the celebration featured footage of a gathering held in late August at the Lincoln Brigade Monument near the Embarcadero, with June Gipson and Deja Abdul-Haqq of the ALBA/Puffin-Award-winning *My Brother's Keeper*, as well as a conversation about music and activism between Bruce Barthol and Barbara Dane, an address by Robin D.G. Kelley (see p. 17 in this issue), and more. You can view the video of the entire event on ALBA's website and YouTube channel. A transcription of a Barthol-Dane dialogue is included in the online edition of this issue at [albavolunteer.org](http://albavolunteer.org).

## Giles Tremlett Answers Readers' Questions

On October 28, ALBA featured an online conversation with Giles Tremlett, author of a new comprehensive history of the International Brigades. The event, which was attended live by more than close to 200 listeners, with many participating in a lively Q&A, is available as a videorecording on ALBA's website and YouTube channel.

## ALBA Authors Curricular Guide for Students in Spain

ALBA is proud to partner with the Spanish government in the preparation of a curricular guide for high-school students in Spain. Highlighting the experiences of U.S. volunteers in the International

Brigades, the guide invites readers to use these stories as an inspiration to set up their own historical-memory projects. Written in Spanish by James D. Fernández and Sebastiaan Faber, the booklet will be made available for free to any student or teacher in the world.

## New Online Workshop for K-12 Teachers

In partnership with the Collaborative for Educational Services, ALBA will offer a new iteration of its successful five-week online workshop for K-12 teachers anywhere in the world. The course will meet weekly on Thursday evenings between March 10 and April 7. Registration deadline: February 24. For more details, go to [www.collaborative.org/events-and-courses/america-and-world-fascism](http://www.collaborative.org/events-and-courses/america-and-world-fascism).

## News from the Tamiment

We do not know at this point what access will look like in the fall, and are awaiting further information from the University administration, who have set policies on access throughout the pandemic based on safety concerns for the community. In the meantime, we can offer some remote reference and research opportunities, as well as reproduction services. If you are interested in these, please let us know by emailing the general [special.collections@nyu.edu](mailto:special.collections@nyu.edu) email address with information as to what you are interested in.

We are excited to announce the launch of our new digital exhibit, *No Turning Back: Ten Years After Occupy*. We believe that the project will be of great interest to the ALBA community, as Occupy was an important turning point for the history of social activism across the globe. The exhibit was curated by Shannon O'Neill, Curator for Tamiment-Wagner Collections, and Mike Koncewicz, Michael Nash Archivist & Ewen Center Program Coordinator, with input from Web Archivist Nicole Greenhouse. It was designed by Marii Nyrop using Wax. Michael Stasiak and DLTS imaged the oversized materials in the exhibit. This exhibit would additionally not be possible without support from NYU Special Collections, Archives and Collections Management, and the Barbara Goldsmith Conservation and Preservation Department. We give our gratitude to the Occupy Wall Street Archives Working Group, John Penley, and Robert Reiss, all of whom contributed the collection material upon which this exhibit draws. We appreciate their trust in our ability to responsibly care for, and provide access to, their records. The exhibit is dedicated to the memories of Faith Laugier and David Graeber. We are hosting a wide range of virtual programs, with the hopes of bringing back in-person events in 2022. Feel free to email us at [tamiment.wagner@nyu.edu](mailto:tamiment.wagner@nyu.edu) if you have an idea for a book talk.

—Michael Koncewicz

# TEACHING FRANCOISM IN TIMES OF COVID

By Angela Acosta

**How might instructors teach the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and Franco dictatorship (1939-1975) to students who have little prior knowledge of the period? A participant in ALBA's teaching workshops explains.**

How can we immerse US-based students in literary worlds that depict the scarcity of postwar Barcelona, as in Carmen Laforet's novel *Nothing*, or the complicated gender roles of the later years of the dictatorship, as in Miguel Delibes's *Five Hours with Mario*? How has the pandemic changed the way instructors address these topics in class? I first grappled with these questions as a participant in "America and World Fascism: From the Spanish Civil War to Nuremberg and Beyond," the five-week professional development workshop run online by ALBA and the Collaborative for Educational Services in the summer of 2020.

The workshop allowed me to inhabit an in-between space as a graduate student gaining subject-matter expertise and an instructor aiming to make the Spanish Civil War and dictatorship accessible to students. I first experienced the weekly Zoom activities—such as analyzing letters from members of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade—from the perspective of a student. I then turned these learning experiences into future lesson plans during lively group discussions with colleagues across different disciplines in K-12 teaching and higher education. I especially enjoyed the discussion conducted in Spanish about teaching poems by Rafael Alberti and Miguel Hernández. For me, the most meaningful take-away from the workshop

was the strong commitment shared by the participants to empower students to recognize the humanity of the victims and survivors of the war and dictatorship.

Soon after the summer workshop, I found myself applying what I'd learned, as Dr. Eugenia Romero and I each took on an asynchronous online section of Spanish Culture During Francoism at The Ohio State University. Taught in Spanish, the course introduces students to the literature, film, and music of the Franco dictatorship. We prepared a series of prerecorded lectures and presentations and shared these materials with both class sections. Students met with us in small groups on Zoom twice during the semester. They also produced weekly lesson checks, posted in online discussions using the Canvas Learning Management System, wrote two film reactions, met with classmates on Zoom, and submitted a final paper on a topic and text(s) related to the course. Although the students wrestled with the uncertainty and stress associated with living through the pandemic, their awareness of living a historic moment also piqued their interest in reading stories of survival from the darkest moments of the dictatorship.

We began the semester reading Arturo Pérez-Reverte's *La Guerra Civil contada a los jóvenes* (*The Spanish Civil War Told to Young People*) as part of an introductory

*"Students' awareness of living a historic moment—the pandemic—also piqued their interest in reading stories of survival from the darkest moments of the dictatorship."*

unit on the Spanish Civil War. The illustrations and short vignettes in the book prompted students' questions and curiosities, setting a course for the topics we would cover later in the semester. After talking about the historical context and inconsistencies of Francoist ideology, we examined the impact of the war and dictatorship on the lives of ordinary people represented in novels and films. We ended the semester reflecting on the ghosts of the war and dictatorship in more recent films like Guillermo del Toro's *The Devil's Backbone*.

Reading about suffering was difficult. The titular short story in Alberto Méndez's *The Blind Sunflowers* left a lasting impression on the students, who could sense Ricardo's fear and frustration living sequestered in a closet as a *topo*—a person who hid from Francoist repression during the postwar years. While I was hesitant to





include this text in the course, my students were more than willing to engage with unsettling stories like these in thoughtful discussions and group videos. As the pandemic rages on, Méndez's stories help us recognize human perseverance and the daily challenges of life in isolation. His close-up views of life in postwar Spain gave us an opportunity to reflect on our own quarantine routines and efforts to keep

our communities and loved ones safe. My students also enjoyed watching Luis Lucia's 1961 musical film *An Angel Has Arrived* and discussing folklore and child stars. We thought critically about how Marisol, the film's young protagonist, teaches her family members how to be productive members of Francoist society using catchy flamenco inspired songs and dances. My favorite question from a lesson check was

asking students to share how they would direct a movie representing the ghosts of the war and dictatorship. They not only had great ideas for plots and settings, but they also practiced using a range of Spanish vocabulary and grammar.

In addition to introducing students to the major actors and events of the Spanish Civil War and dictatorship, I also wanted them to visualize daily life under the Franco regime. In my lectures, I focused on details like the poor quality of the soup Andrea, the main character in Laforet's novel during the "hunger years," eats at a restaurant. Apparently mundane details like these, I tell my students, prove especially important for uncovering lives and works excluded from dominant historical and cultural narratives—including women and members of the LGBTQ community.

Since we didn't have regularly scheduled class meetings, I met students in small group "coffee talks" to see how they were responding to course topics in real time. It turned out they were connecting what they learned in other Spanish or history classes with the context of the Spanish Civil War and dictatorship. (In fact, I ended up learning more about international politics and diplomacy from them!)

Teaching an upper-level class online was a lot of work for instructors and students alike. The amount of material was ambitious, and the lack of regular meetings made it difficult for students to pace their reading and viewing of the course materials. For the second half of the semester, we decided to adjust the workload to give students more time to develop their final paper. While not everyone read and watched the entirety of the texts on the syllabus, my students were able to approach each lesson with empathy for characters who, like them, were navigating life on the cusp of adulthood. Just as those in Spain assumed that the war would be over by Christmas of 1936, so too did students expect the pandemic to be a distant memory by 2021. The greatest lesson learned from teaching during the pandemic is that we have the tools to represent and participate in the history unfolding around us daily in our art and activism. ▲

*Angela Acosta is a Ph.D. Candidate in Iberian Studies and Graduate Teaching Associate at The Ohio State University.*

# HOW TO TEACH A SPANISH LANGUAGE CLASS ON THE CIVIL WAR AND THE TRANSITION

By Patricia Smith

Spanish teachers in the ALBA workshops often ask whether they can use the rich and complex material about twentieth-century Spanish history in language classes, even at beginning or intermediate levels. The short answer is: Absolutely!

For the past decade, I have taught a sixth-semester course at Tufts University that deals with the war and the Transition and that can easily be adapted for higher or lower levels, as well as AP courses. I usually begin the course by dividing students into groups and asking them to reflect on an impactful event from their past. As an example, I relate the following anecdote from my own life. In my Junior Year Abroad, with St. Lawrence University in 1968-69, I lived with a very religious family in Madrid who had high praise for Francisco Franco. As it turned out, the mother of the family had lost two brothers during the war, one on either side. I was 20, very naïve, and I had never read much on history or politics, let alone thought about social class differentiation. We lived in the wealthy Barrio of Salamanca. My Spanish host father proudly held a title of Marquis. His wife, as *Marquesa*, often took me shopping with her. She thought she deserved to go to the head of the line in any neighborhood store. One day, embarrassed by her rudeness, I asked her why she did not wait on line with everyone else. Indignant, she scoffed: "Why, I'm nobility!"

My Spanish family made clear I was not to ask too many questions. My teachers at St. Lawrence also cautioned me. As a result, I would not realize the true nature of the Franco regime until I researched Spanish history, many years later. In 1988, I began to coordinate exchange programs with a public high school in Madrid. I went to Madrid with students ten times, always in February. Even then, historians advised me not to talk about the Civil War. I followed their advice while in Spain, but when I returned to my teaching assignment at Braintree High School, MA, in the early 1990's, I discovered ALBA and the *Volunteer*. In the late 90s, I took my AP classes to Tufts to see ALBA's poster exhibit, *Shouts from the Wall*.

I was hooked. After my retirement from Braintree, I became a part-time teacher at Tufts, where sixth-semester courses can focus on one topic as long as they include level-appropriate grammar work. I immediately saw the opportunity for a course focused on the war and the Transition, which I've taught every year since then.

I have adapted the course frequently to incorporate current events. In 2017, the Tisch College at Tufts encouraged us to design courses that would allow undergraduates to engage in research involving civic or historical education. In the course's

***"My students develop their proficiency in Spanish while engaging with important questions in ways that I, as an undergraduate in the 1960s, never could."***

current iteration, students compare Spain's 2007 Memory Law with a similar law or event in another country. The students do independent research, maintain a diary which they hand in three times during the semester, and at the end of the semester all participate in a roundtable discussion in which they present about reparations, controversies, museum interventions, and other ways of dealing with the past. I ask them to reflect on how they learned history in high school, and how they think the methods of teaching history should be adapted in Spain, the other country they researched, and the United States. (For a recent syllabus of the course, see the *Volunteer's* online edition at [albavolunteer.org](http://albavolunteer.org).)

As the student reflections included below indicate, the course has not only helped students develop their proficiency in Spanish but allowed them to engage with important questions at a broader level in ways that I, as an undergraduate in the 1960s, never could. ▲

*Patricia Smith teaches at Tufts and is a consultant for the College Board. You may email her with questions or comments at [patricia.smith@tufts.edu](mailto:patricia.smith@tufts.edu).*

*"My grandfather served in Franco's navy in the late 1940s and I always knew that my grandparents grew up under the Franco regime, but it was never something they talked about or something I had learned about in high school. This class gave me an opportunity to not only learn about a fascinating, complicated part of Spain's history, but to gain insight into my own family's history. In March 2019 I had the opportunity to present on historical memory in both Spain and Germany at the Worcester State Undergraduate Language Conference. I plan to move to Spain next year upon graduation and am considering doing research focusing on historical memory." — Hannah San Sebastian*





"It is because of this curriculum, in conjunction with other courses about fascism, that I have decided on a major in political science and intend to study abroad in a Spanish-speaking country. Learning about historical memory changed my view on the ways large-scale traumas affect different nations across the globe. It has also made me more understanding and empathetic towards the many different responses to such traumas." — Maeve Hagerly

"I enrolled in the course with absolutely no prior knowledge of the Spanish Civil War, and quickly realized how many valuable aspects and layers there were to learn. My eyes were opened to the fact that this war, and countless others, weren't taught in my standard high school, for some reason I still do not understand. I was even more shocked to learn that currently, a significant portion of Spanish people themselves are not fully educated on this key part of their history. This course has made me consider what history books and teachers don't tell us—events and perspectives that they purposely don't want to make public. This was the first time I felt I was part of a conversation in Spanish that truly had meaning in the real world, and I absolutely loved it. Learning more about the rich and complex Spanish culture in general made me realize that I want to major in Spanish cultural studies." —Elitsa Ilieva

"The idea of historical memory was particularly impactful. Once I learned more about how historical narratives are crafted, I began to use that lens to examine some of our own

history. This became invaluable in the summer of 2020, as the nation took a small step towards reckoning with past and present racial injustices. The events led me to form a diversity, equity, and inclusion group in my community, which has since joined my school district's administration to address bias. Professor Smith's class and our study of the Spanish Civil War ... inspired me to continue my pursuit of social justice and to major in Spanish Cultural Studies before beginning medical school." —Alex Martin

"The intimate study of the Spanish Civil War through the work of historians, writers, leaders and other figures reveals some of the darkest truths of our human existence. ... A swirl of factors before the war—including increasing tribalism, factions and hate—led to unspeakable crimes. The Spanish Civil War and particularly its aftermath highlights how hard it is for countries to come to terms with acts like these. ... In *A Problem from Hell*, Samantha Powers tells the story of Raphael Lemkin, who created the word genocide in 1944. Let that sink in: The word we came up with to define these acts did not exist till 1944. ... It is an immense task to track, prevent, and address genocide. ... I know one thing: this is a task that we as humans must take up no matter how much we feel unprepared and scared of missteps." —Michael Wrede

*To read more student reflections, see the online edition of this issue at [albavolunteer.org](http://albavolunteer.org).*

## HUMAN RIGHTS COLUMN

# Teachers in the Trenches: What's Behind the Attack on Critical Race Theory?

By Steve Volk

CRT is a curious target for legislators and school board members, if only because it is not taught at the K-12 level and only rarely to undergraduates. Today, it's serving as a red herring to silence the discussion of race and racism across classrooms in the U.S.



In recent months, Republican legislatures in approximately thirty states have sprinted to pass legislation which seems intent on banning teachers from discussing race, racism, and what has been termed “divisive” concepts. Also forbidden: anything that makes (white) students feel “discomfort” or a “sense of responsibility” for the past. These efforts have been packaged as an opposition to “critical race theory” (CRT), an academic framework that views racism as ingrained in law and other modern institutions. But CRT is a red herring that functions as a catch-all term to include any consideration of race and racism (“multiculturalism,” “wokeism,” “identity politics,” “culturally responsive teaching”)—any hint that “racial inequities in the United States are anything but fair outcomes, the result of choices made by equally positioned individuals in a free society” or any attempt to offer an unembellished history of the United States.

CRT is a curious target for legislators and school board members, if only because it simply is not taught at the K-12 level and only rarely to undergraduates. It emerged in the legal studies field in the 1970s, spreading to other academic disciplines, providing a framework for understanding “the many ways that governmental entities and private interests have put racial ideologies into practice, as Jacqueline Jones put it. But as the increasing diversification of the U.S. population and the unprecedented calls for social justice sparked by the murder of George Floyd in May 2020 left the Right searching for a response, “critical race theory” was at once vague, all-encompassing and suggestively threatening. Fox News, which virtually ignored CRT through mid-2020, referenced it over 1,900 times between June and August 2021.

To understand how opposition to “critical race theory” became the target of state-level education legislation, we must consider the role that grievance-oriented, violent grassroots protest has come to play in rightwing tactics. Much as the Tea Party used townhall meetings to undermine the Affordable Care Act, the Right is now leveraging its opposition to “CRT” to organize at the local level, ensuring that the base remains ginned up and angry. In late September, the National School Boards Association noted the escalation of “[t]hreats of violence and acts of intimidation” directed at school officials across the country and pleaded with the Biden Administration to deploy “existing statutes, executive authority,” and “other extraordinary measures” to combat what it characterized as domestic terrorism. The bills speeding through state legislatures can tell us something about the way in which violence-prone, anti-democratic forces are (once again) gathering behind the flag of a whitewashed, nationalistic version of this country’s history.

In 1974, for example, disputes over the adoption of new literature textbooks in Kanawha County, West Virginia, quickly turned violent. Opponents, labeling the new texts “anti-American,” shot up empty school buses and classrooms, bombed the school-board building, and threw rocks at parents who didn’t adhere to their boycott. While the new texts were ultimately adopted, the protest helped launch the modern homeschooling and Christian-school movements and, as Adam Laats explains, propelled the Heritage Foundation from its very modest beginnings into the vast conservative policy organization that is fueling today’s school board conflagrations. The same response—violence and a retreat



from public schools—marked many white parents’ response to *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954.

Today’s attempts by state legislators to intervene in the classroom recalls the anti-Communism of the post-war period, attempts in the 1920s to ban the teaching of evolution, and the post-Reconstruction imposition of segregation in the nation’s schools. It’s no coincidence that the laws pouring out of statehouses look like each other. Most are written by the Right’s “bill-mills,” including the American Legislative Exchange Council, the America First Policy Institute, and the Alliance for Free Citizens. Fundamental to all of them is the attempt to reassert control: control over Black lives, control over the political process, and, at the level of schools, control over the discussion of race and racism in the classroom. Most bills include language aimed at discouraging or prohibiting teachers from making “race or gender salient in conversations about power and oppression.” Some states directly ban teaching the *New York Times*’ 1619 Project, a collection of essays examining the role of race and slavery in the country’s origins (Michigan and Missouri); some prohibit outside speakers from addressing these topics (Kansas). Some are preventing teachers from promoting social justice for a race, gender, or social class (Arkansas, South Dakota), while others sanction the use of specific materials and resources that foreground the struggles of marginalized groups (Missouri).

Most of the bills forbid the teaching of so-called “divisive concepts,” as first defined in a September 2020 executive order by then President Trump. These prohibit raising the idea that the United States is fundamentally racist or sexist, as well as touching on any subject that would cause an individual to “feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress on account of his or her race or sex.” The legislation passed in Arizona, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Texas specifies that these ideas cannot be made “part of a course.” Arizona’s law would ban teachers from suggesting, among other things, that an individual by the virtue of their race or sex “bears responsibility for actions committed by other members of their race, ethnic group or sex.” According to its co-author, Rep. Chuck Wichgers (R-Muskego), the legislation which recently passed the Wisconsin State Assembly would ban such concepts as “Social Emotional Learning,” “Diversity, Equity and Inclusion,” culturally responsive teaching, anti-racism, conscious and unconscious bias, culturally responsive practices, diversity training, equity, microaggressions, multiculturalism, patriarchy, restorative justice, social justice, systemic racism, white privilege, white supremacy and “woke,” among others.

Truth be told, if legislators were really concerned that students not “feel discomfort” because of their race or sex, they would have sought means to protect Black, and other marginalized students in their schools long before. Rather, what the sprint to legislate the discussion of race has made clear is that these laws are part of the Right’s response—also highlighted by its voter suppression laws—to the rising movement for social justice building since the early 2010s and reaching an astonishing peak following Floyd’s murder. Whether or not the legislation passes or courts ultimately uphold their constitutionality, their purpose is to intimidate and, ultimately, silence. Teachers in Arizona, for example, face the suspension or revocation of their teaching certificate if they violate the law. “If you pass a bill that makes educators scared to talk about stuff, because you can potentially go after their license,”

## *"Fox News, which virtually ignored CRT through mid-2020, referenced it over 1,900 times between June and August 2021."*

noted Chris Kotterman, director of governmental relations for Arizona’s School Board Association, “then they’re not going to walk up to that line. And that’s what the proponents of the bill actually want.” In Wisconsin, proponents of the pending legislation recommended that teachers be filmed or audio recorded so the content of their lessons could be reviewed in the “same way police body cameras are used.”

An essential part of the attempt to silence the discussion of race and racism in the U.S. is the demand that American history be represented as exemplary and unblemished. Teachers are forbidden from teaching that slavery is anything else than a “betrayal of America’s founding values” (Texas). A bill in Michigan prohibits the teaching of any theories deemed to be “anti-American.” Missouri bans materials from the [Howard] Zinn Education Project. The Heritage Foundation, a significant generator of these bills, insists that CRT “seeks to undermine the foundations of American society.” But “knowledge of the past exists to serve the needs of the living [which] includes an honest reckoning with all aspects of that past,” as the American Historical Association recently argued, along with 147 organizations that oppose the imposition of gag rules in the nation’s classrooms.

At the present time, the courts, State Boards of Education, local school boards and teachers are sorting themselves on both sides of the legislation. Arizona’s Supreme Court will take up the constitutionality of that state’s measures in early October and many admit that in Arizona and elsewhere the stunning vagueness of the legislation will make it unenforceable. But crafting legislation to enhance learning and protect children was never the Republican legislators’ intention. Forbidding the study of race, as they are attempting, will not make racism and its legacies disappear. Events in the “real world” disclose a different reality. In the real world, superintendents and teachers have been harassed and fired for supporting anti-racist efforts in their schools, moderate school boards have been replaced by slates of “patriots,” and educators (and their families) have been threatened with physical harm.

These measures may keep the Republican base in a state of high dudgeon, but they won’t quash the demands of young people to learn—or Black people from demanding their rights. As Jania Hoover, a high school social studies teacher in Texas, wrote in July, “Young people want to understand the world around them, and it’s my job to do my absolute best to help them make sense of things, even if it’s just by providing them with knowledge of past events that created the inequalities they witness on a regular basis...I want kids to learn about these systems and work to change them.”▲

*Steve Volk is Professor Emeritus at Oberlin College, where he taught Latin American history and museum studies. He writes about education and democracy at <https://steven-volk.blog>, where you can find a longer version of this column.*

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# WATT AWARD RECOGNIZES NEW GENERATION OF STUDENTS

By Aaron B. Retish

This year, the jury of the Watt Essay contest recognized a group of excellent papers written by high school, undergraduate, and graduate students from around the world.

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Even though the pandemic continues to affect education and restrict access to archives and libraries, the next generation of scholars of the Spanish Civil War and anti-fascism is producing creative and innovative studies that break new grounds of research. The Watt jury was impressed by how many students are re-examining the role of women, gender, and race in the Spanish Civil War and how they place the fight against fascism in Spain as a central chapter in the longer story of the anti-fascist movement.

There were two recipients of the pre-collegiate award. Justin Murdock of Stuyvesant High School in New York wrote about propaganda from competing political interests in Spain in his wonderful essay "The Omnipresent Weapon." Justin's essay came out of a class on the Spanish Civil War taught by Mr. David Hanna. The second recipient of the award, Bismah Shaikh, from Houston, Texas wrote a taut, well measured poem about the heroics of Jesse Owens at the 1936 Berlin Olympics. It was there where Owens won four gold medals in an event scripted to show the superiority of Aryans. As Bismah shows, this was an early anti-fascist action and was part of Owens overcoming racism and classism in the United States as well.

The undergraduate and graduate submissions showed cutting-edge research in exceptional essays and chapters of dissertations. Two undergraduate essays stood out among a large and impressive group of submissions. Morgan Davis of New York University presents a complex study of the magazine *Y Revista de la Mujer*, a publication of the Women's Section of the Falange in an excerpt of her senior honor's thesis. In "Female Leadership in Francoist Spain: National-Catholic Restrictions and Female Solidarity in the *Sección Femenina's Y Revista de la Mujer*," Davis examines how the publication presented a retrograde idea of femininity but also shows how the magazine presented a safe space for women, which was relatively progressive for Francoist Spain. Samuel Orloff of the University of Pennsylvania also submitted a section of his senior honor's thesis. In the very well-researched paper "The Initial Media Responses to the Battle of Cable Street," Orloff describes the lasting political and cultural significance of the 1936 Battle for Cable Street in which Britain's Union of Fascists tried to march through the largely Jewish section of East End London and were stopped by local anti-Fascists.

Graduate students from both sides of the Atlantic also submitted chapters of their theses, many of them based on exciting archival research. The pool was so deep that the jury decided to award two prizes. Kevin Antonio Aguilar of University of California-San Diego's "Ambassadors of the Revolution: Anarchist Diplomacy during the Spanish Civil War" presents what one member of the jury called "uncharted territory" in the history of the Spanish Civil War, specifically Aguilar's study of the relationship among Anarchists, the Mexican government, and the exile community. The relationship was undermined in part by how Spanish radicals brought pre-conceived notions of race and class in Mexico. Based on research in archives across Europe and in Mexico, Aguilar's subtle analysis of the balance of diplomatic relations makes a wonderful read. Our second recipient is Katherina Seibert of the University of Vienna, who explores how the Military Health Service under Franco tried to control nurses under its control. Seibert challenges the idea that Nationalist nurses acted conservatively. She shows that female officials overseeing Nationalist nurses had to negotiate the reality of romantic interludes by nurses with Catholic morality. Based on excellent archival research, Seibert shows that Nationalist nurses, away from the eyes of their family, did not always adhere to Nationalist ideology.

The jury for the Watt award was comprised of Angela Giral (Columbia University), Joshua Goode (Claremont Graduate University), Gina Hermann (University of Oregon), Jo Labanyi (New York University) and Aaron Retish (Wayne State University). The George Watt Memorial Essay award honors the memory of Abraham Lincoln Brigade veteran George Watt (1914-1994), a social worker, writer, and lifelong activist central to the creation of ALBA.

*Aaron B. Retish, who teaches at Wayne State University, serves as Treasurer on ALBA's Board of Governors*

## Pre-collegiate awards

**Justin Murdock, "The Omnipresent Weapon"**

*No Pasarán! Bombs rained upon the Iberian Peninsula – whether literal ones from the piercing Condor Legion or metaphorical*



as propaganda posters plastered streets. From Barcelona to Bilbao, both were incessant throughout the Spanish Civil War. The Spanish people witnessed the first of many things: a vast international conflict succeeding the Great War, a major political ideological clash on the European stage, and the most infamous civilian bombings to date. With all that came the aggressive use of a deadly, increasingly popular weapon: propaganda. “The Omnipresent Weapon” makes a thorough examination of the propaganda used by the two Spanish factions, the Republicans and Nationalists, by analyzing the intentions and artistic decisions made in the posters. Through such, considering modern political corruption and strife, readers may reflect upon the true gravity of propaganda usage upon Spanish society in the civil war and global conflicts to come.

### Bismah Shaikh, “The Weight of Actions”

This poem is a tribute to the legendary Jesse Owens who is a role model for many people even today. He conquered injustice and racism with pure grit and perseverance, and this is primarily what I want to highlight with my poem. His actions are a beacon of hope for all those to come since he stood up against the thousands that were hell bent on bringing him down. If this incident emphasizes the extent to which racial injustice goes back into history, then Owens’s feat signifies that anything is possible— especially victory against discrimination.



Spanish Civil War poster.

## The Weight of Actions

Big word going around:  
The Olympics.  
Four medals whose rattle drowned  
The jeers of these Critics,  
Stayed right on track, Never strayed too far-right,  
Bolted straight through the finish line,  
Left the ethnocentric Reich unaligned.  
Boy raised in Alabama,  
Derailed the Fascist drama,  
Outran the racists,  
Usurped the classists,  
Monochromatically televised,  
Person of color outshone worldwide.  
“No words, just run straight ahead,”  
Jesse Owens corrected the misled.

## Undergraduate Awards

### Morgan Davis “Female Leadership in Francoist Spain: National-Catholic Restrictions and Female Solidarity in the Sección Femenina’s Y Revista de la Mujer”

*Y Revista de la Mujer*, first published as *Y Revista de la Mujer Nacional-Sindicalista* and later as *Y Revista Nacional-Sindicalista de la Mujer*, was one of several magazines published by the Women’s Section (Sección Femenina) of the Falange. It was published for the first time in February 1938, during the Spanish Civil War, and for the last time in 1946. The magazine was printed in San Sebastian, in the Basque region of Spain, in 1938 under Nationalist control. In reading the issues of *Y Revista de la Mujer*, I have been attentive to the magazine’s role in enforcing retrograde notions of femininity, but I have also been open to recognizing the existence in its pages of features that I was not expecting to find, as the magazine offered the opportunity for women to create a community in print together, opening up some space for differences among female readers under the regime. In my conclusion, I ask how these unexpected findings may affect our understanding of the Sección Femenina.



Jesse Owens at the 1936 Berlin Olympics.

Samuel Orloff, "Initial Media Responses to the Battle of Cable Street"

In the history of interwar British anti-fascism, the 4 October 1936 Battle of Cable Street stands out as an especially significant event. The 1936 clash transpired after anti-fascists descended on the streets of London's East End to block Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists (BUF) from provocatively marching through the heavily Jewish district. Some scholars have suggested that the importance of the event was overstated. By looking to the press coverage of the Battle of Cable Street that was published in ideologically diverse newspapers, it is clear that the event was understood by contemporary observers to be of great importance.

The media responses to the clashes of 4 October also highlight the extent to which the Battle of Cable Street took place in a broader domestic and international context. By situating the events in the East End alongside contemporary events in Britain and Continental Europe, it is possible to identify continuities with the anti-fascism of the early 1930s. Finally, the often ideologically motivated differences in the representation of the Battle of Cable Street in the various newspapers demonstrates the emergence of incipient memories in the immediate aftermath of the incident. As the clashes at Cable Street drifted into the realm of historical memory,

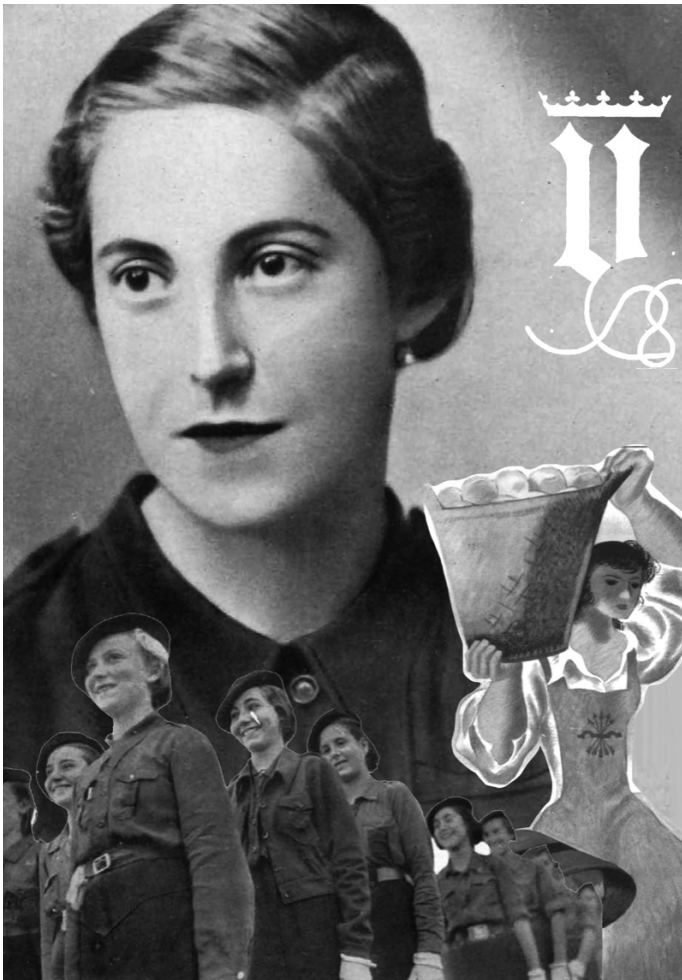
these contrasting narratives solidified into major differences in the interpretation of interwar anti-fascism.

## Graduate Award

### Kevin Antonio Aguilar "Ambassadors of the Revolution: Anarchist Diplomacy during the Spanish Civil War"

This chapter of my dissertation looks at Spanish anarchists' efforts to build formal and informal ties with the Mexican Left and the administration of President Lázaro Cárdenas during the Spanish Civil War. Along with being one of the only countries to provide financial aid and arms to Loyalist forces during the Civil War, Mexico was the sole country to support factions seeking to initiate a parallel social revolution during the conflict. I look at how representatives of the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) and the Federación Anarquista Ibérica (FAI) solidified these alliances through cultural events, the radical printed press, and speaking tours, where they professed the strong racial and class solidarities between both countries laboring classes.

Yet as this chapter demonstrates, the task of fostering an anti-colonial and internationalist worldview proved far more complicated than mere salutations to global social revolution.



Photomontage cover of the magazine *Y* published by the Sección Femenina



Francoist health service during the war, photo Archivo General Militar de Ávila (CF195.9.8).



Mexican ambassador to Spain Adalberto Tejeda visiting the Instituto de Puericultura y Maternología "Luisa Michel" in Barcelona, April 27, 1938.]



## ***"The submissions showed cutting-edge research in exceptional essays."***

While Spanish radicals lambasted the inequalities perpetuated by centuries of colonialism, they also faced criticism due to their racialized interpretations of Mexican society and class conflict. Despite such obstacles, the persistence of Spanish anarchist intermediaries to reconcile such contradictions provides insight into the difficult and complicated efforts made to sustain relations between the two country's revolutionary movements.

### **Katherina Seibert, "'I married off a paramedic.' Negotiating Francoism in the frontline hospital"**

Establishing the image of Spain returning to be a society of order, honor and complementary gender relations was a complex negotiation during the Francoist nation-building. This process started already during the Civil War which disrupted Spain's democratic experience of the interwar period. To create the Francoist society a spectrum of integrative measures was applied which ranged from violence, repression, and social and physical exclusion against supporters of the Second Republic, to the distribution of privileges, positions of power, and access to wealth

for Franco's supporters. In this paper, I examine the Military Health Service of the Francoist army as an arena to study the beginnings of these negotiations which were set during the Civil War. As an institution where men worked with women, the Military Health Service turned into a social space where several levels of social relations were renegotiated, like the distribution of labor, gender relations, gendered relationships of power. In the military hospitals and frontline sickbays, discrepancies surfaced between the official propaganda images and the way how the medical staff lived up to it. Parting from a paradigmatic letter from the frontlines about inappropriate relationships among military hospital staff, I analyze how Francoist discourses on honor and order were defied by the doctors, nurses, and auxiliaries; how sexuality challenged the Francoist project of statehood; and how the armed forces reluctantly opened their gates for the presence of female staff. ▲

Visit the *Volunteer's* online edition for the full text of the award-winning essays.



Cable Street Mural, 2020. Photo Hjamesberglen. CC BY 4.0.

# Faces of ALBA: Peter Glazer

By Aaron Retish

Peter Glazer is a world-renowned director and playwright and a professor of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. He sits on the ALBA board and is an active leader in ALBA's Bay Area programs. Peter's father was the folk singer Tom Glazer.

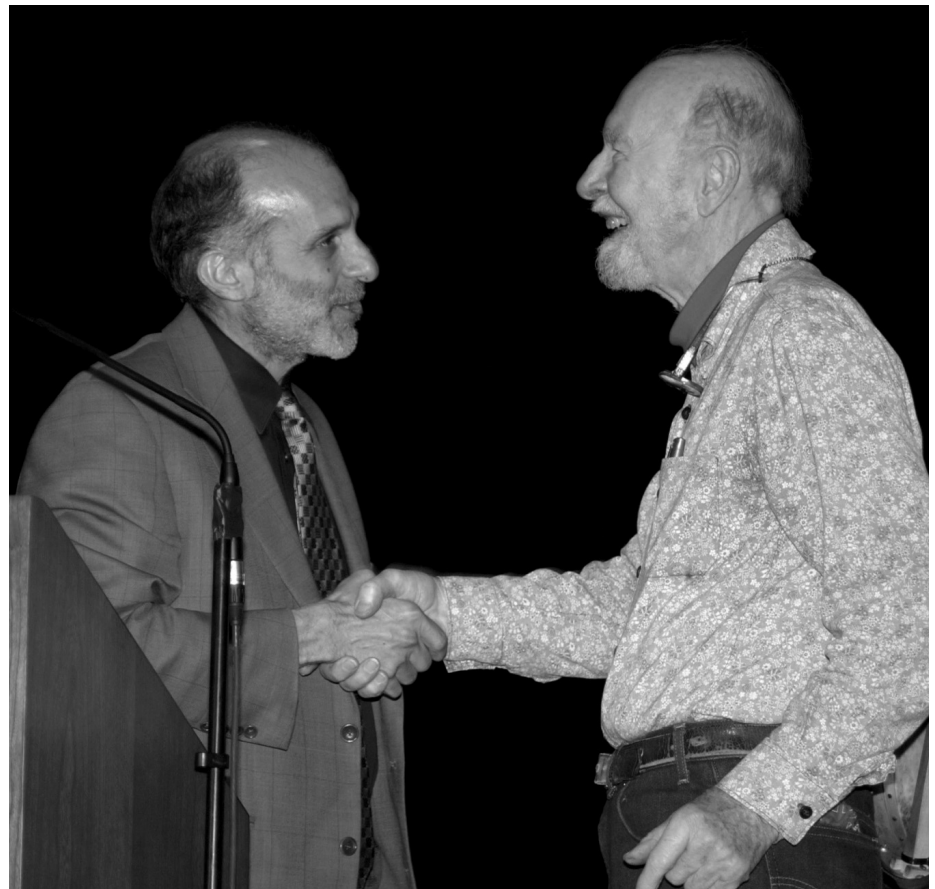
***You have written several plays and musicals about the Spanish Civil War. There are so many books, stories, and movies on the war. What does theater allow you to convey in telling the story of the Spanish Civil War that those other media cannot? Do you try to evoke a certain feeling or impart a message in your works?***

Theater makes the past present in a particular way. For a somewhat hidden history like that of the Spanish Civil War, there is something immediately powerful for an audience to experience and share space with a cast of actors who have immersed themselves in this story and material. That's especially true with a story as powerful as this one. In the moment of performance, everyone experiences it together. This piece was a collaboration with composer Eric Peltoniemi, who I met when he musical-directed *Woody Guthrie's American Song* in Minneapolis. Eric and I discovered we had a lot in common, including a love for the passionate music that came out of the Spanish Civil War. As anyone familiar with that music knows, it's glorious, and irresistible. We were immediately excited at the prospect of placing songs of the Spanish Civil War on a theatrical stage, as performative touchpoints for the story. The project evolved from there. In my two experiences directing the show, once at Northwestern University and once at UC Berkeley, both with student casts, their excitement at learning and then sharing this history was infectious. The fact that they were all roughly the same age as the volunteers whose stories they were telling brought added resonance to the performances. I want audiences to feel involved in the stories I tell, caught up in them. In the case of *Heart of Spain*, I hope they can connect to the sense of urgency the volunteers felt.

***While you are most known for your great musical "Woody Guthrie's American Song," you have also written and directed a broad range of plays and performance, including adaptations of novels by J. M. Coetzee and Karen Shepard. What do you think links your plays together?***

I am teaching a class on adaptation this semester at Berkeley, reading lots of examples, and it's not uncommon for playwrights who write adaptations to also be the directors of the works. Artists such as Mary Zimmerman, George C. Wolfe,

and Moises Kaufman come to mind. I think this is because the act of reimagining literature for the stage is a celebration of what theater can do. Among many other characteristics of adaptations, they can be celebrations of theatrical vocabulary. Consistent with something all three of these remarkable playwrights have said, in one way or another, I, too, want to create theater that can *only* be theater. I can enjoy a realistic play as much as anyone, but they don't interest me as a writer or director. George Wolfe has written that realism is better suited for film and television, and





whether you agree or not, he wants theater to do something else, something *theater* can do best. I believe that what links my work regarding content is the desire to elevate lost, hidden, or subversive stories. *Foe*, the incredibly intense and lyrical novel by J. M. Coetzee, was a post-colonial and anti-apartheid rewriting of *Robinson Crusoe*. The famous/infamous source needed a major correction, which Coetzee provided, and I wanted to bring that story forward. Woody Guthrie may be known by many as the writer of *This Land is Your Land*, but his body of work provides a valuable perspective on the deep flaws in the American project. Unfortunately, that show remains just as relevant as it was when it premiered in 1988, in part because Woody, who wrote in the 1930s, 40s, and early 50s, saw what was wrong with the country, at its core, and those problems persist. Karen's novel, *The Celestials*, explores a mostly unknown moment of intercultural reckoning in a small Massachusetts town in the 1870s. Theater offers the opportunity to share that story with a broad audience, who experience it in a shared, common space.

*What was it like growing up in the household of the famous folk singer Tom Glazer?*

I was exposed to lots of amazing music as a kid. Though as a songwriter and performer, he worked in the folk vein, his listening tastes were almost exclusively classical. Because almost all of his performing work was with children, he worked during the day. His weekly schedule was very similar to many of my friend's dads who worked in an office. But it was not entirely 'normal.' He performed shows most years at my public school, so all my friends knew who he was, and his concerts for kids were amazing, so that made things pretty special. When he recorded albums and singles in the 60s, he often used children to sing on those records, so I spent a fair amount of time in recording studios during elementary school. That was great fun. The chorus parts of his most famous song, "On Top of Spaghetti," was recorded in a 6<sup>th</sup> grade classroom at my school with about 30 students. The recording rig took up a small truck. Now, you could probably do the same on your watch.

*I first heard you, long before we met, reading a passage by Woody Guthrie on the album "Til We Outnumber 'Em." How did you get involved in that project*

*"The music that came out of the Spanish Civil War is glorious—and irresistible."*

*and why do think that the music of the legends of folk music like Guthrie, Pete Seeger, and your father still resonate?*

That CD was recorded in Cleveland in 1996, at a huge event celebrating Woody Guthrie sponsored by the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. It included an academic conference at Case Western Reserve, a bunch of shows at local clubs and venues, and a closing concert on Sunday night in Severance Hall, the first time that popular music had ever been heard at the heralded home of the Cleveland Symphony. The line-up was amazing: Billy Bragg, Ani DiFranco, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, Arlo Guthrie, Indigo Girls, Dave Pirner, Tim Robbins, and Bruce Springsteen. I spoke on one of the panels at Case about Woody's writing. The promoters recorded everything, and when Ani DiFranco produced the album, I was pleased to find some of my words included. I also directed a concert performance of *Woody Guthrie's American Song* that weekend, in the small chamber music hall at Severance. I missed the big Sunday show, which I will always regret, because my first day of graduate school at Northwestern was the next day, and I needed to attend orientation at 9 AM. I think I was way too responsible.

*How were you able to get the Smithsonian Folkways to issue the wonderful two-volume collection of songs of the Spanish Civil War?*

For my first sabbatical from teaching at UC Berkeley, I was working on a project about national anthems. I was granted a research fellowship from the Rockefeller Foundation at the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, which is closely affiliated with Smithsonian Folkways. I got to know the Folkways people, and they mentioned that the two volumes of "Songs of the Spanish Civil War" were among their most requested titles. Since Tom sang on Volume 1, and I was affiliated with ALBA, I guess I was a logical person to talk to about a re-release. One thing led to another. My growing friendship with Atesh Sonneborn and Dan

Sheehy also laid the groundwork for their release of a collection of my father's live recordings for children, "Tom Glazer Sings Honk-Hiss-Tweet-GGGGGGGGGG... And Other Children's Favorites."

*As a child, did you have a favorite children's song of your father's? Our family still sings many of his songs.*

Well, I think the songs that made the biggest impression on me as a youngster were some of the old folk songs he sang. I was a pretty anxious kid and I remember one night I was desperate for him to sing "The Streets of Laredo." I don't think I was able to get to sleep until he did. I loved the way he sang that song – I didn't have words for it then, but his voice was just magnificent. There is a recording of "The Sheeling Song," also called "Mo Mary," on his very first album *Olden Ballads*. I never tire of hearing it. This was before he started doing music for children. In my book *Radical Nostalgia*, I tell the story of hearing him sing Spanish Civil War songs for our friends and neighbors when I was a teenager. I can still hear his version of "The Four Insurgent Generals." I found that song just as haunting then as I do now. He also did a beautiful setting of Dylan Thomas's poem, "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night" on an album for adults, long out of print.

*Did you or your father ever run into the "other" famous folk singer named Glazer, labor's troubadour Joe Glazer?*

He always thought it was funny that there were two Glazers in the small world of folk music of that era. He knew Joe, but I don't think I ever met him. Needless to say, they often got confused. I do remember meeting Josh White, who performed at a nearby high school, and of course Pete Seeger. He and my father were long estranged over politics, of all things. Pete and Woody were further left, for sure, and more comfortable with the Communist Party. My dad was more of a liberal. When the CIO purged Party members from their locals, as I have heard it told, people like Pete and Woody refused to continue singing for them; my father, and some others did not. Pete and my dad reconciled when they were both old men, and Pete spoke very fondly of Tom whenever I saw him. ▲

# How Two Pacifists Came to Support the International Brigades

By Jorge Marco

Is it possible to be a pacifist and support—or even join—a war? If our criterion is consistency, the answer is clearly no. Yet consistency, for good or for bad, is not a universal human trait.

Sometimes the only answer to real-world challenges is to contradict ourselves. This is the situation many pacifist anti-fascists found themselves in during the 1930s and '40s. While historians have rightly argued that the interwar period saw the rise of a “mystique of violence,” this was countered by a powerful peace movement born in response to the First World War. Starting in the 1920s, however, the threat of fascism confronted pacifists with a dilemma. Did fascist aggressions and expansion warrant their abandoning their principles? In December 1936, half a year into the Spanish war, two prominent pacifists reflected on this question in a fascinating exchange of letters that has been preserved in the archive. Henry Noel Brailsford was a renowned left-wing journalist in Britain, cofounder of the Men's League for Women's Suffrage and a one-time member of both the Independent Labour Party and the Labour Party. A fierce critic of Mussolini and Hitler, but also of Stalin, Brailsford reconsidered his pacifist idealism after the coup d'état against Spain's Second Republic. Writing to his friend, the American publisher Dorothy Whitney Elmhirst—a prominent pacifist and feminist activist—he announced that he was going to join the International Brigades in Spain. Elmhirst, though shocked, responded with a show of support and affection. Although neither abandoned their pacifist convictions, they temporarily suspended them in the face of fascism. The dream of a peaceful world could only be achieved by first defeating fascism militarily. In the end, Brailsford was not able to join the Brigades. At 63, he was too old to meet the requirements. Still, from the beginning of 1937 he organized dozens of meetings and conferences in favor of the Spanish Republic. In fact, he played a central role in the recruitment of British IB volunteers among members of the Labour Party and Trades Union Congress.

[11 December 1936]  
Dear Dorothy,

I want to tell you that I am joining the International Brigade in Spain. I shall go about Christmas, after I have given some help in recruiting. May I beg help from you? I know your pacifist principals. At one time of my life, I came near to holding them as strongly as you do. But can one in this muddle world be sure of any theoretical guide to conduct? As I see it, not to resist in this case would have been ruinous. It could have meant the extinction of political liberty, and also of all freedom of thought in Spain. Church plus army plus grandees is an uglier combination even than genuine Fascism. And if we don't resist, I think all Europe, save for a little Northern fringe, will be under the dictators, who will do as they please. Two considerations chiefly move me; 1) that we in this country must be shaken out of our security and move up to action. In short, I think the Brigade, if we support it wholeheartedly, can save our souls as well as the soil of Spain; 2) If the Republic goes down, the whole Spanish Left will be massacre. This is happening

everywhere now. I have plenty of evidence of this from friends whose word and judgement I trust, but you will find this confirmation in Wednesday's Times (column 1, Foreign news page), where a strongly pro-Franco writer describes the “ruthless extermination” of the whole Left, Traditionalist, and moderate liberals as well as socialist and communist.

If Franco conquers Madrid and the East, we must expect a massacre that will literally leave no liberal element alive, Spain will be crushed into darkness for years, till a new government grows up. Can any pacifist principle answer the argument that by fighting we may save hundreds of thousands from massacre, to say nothing of Spanish happiness and our security?

So, will you forgive me if I ask bluntly for money for the International Brigade? It would be used chiefly to send out recruits, some are waiting, all trained men, and I am hoping to get more. I will gladly give you more information if that would help you to decide. I would even reach down to Darington for a day. Our recruits are all volunteers, idealist, no pay or just a peseta or two, one cigar, etc. There's no more even to send home, wounded men, of where there are already may.

Yours ever,  
N. H. Brailsford

[December 21, 1936]  
Dear Noel,

I hardly know what to say to you, because, as you know, I can hardly bear the thought of your going to Spain. My heart is torn between desire to restrain you and the urge to encourage nobility and greatness when one sees it in an action of this kind. What can I do! I think I must ask you to take a gift as a kind of personal testimonial to yourself and to ask you to spend it in any way that you think best. I can't quite bring myself to contribute to a fighting brigade direct, but if you make the contribution for me perhaps that is a way to save my conscience. It sounds terribly dishonest, doesn't it? But you will understand how torn and confused and miserable I feel about it all. The purity and integrity of your motive is about the finest thing I see at this moment.

Bless you both,  
Yours, Dorothy

Sources: Letters from Papers of Dorothy Whitney Elmhirst. DWE/G/1/C (Devon Heritage Centre; Archives of the Trades Union Congress). Spanish Rebellion: International Brigade 1937-1942 (Warwick Digital Collection). ▲

Jorge Marco teaches Spanish Politics, History & Society at the University of Bath (UK). His most recent book is *Paraísos en el infierno: Drogas y Guerra Civil española* (Comares, 2021).



# FROM MISSISSIPPI TO MADRID

By Robin D.G. Kelley

The following are excerpts from Robin Kelley's address at ALBA's Bay Area celebration. For the unabridged text, visit the online edition of this issue at [albavolunteer.org](http://albavolunteer.org).

*"I've long considered Mississippi and Spain as two of the finest examples of radical possibility."*



Thank you for inviting me to say a few words in recognition of June Gipson of My Brother's Keeper and the Open Arms Clinic, two extraordinary organizations. I want to use this time to honor Mississippi's history of freedom fighters and their connections to Spain. ... I've long considered Mississippi and Spain as two of the finest examples of radical possibility; places where vision of social democracy merged that could have been, and still could be, a model for the world.

Mississippi [is] often derided as a kind of political backwater: a place of reaction ... But we don't know our history. The truth is that, much like in Spain, in Mississippi fascism was a ruling-class response to the revolutionary insurgency of working people, especially Black working people. The South has long been and continues to be the epicenter of the country's most radical democratic movements: reconstruction, populism, biracial labor struggles, the Poor People's campaign—today and 50 years ago. Jim Crow lynching and disenfranchisement ... were designed to crush interracial movements fighting to expand democracy, protect the rights of working people, redistribute land, dismantle the plantation oligarchy, and guarantee free education and health care. Mississippi and other Southern States, in fact, passed the most draconian anti-labor, anti-Black, and anti-immigrant laws—not because they were conservative States, ... but in order to suppress a radical vision. And they only succeeded because they were able to eliminate nearly half the electorate. ... And as we know, racism worked. Racism convinced white workers that their interests aligned closer to the ruling classes than to Black and Indigenous Peoples. Now, it may seem strange to say that fascism first emerged in the United States, in the US South, long before it arose in Europe. But Black members of the Lincoln Brigade had been saying it the moment they set foot on Spanish soil. ...

Both Spain and Mississippi, in fact, enjoyed the benefits of brigades—volunteers who came there to fight for freedom and democracy. In Spain there was the Lincoln Brigade ...; in Mississippi there was the Student Nonviolent Coordinating

Committee (SNCC), Freedom Summer, and the Republic of New Africa. ... In so many ways, the Mississippi movement—SNCC, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, the Mississippi Freedom Labor Union—fought for a social and economic justice agenda. That was no different from that of the Republican antifascist forces in Spain. That is, they fought for economic justice, for the redistribution of land and wealth, and for workers' power.

The provisional government of the Republic of New Africa established its base in Mississippi around 1971 and purchased land, set up cooperative farms, and built institutions. And despite relentless state repression, including a shootout, the Republic of New Africa took root in the city of Jackson, Mississippi. Then, in 2013, in an historical election, the late Chokwe Lumumba, a radical lawyer and leader of the New Afrikan People's Organization in the Malcolm X grassroots movement, was elected mayor of Jackson.

Lumumba was part of a movement that envisioned the Jackson Plan, designed to transform the city into a model of radical social democracy by establishing a solidarity economy very much like that of the Mondragón Corporation in Spain's Basque region through worker cooperatives, ecofriendly community gardens, inexpensive energy-efficient housing, and developing community and conservation land trusts to make land available for all, especially to house the homeless. He also launched People's Assemblies, which are open meetings to discuss community needs, ensure democratic participation, and mobilize working people to win political power. And that they did: The People's Assemblies were responsible for Chokwe Lumumba's victory as well as the election of Jackson's current mayor, his son, Chokwe Antar Lumumba. Rukia Lumumba, Antar's sister, founded the People's Advocacy Institute ...

The world James Yates dreamed of is struggling to this day to come into being in places like Mississippi, thanks to the hard work of June Gipson and My Brother's Keeper, the Open Arms Clinic, both organizations making possible a liberatory future for the LGBTQ community, the People's Advocacy Institute and of course, ALBA. This is a legacy of the Spanish Civil War. It is the legacy of the Black struggle to democratize the United States—and ultimately the world. And of course, it's not over. Free the land! ▲

*Robin D.G. Kelley, a member of ALBA's Honorary Board, is the Distinguished Professor and Gary B. Nash Endowed Chair in U.S. History at UCLA.*

# French Exhibit Features Work by Josep Bartolí, Exiled Spanish Artist

By Gina Herrmann

On September 23, the Camp de Rivesaltes Memorial in southern France celebrated the opening night of “The colors of exile,” an exhibit honoring the life and work of Josep Bartolí, the Catalan artist and antifascist activist. The show, which will be up until September 2022, features over 150 works by Bartolí. It follows on the heels of a much acclaimed—and Golden-Palm-winning—animated film, *Josep*, based on the artist’s experiences in the French detention camps hastily erected in 1939 to contain tens of thousands of Spanish Republican refugees. Directed by the designer Aurel, the film was screened at the opening night of the exhibit, poignantly and hauntingly projected outside among the ruins of the camp barracks.

Born in 1910 in Barcelona, Josep Bartolí was a cartoonist and caricaturist. A fervent defender and soldier for the Republic during the Civil War, in 1939, he found himself interned in the camps in the south of France, including those of Saint-Cyprien and Bram. After a long journey and escape from a train to Dachau, the artist found refuge in Mexico, where he was offered asylum and found fellowship with Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, and their circle. It was in Mexico that he published—with text from the journalist Narcís Molins Fabrega *Campos de concentración 1939-1940*—his iconographic testimony of his life in the camps. Bartolí later moved to New York, where he joined Rothko, Pollock, and Kline in the “10<sup>th</sup> Street Group.”

the artist’s widow. It follows his itinerary as a Republican fighter, a political painter, and visual chronicler of the Spanish Civil War; the Republican exodus; and the horrors of Francoism. Selections from the exhibit also comment on his commitment to fighting racism and injustice during his long exile in the USA.



For Josep Bartolí, the exhibit states, “drawing was a necessity, his work of resistance” Most arresting among his remarkably diverse selection of works on display are the pieces that chronicle the end of the civil war in Spain, the defeat of the Republic, exile into France, and the horrors and brutality of the French internment camps on the beaches of Argelès, Barcarès and St., Cyprien. These black and white sketches penciled *in situ*, exquisitely detailed and precise, are an important contribution to the history of the Republican internments in France. Along with the famous photographs taken by Robert Capa in 1939, Bartolí’s angry and ironic drawings mark a defining moment in the history of graphic reporting.

The exhibit is not limited representations of the concentration camp. Bold colors and oil paints made their appearance in Bartolí’s work after 1952, which feature

bullfighting, mass culture, racial violence, war and hunger, as Bartolí denounces the machismo and the racism prevalent in American society in the 1950s and 1960s. ▲

Curated by Bartolí’s nephew Georges Bartolí, the exhibit draws from the archive of Bartolí works recently donated to Rivesaltes by

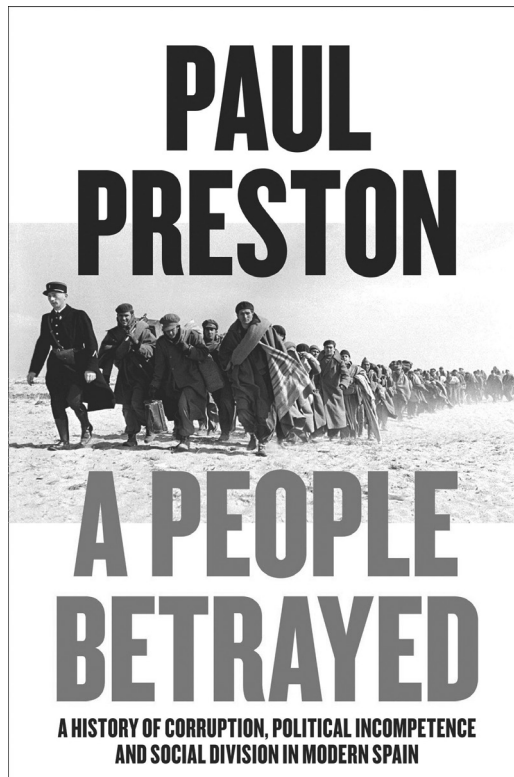
ALBA board member Gina Herrmann teaches at the University of Oregon.



# Book review

*A People Betrayed: A History of Corruption, Political Incompetence, and Social Division in Modern Spain*, by Paul Preston. London: Liveright Press, 2020. 768 pp.

Reviewed by Eric Smith



In this wide-ranging book, Spain's foremost scholar of the modern period surveys in detail the long history of corruption among the country's political class. While corruption benefited from a deep public apathy, Preston's account is also rife with the people betrayed rising in revolt and political elites sending in the troops to put them down. Tellingly, the 1931 Second Republic only arrives 227 pages in.

Preston starts in the mid-nineteenth century. He spends considerable time unpacking the *turno pacífico*, the nineteenth century political deal that alternated governmental power between the liberal and conservative parties. This leads into an exploration of the origins of the Catalan crisis and the Catalan contribution to republicanism, one of several reform movements that saw the monarchy as a source of corrupt governance.

The Spanish-American War of 1898 underscored the fact that the Spanish military's only successes over the course of the nineteenth century had been at home. Less than two decades later, World War I—in which Spain remained neutral—brought an economic growth that was squandered by the country's elites, while wartime

profits were used for conspicuous consumption rather than investing in efficiency of operations or the labor force. Meanwhile, rampant corruption roused the ever more radical masses. Anti-corruption reform efforts that followed were repressed as Catalanist initiatives (even when they weren't). Thirty-five percent of the 1921 budget was allocated to military expenses, with almost three quarters paying the salaries of a ballooning officer class (there was one for every four soldiers). The enlistees, meanwhile, remained as poorly trained as ever. The peace was kept largely through bribes. Only after Spain joined NATO, in 1982, did the army manage to crack down on its deeply embedded culture of corruption.

Preston corrects Raymond Carr's claim that the 1923 coup that installed Miguel Primo de Rivera as dictator undermined democracy: there simply wasn't enough democracy to undo. While it claimed to end corruption, the seven-year Primo regime was as corrupt as any government Spain had in the past century. Its ruthless repression of the opposition saw the CNT, the anarchist union, grow ever more militant and more effective, to which the government responded with more repression. Preston also lays considerable blame at the feet of King Alfonso XIII, who has generally escaped culpability.

Two of the faces of venality and graft of whom Preston makes frequent mention, in addition to King Alfonso, are Juan March and Alejandro Lerroux. The latter, who never saw a political office that he couldn't benefit from financially, eventually got his due when the Republic confiscated his property at the onset of the civil war. The Majorcan banker March is another matter. If any single private individual held the keys to the onset of the civil war, Preston's evidence suggests, it was March, whose personal fortune financed the procurement of necessary materials for the rebels. March's corruption continued unabated under Franco—whose own kleptocracy doesn't escape Preston's watchful eye, either.

Preston's focus on corruption allows him to shed a new light on Spain's history of political tensions and problems of underdevelopment. He pulls no punches, offering judgment of incompetence on both the left and the right. Some readers might be surprised, for instance, when Preston writes that the anarchist educator Francisco Ferrer was financing terrorism or that the Socialist union leader Francisco Largo Caballero deserves no small amount of blame for the Republic's woes.

Preston's writing is as lucid as ever, although perhaps the period of the Transition receives a more truncated treatment than it deserves. On the other hand, Preston could easily have written an even bigger book. Rather than starting in the nineteenth century, he very well could have opened half a millennium earlier, with Pope Alexander VI, Valencian by birth. Indeed, reading Preston it's difficult to avoid the impression that political corruption is a never-ending problem. Anyone paying attention to Spanish current events will find echoes of Alfonso XIII's corruption in the King Juan Carlos I, while the re-emergence of Catalan republicanism reenacts, to some extent, the nineteenth-century response to the monarchy's indiscretions. ▲

*Eric R. Smith, author of American Relief Aid and the Spanish Civil War (2013), holds a Ph.D. from the University of Illinois at Chicago and is an instructor of history at the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy.*

## IN MEMORIAM

# EDWARD ASNER

**(1929-2021)** By Sebastiaan Faber

The actor Ed Asner, who passed away in August, was a tireless activist and a faithful friend of the Veterans of the Lincoln Brigade.



On Ed Asner's first day in office as president of the Screen Actors Guild (SAG), in 1981, the executive director handed him the ceremonial President's gavel that Charlton Heston, who had held the position from 1965 to 1971, had left for his successors. Asner, irate, uttered an expletive and threw it across the room, telling the director to get rid of the thing. Heston was close to actor-turned-president Ronald Reagan, who'd won the 1980 election. Later, Heston would become a spokesman for the National Rifle Association and a vocal supporter of anti-union legislation. "He and Asner hated each other's guts," Richard Masur, Asner's longtime friend and SAG President from 1995 to 1999, told me.

Asner, who died in August, had been approached to run for the SAG presidency following his central role in the 94-day actors' strike a year earlier. "By then, Ed was a national television personality. He was one of the best-known faces on the picket line," Masur recalls. "Although until that moment he had not been very involved in the union and didn't know much about its governance, he was a very decent president." "Under his leadership, the union took militant stances in defense of its own members and in solidarity with the broader labor movement," John Nichols recalled in *The Nation*.

By the early 1980s, Asner was known across the world as Lou Grant, the grumpy city editor at the *Los Angeles Tribune* in the show of the same name—a gutsy, journalism-based drama series that had spun off from the *Mary Tyler Moore Show*, a sitcom with a laugh track. It was a sign of the times: American investigative journalism had bolstered its reputation as a pillar of democracy and the scourge of



## ***“When Asner committed to something, he did so with absolute certainty and total passion.” —Richard Masur***

corrupt leaders through its establishment-shattering scoops on the My Lai massacre (1969), the Pentagon Papers (1971), and the Watergate Scandal (1972). Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman embodied this ethos in Alan Pakula's *All the President's Men* (1976); *Lou Grant* premiered the year following, in a portrayal of the fourth estate that was slightly less heroic but nonetheless deeply ethical and political.

The series, which ran for five years, inspired an entire generation of aspiring newspaper reporters in the United States and abroad. (I saw it as a teenager on Dutch television and it immediately made me want to go into journalism.) The show's format, focusing on the daily lives of working urban journalists, allowed the writers to address issues ranging from environmental pollution and LGBT rights to domestic violence and capital punishment. *Lou Grant* won 13 Emmys, two Golden Globes, and a Peabody. Yet in 1982, CBS decided to take the show off the air for reasons that were never cleared up. While the network cited falling ratings, Asner and others always maintained that it was canned for political reasons, specifically Asner's public profile as union leader and left-wing activist.

Asner, born in 1929 in Kansas City, Missouri to an Ashkenazi immigrant family, was a college drop-out (first journalism, then drama) who, after two years in the US Army Signal Corps, joined an improv group in New York City. A couple of off-Broadway gigs led to a career in television, including his seven-year stint in the *Mary Tyler Moore Show*. His success as lead in *Lou Grant* paved the way for a slew of more serious parts, including Captain Davies in *Roots*, as well as voice roles. (He was Carl Fredrickson in the 2009 cartoon comedy-drama *Up*.)

Asner led the Screen Actors Guild for four years, from 1981 until 1985, when he was at the height of his television fame. But his activism extended far beyond his union work. He was among the early supporters of what would later become the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), an outspoken critic of South African apartheid, and always ready to share his fame and

network in support of progressive causes. Generous to a fault, he almost never declined a request for help.

During the 1980s, he became one of the most vocal critics of US foreign policy in Central America—which under Reagan took a criminal turn—and a supporter of left-wing movements in El Salvador and Nicaragua. As a cofounder and spokesperson for Medical Aid for El Salvador, in which the Lincoln vets were also involved, Asner helped raise \$25,000 for humanitarian aid for victims of right-wing repression. In early 1982, he and other Hollywood stars traveled to the State Department to deliver the check. “One reporter asked Ed how he would feel if the leftists won and the people of El Salvador elected a communist government,” recalled his friend Kim Fellner, who then worked as communications director at SAG, in *American Prospect*. “He responded that if that was the result of a democratic election, so be it.”

“The moment the words were out of my mouth, I knew I was up shit creek,” he told Fellner over the phone. The statement immediately turned Asner into the target of right-wing fury and spilled over to the Screen Actors Guild as well. “The SAG headquarters and Ed's home were graffitied with anti-communist obscenities,” Fellner writes, “and a beefy bodyguard accompanied Ed to radio talk shows in Miami, due to threats from militant anti-Castro Cuban exiles. Advertisers like Kimberly-Clark and Cadbury dropped their sponsorship of *Lou Grant*, and shortly thereafter, CBS canceled the show.”

For Masur, the episode illustrates Asner's temperament and political tactics. “It reflected his total commitment and passion for what he believed in,” he told me, “but it also showed his difficulty acknowledging that sometimes there are limits to what one can do. When he went to DC for El Salvador, there was nothing he could have done about the fact that he would be identified as Edward Asner, President of Screen Actors Guild. But he could have decided to not go—or at least made clear that he was there as a private citizen, not as the leader of a union representing

65,000 people. The Guild is a nonpartisan organization, in part because we have the most diverse membership of any labor union on earth.”

“In 1997, Ed and I worked together to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Hollywood Blacklist and the Hollywood Ten HUAC hearings,” Masur said. “As president of the union, I publicly apologized for the SAG's involvement in the anti-Communist witch hunt. In fact, when I joined, in the early 1970s, members were *still* asked to sign a loyalty oath!” In the 1990s, Masur and Asner also spoke and performed at gatherings of the Veterans of the Lincoln Brigade in New York and the Bay Area, alongside other Hollywood activists like John Randolph, Ring Lardner, Jr., and Martin Sheen. Asner also spoke at the 1991 VALB anniversary dinner in Hayword, which doubled as a fundraiser for Medical Aid for El Salvador. In 1998, Asner married Cindy Gilmore, whose father, Milton Weiner, was a Lincoln veteran, and whose grandfather, Dr. Thomas Addis, had supported the Lincoln Brigade on the US home front. (The couple divorced in 2015.)

In his later years, Asner became a vocal critic of the Screen Actors Guild and opposed its merger with American Federation of Radio and Television Artists (AFTRA). “Although he and I did not always agree—and sometimes we disagreed very strongly with each other—I always respected his commitment to what he believed,” Masur said. “Two things defined Ed. Whenever you asked him to do something, he almost always said yes. That is a rare quality. And when he committed to something, he did so with absolute certainty and total passion.”▲

*Sebastiaan Faber, chair of ALBA's Board of Governors, teaches at Oberlin College.*

## IN MEMORIAM

# Manus O’Riordan

(1949-2021)

By Richard Baxell



On Sunday September 26, 2021, the respected and popular Trade Unionist, political activist and writer, Manus O’Riordan, died suddenly of a heart attack. Among many to pay tribute was the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins, who remarked that. “It was a privilege to have known him and his father, Mick O’Riordan, particularly for their testimony to the bravery of those who served in the International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War.” As the son of a former volunteer, Manus grew up steeped in his father’s world of politics, of which Spain was always a significant part.

Born in Dublin in 1949, Manus was raised in the Portobello area of the city. Having earned a secondary school scholarship, he went on to take a degree in economics and politics from University College Dublin and a Masters in Economics and Labor History from the University of New Hampshire, USA. After graduation he returned to Dublin to work as a researcher and economist for the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union (later merged into SIPTU, the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union), becoming the Head of the Research Department. It was a job to which he dedicated the entirety of his working life and where he met Annette, who he married in 1974.

The couple regularly accompanied Manus’s father to International Brigade commemorations and reunions in Ireland, Britain and,

following the death of Franco in 1975, Spain itself. Continuing the work of his father, who wrote a history of the Irish in Spain, Manus penned numerous articles and reviews defending the reputation of the former volunteers, notably his fellow UCD alumnus, the Irish Republican leader, Frank Ryan. Soon after the International Brigade Memorial Trust was formed in Britain in 2001, Manus joined as a trustee and Executive Committee member. In 2010 he officially took on the role of Ireland Secretary and, three years later, he took on a similar role in the Friends of the International Brigades of Ireland.

Both organizations were very fortunate to have him, for Manus possessed a unique skillset. He was extremely knowledgeable, with a prodigious memory and his presence and gravitas commanded fellow committee members’ respect. He was dedicated and hard working, organizing the IBMT’s AGM in Dublin on two separate occasions: in 2005 when Irish President Mary McAleese invited a group of veterans, including Manus’s father, to meet her at her official residence, and in 2016 when President Higgins opened the meeting and delivered a beautifully crafted and heartfelt speech on the volunteers’ political legacy.

Erudite, cultured, with a mischievous sense of humor, Manus was always entertaining company. He was a brilliant linguist who translated poetry between English and Irish and, like his wife Annette (who sadly died in 2013), was an accomplished singer. He often performed the wonderful Spanish Civil War ballad, *Si me quieres escribir*, to captivated audiences. Somehow, he also found the time to be a devoted supporter of Bohemian Football Club. On the day after Manus’s death, fans of both sides observed a minute’s silence, paying their affection and respect with a large banner: “RIP Manus – ¡No Pasarán!”

It’s always sad when someone dies prematurely, but there is some consolation that Manus’s final hours were spent doing what he loved and dedicated to what he did much of his life. On the day before he died, he attended the annual International Brigade commemoration at Omeath, County Louth, proudly bearing the flag commemorating the Irish veterans of the Spanish Civil War. Jim Jump, Chair of the IBMT, expressed the view of many when he paid tribute to his former colleague’s life and work:

Manus made an enormous contribution to the work of the IBMT. He brought a scholarly wealth of knowledge about the volunteers from Ireland to our deliberations and did much to raise awareness about the large Irish contingent in the British Battalion in Spain. He was also a warm and loyal colleague and his loss will be painfully felt by his many friends in the IBMT and beyond.

Above all, the loss will be felt most keenly by his family, to whom he was devoted: his partner Nancy Wallach (also the child of an International Brigader); his sister Brenda; his children, Jess, Neil and Luke; and his grandchildren, Amaia, Rory, Caleb and Eli. Hopefully the widespread demonstrations of affection and respect with which Manus was clearly held will provide them with some small measure of consolation.

Leanann an streachailt – La lucha continúa – The fight goes on. ▲

*Richard Baxell is a British historian and the author of three books on the Spanish Civil War. Between 2015 and 2018 he was the Chair of the International Brigade Memorial Trust.*

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