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# The Volunteer

FOUNDED IN 1937 BY THE VOLUNTEERS OF THE LINCOLN BRIGADE.  
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Seán O'Brien and Lorraine Scripture. Photo Wilson Freeman

## Living Historians' Tribute to the Brigades



ALBA/Puffin Award for Life After Hate p 3

Newly Digitized Collections p 4

Nightmare Alley: Gresham in Spain p 13

# The Volunteer

Founded by the Veterans of the  
Abraham Lincoln Brigade

239 W. 14th Street, Suite 2  
New York, NY 10011 (212) 674-5398  
[www.alba-valb.org](http://www.alba-valb.org)

Editor Print Edition  
Peter N. Carroll

Editor Online Edition  
[www.albavolunteer.org](http://www.albavolunteer.org)  
Sebastian Faber

Associate Editor  
Aaron B. Retish

Book Review Editor  
Joshua Goode

Graphic Design  
[www.eyestormx.com](http://www.eyestormx.com)

Editorial Assistance  
Phil Kavanaugh

Manuscripts, inquiries, and letters to the  
editor may be sent by email to  
[info@alba-valb.org](mailto:info@alba-valb.org)

The editors reserve the right to modify texts  
for length and style.

Books for review may be sent to  
Joshua Goode

Claremont Graduate University  
Blaisdell House, #5, 143 East 10th Street  
Claremont, CA 91711

[www.albavolunteer.org](http://www.albavolunteer.org)

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.

## IN THIS ISSUE

- p 3 *ALBA News*
- p 4 *Tamiment Digitization*
- p 6 *Florida Chamber Music*
- p 8 *Living Historians*
- p 10 *Salaria Kea*
- p 12 *William L. Gresham*
- p 13 *Faces: Stan Junas*
- p 15 *Rescuing the IB Archive*
- p 17 *Poetry Feature*
- p 19 *Almudena Grandes*
- p 20 *Reviews*
- p 22 *In Memoriam Manus O'Riordan*

Dear Friends,

When Bryan Stevenson received the ALBA/Puffin Award in 2014, he spoke about the message he likes to deliver to white audiences: "I often say: 'Many of you were raised in households where your parents and your teachers—the people you loved and trusted—taught you that you're better than everybody else because you are white. Of course, that's a lie. It was a terrible thing to do to you; and nobody helped you recover from that.'"

It's this kind of recovery that this year's ALBA/Puffin Award winner, *Life Against Hate*, puts front and center. The Chicago-based organization works one-on-one with individuals who wish to leave the toxic world of white supremacy—one of the cauldrons of hate and misinformation in this country that spawned the shocking assault on the Capitol building in January 2021. Join us on April 30 for the award ceremony during our online annual gala, which as always will feature a slate of inspiring speakers and musicians.

Inspiration is also what we hope you'll find in this issue. Check out our stories about the exciting new digitized collections at NYU's Tamiment Library (p. 4), young living historians who've become fascinated with the Lincoln Brigade (p. 8), Lincoln vet William Lindsay Gresham, whose novel has inspired Guillermo del Toro's latest film (p. 12), or about Lincoln vet Stan Junas and his family, who very generously are sponsoring this issue (p. 13).

Although ALBA is a small organization, we are lucky to have a wonderfully dedicated staff, a devoted board—and, above all, you: the most supportive and generous of communities any nonprofit could wish for. We couldn't do any of this work without you.

¡Salud!

**Peter N. Carroll & Sebastian Faber, Editors**



P.S. Your generous, tax-deductible donations will help support our ongoing educational work, including a five-week online course for public-school teachers this spring, and half a dozen general-audience workshops.

## TO THE EDITORS

While there have been many recent tributes to my late partner Manus O'Riordan in the Irish media, including President D. Michael Higgins' own website, and from the many organizations in which he was involved, such as the IBMT and his union, SIPTU, *The Volunteer's* article on Manus held very special significance for me.

It demonstrated the internationalism first exemplified by the Brigadistas, whom we honor. Manus would have been pleased that his work on behalf of the anti-fascist legacy of the International Brigades made an impact on those who work to restore the legacy of the Lincoln Brigade as well, where many Irishmen fought under the leadership of Frank Ryan. Manus led a life filled with purpose, never letting up on writing, rallying and speaking about Irish labor, the Irish war of independence and of course, the Spanish anti-fascist war. It meant a great deal to see that life recognized by a sister/fraternal IB organization.

I just received my print issue of *The Volunteer*. I had seen the article about Manus online, but somehow seeing it highlighted on the cover and on the back pages had a very different and even stronger impact. Richard Baxell's very comprehensive account also highlighted the personal qualities, the sense of humor, the erudition, the quick wit, the passionate sense of justice, that those of us who loved him as family also cherished. In addition to contributing to *The Volunteer* in memory of my father, VALB Hy Wallach, I have now added a donation in memory of IBMT Ireland Secretary Manus O'Riordan.

Salud!

Nancy Wallach  
Alba Board Member

See page 15 for more letters to the Editors.

# ALBA NEWS

## “Life After Hate” Wins ALBA/Puffin Human Rights Award

On January 6, the one-year anniversary of the assault on the Capitol, ALBA announced that the 2022 ALBA/Puffin Award for Human Rights Activism will go to the organization Life After Hate (LAH). Founded in 2011, LAH helps people leave violent far-right and white supremacist groups to connect with humanity and lead compassionate lives. LAH will receive the award at ALBA’s annual gala on April 30.

“Right-wing extremist groups have deeply embedded in our country and our culture,” said Kate Doyle, chair of ALBA’s Human Rights Committee. “There couldn’t be a better time for ALBA to recognize the tremendous work of Life After Hate.” “Their work has never been more valuable and more needed,” added Neal Rosenstein, President of The Puffin Foundation. “But the success of LAH’s research and interventions shows that we can overcome hate.”

“As the first nonprofit in the U.S. dedicated to helping individuals disengage from violent far-right hate groups and hateful online spaces, we know that direct interventions, one person at a time, can produce substantial ripple effects including the prevention of hate crime and domestic terrorism,” said Kristine Dugan of LAH. “ALBA’s generous award will help us expand the scale and effectiveness of our program.”

## ALBA Online Gala on April 30

The annual gala, including the ALBA/Puffin Award ceremony, will once again be online this year, in light of the ongoing pandemic. Tune in through YouTube or Facebook on April 30 for an inspiring slate of speakers and musical guests. For more details, keep an eye on our website and your email inbox.

## George and Ruth Watt Letters Performed

This spring, stay tuned for a special online presentation featuring a performance and discussion of the fascinating letters that Lincoln volunteer George Watt exchanged with his wife Ruth when George was serving in Spain. The letters, curated by Dan and Molly Watt, will be read by actors. Tentative date: Saturday, April 9, 1pm EDT.

## New Five-Week Online Teacher Workshop

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)

## ALBA Workshops for Everyone Spark Broad Interest

A new slate of “workshops for everyone” offered as part of new Perry Rosenstein Cultural Series (PRCS) has drawn broad interest from the ALBA community. Modeled on ALBA’s institutes for teachers but open to the general public, the 1.5-hour PRCS workshops are led by two experts who provide participants with reading and viewing materials in advance and then lead a lively, interactive discussion.

The fall calendar included two workshops: one on Hemingway and the Lincoln Brigade (with Peter Carroll), and one on the posters and print culture of the Spanish Civil War (with NYU’s Jordana Mendelson). The interest proved so strong that two additional workshops on the same topics were added, for a total of four. This winter and spring, ALBA will be offering additional PRCS workshops on Spanish immigrants in the US and the Spanish Civil War; Spain and the Holocaust; Women and the Spanish Civil War; and Poetry and Fiction of the Spanish Civil War.

## Catalan Government Names Program After Alvah Bessie

The regional government of Catalonia has instituted a new program as part of its ongoing efforts to locate and exhume mass graves from the Spanish Civil War and use DNA technology to identify the remains. The new program, which will be named after Lincoln Brigade veteran Alvah Bessie, will focus specifically on exhuming and identifying the remains of International Brigade volunteers who died and were buried in Catalonia. The program combines historical research to pinpoint the potential location of the remains and the search for the victims’ relatives, with the aim of informing them and offering them the opportunity to help in the genetic identification process. Bessie, a well known author and Hollywood script writer, returned to Spain after Franco’s death to shoot the film *Spain Again*, based on his memoir, and to search for the burial site of his friend and fellow Lincoln volunteer Aaron Lopoff. ▲

# Tamiment Tackles Difficult Digitization

## New ALBA Collections Available Online

By Sebastiaan Faber

The ever-expanding ALBA collection, which has been housed at NYU's Tamiment-Wagner Library since its transfer from Brandeis University in 2000, is now increasingly available online. The slow but steady efforts to digitize materials—archival-quality preservation and transfer is a time-intensive, painstaking process—have focused primarily on graphic and audiovisual objects: not only photographs, posters, and postcards but also video and audio (see the sidebar for an overview of collections currently available).

“One of our priorities is to preserve and digitize collections that are in danger of deterioration, such as VHS tapes, or that are in forms of media that have become difficult to access, such as reel-to-reel tapes,” says Shannon O’Neill, the Curator for the Tamiment-Wagner Collections. “At NYU, we’re tremendously lucky to have our own in-house specialists to do much of this work. Only in rare cases do we need to outsource, for example when we’re dealing with media for which we don’t have the proper vintage equipment.”

Recently, NYU’s preservation staff has been able to digitize and caption a collection of oral histories of prisoners of war that Lincoln vet Bob Steck and others recorded in the 1970s and 1980s in collaboration with Carl Geiser, author of *Prisoners of the Good Fight* (1986). These interviews, conducted in English and Spanish, were preserved on cassette tapes, which are notoriously prone to deterioration. The audio, captions, and transcriptions can now be fully accessed online, along with two presentations in which Steck explained the project to his fellow veterans.

I recently spoke about this project with NYU’s Carol Kessel, Senior Manager of

Library Infrastructure, and Kim Tarr, Associate Director for Media Preservation.

### **How many hours’ worth of audio did you process for the Steck project?**

Tarr: The tapes are each, on average, 53 minutes in duration for a total of 423 minutes, or a bit over seven hours.

### **In what state of preservation were the cassettes? Was there any need for physical restoration?**

Tarr: The eight tapes that comprised the Robert Steck Audio Collection (ALBA A 104) are all standard 1/8-inch audiocassettes. One of the tapes exhibited a high-pitched sound that appeared to be recorded in. Another tape had a portion of the magnetic tape twisted in the plastic cartridge. This was corrected by removing the tape from the shell—but the tape crease affected a 15-second portion on both sides. However, we were able to capture the content, digitally reverse it, and then place the content in the appropriate section of each side.

### **Can you tell me about the transcription/captioning process? How much of it was done manually and how much through Artificial Intelligence and automated speech recognition?**

Kassel: We worked with a company, Konch, to do the captions. They go through a two-step process. The first step is AI/speech recognition, which can be very accurate but often misses the most important words—so it’s accurate but not always useful. Then they have a process for assigning audio for human correction. We retrieve the edited transcripts when the human corrections are finished.

### **How much and what kind of processing did you have to do on the audio itself? I’m thinking of noise reduction or pitch correction.**

Tarr: No speed changes or pitch shifting were required for this project. Additionally, no noise reduction was used on these cassettes. Any extra blank content was removed from the beginning and the end of the tape. And the audio levels have reduced slightly, so peaks level were at 0Db for access copies to prevent overmodulation.

### **Did the project present any other challenges from a preservation or digitization perspective?**

Kassel: The captioning surfaced an interesting problem, which is that we don’t always have great metadata about the language of the item. In the past, this aspect has not affected our workflow, but it does now! Some of these items were first captioned as English, for example, when in fact they were primarily in Spanish. This meant we had to re-send them. Additionally, the AI/speech recognition process requires that you pick one language. It doesn’t know when the language changes, so it just keeps going as if it’s the same language that you picked at the outset. Such items require a lot more hand-editing at the end, as you can imagine.

### **If users find errors in the transcription, should they report them and, if so, how?**

Kassel: Yes, they should report them. They can write to [special.collections@nyu.edu](mailto:special.collections@nyu.edu) with any comments about the collection.

Part of the ALBA collection that is currently online in digitized form include the following. Visit the online *Volunteer* at [albavolunteer.org](http://albavolunteer.org) for more extensive descriptions and hyperlinks.

## Photographs

### Harry Randall: Fifteenth International Brigade Photograph Collection (ALBA.PHOTO.011)

Three reels and 1,832 images produced by the Photographic Unit of the 15th International Brigade by the Unit from August 1937 to September 1938, under the supervision of Harry W. Randall, Jr.

### Moscow: Selected Images ALBA.PHOTO.177

1,048 images selected from the International Brigades Archive in Moscow, Series 5: Photographs.

### John Albok Photograph Collection (PHOTOS.063)

433 black and white negatives from 1933 through 1968, including May Day parades from 1933-1938, some featuring the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade.

## Posters and Postcards

### Spanish Civil War Postcards (ALBA.242)

An *ad hoc* collection of 168 Spanish Civil War Postcards from ALBA.242 and several other collections.

### ALBA poster collection

An extensive collection of Spanish Civil War posters from Spain and other countries, of which a dozen are available online in high resolution.

## Oral History: Video

### Manny Harriman Video Oral History Collection

Some 80 oral history interviews that Lincoln vet Manny Harriman (1919-1997) began videotaping in 1985 with veterans and/or their surviving relatives and friends across the country. Also contains a small number of recordings of VALB political activities during the mid-1980s, particularly around aid to Nicaragua.

### Arthur H. Landis Oral History Collection

Veteran Arthur H. Landis (1917-1986) wrote *The Abraham Lincoln Brigade* and *Spain! The Unfinished Revolution*, about the political complexities of the war.

The collection includes about four dozen interviews with American Spanish Civil War veterans conducted in the 1960s.

### Media Entertainment, Inc. Oral History Collection

Videos and transcripts for 11 interviews conducted in 1996 for the documentary *In Search of the Lincoln Brigade*.

## Oral History: Audio

### John Gerassi Oral History Collection

Journalist and scholar John "Tito" Gerassi published *Premature Anti-Fascists: Oral History of American and Canadian Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War* in 1986; this collection contains 227 audiocassettes consisting of 89 separate interviews with individual veterans.

### Francis Patai Audio Collection

Frances Patai was an educator, writer, historian and feminist activist who wrote a book on U.S. women medical personnel who volunteered during the Spanish Civil War. The collection consists of interviews primarily with the women who served as nurses.

### Robert Steck POW interviews

Oral histories of prisoners of war that Lincoln recorded in the 1970s and 1980s, in English and Spanish. Seven tapes, more than seven hours' total. Captioned.

## Letters and ephemera

### The James Lardner Papers

James Lardner (1914-1938) was a journalist who enlisted in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade to fight against Franco's rebel forces in Spain. The collection consists chiefly of correspondence.

### The Herman Greenfield Papers

Herman 'Hy' Greenfield (1915-1938) was a native New Yorker who was killed in action in February 1938 at Segura de los Baños. The collection includes postcards, newspaper clippings, and letters.

### The Miriam Sigel Papers

The Miriam Sigel Friedlander Papers consist of letters written by three individuals who fought and died in the Spanish Civil War: Ernest Arion, Harold Malofsky (Melofsky) and Miriam's brother, Paul Sigel.

### The Marjorie Polon Papers

Marjorie Polon (1924-1977) a native of New York City, was the daughter of Russian Jewish immigrants. The Marjorie Polon Papers consist chiefly of letters from six American Abraham Lincoln Brigade volunteers (Bill "Mike" Bailey, Nathan Gross, Harry Hakam, George Kaye, Sydney Levine and William Van Felix) who fought together in the Spanish Civil War. ▲



# FLORIDA CHAMBER GROUP TELLS LINCOLN BRIGADE STORY THROUGH MUSIC

By Sebastiaan Faber

In December 2021 and January 2022, the South Florida Chamber Ensemble (SFCE) performed *Extranjeros*, a program about the Spanish Civil War and the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. Written by Myrna Meeroff and produced in partnership with ALBA, the program featured music and texts from Manuel de Falla, María Rodrigo, Joaquín Rodrigo, Federico García Lorca, Joaquín Turina, William Grant Still, and Metallica.

**M**yrna Meeroff, the SFCE's executive director, is a French horn player and music educator from Buenos Aires, Argentina, who has performed for audiences all over the world. She currently teaches at Broward College.

## Can you briefly describe the show?

In the performance I read a segment of the story and follow it up with a piece of music and speak about the composer of the piece. For example, the second piece on the program is *I Dream a World* from the opera *Troubled Island* by William Grant Still. Langston Hughes collaborated with Still on the libretto but left to cover the Spanish Civil War before the piece was finished. I tied each segment to an artist and matched the music with the person. Included in the program is music by Lorca, Turina, Falla and Rodrigo. I pulled in Pablo Neruda through the music of the film *Il Postino* and Ernest Hemingway through the music of Metallica. It is a very eclectic mix of styles of music, from traditional Spanish to Mexican pop music. The program closes with a slideshow of Lincoln Brigade volunteers who died in Spain. Also, as it turned out, the flamenco guitarist I hired for the show, Nick Mastrovito, is Spanish. His grandmother and mother lived through the Spanish Civil War. When I first signed him on, I had no idea. After each performance I invite him to share his family's story of the Spanish Civil War. We then open it up for comments from the audience. The discussions have been intelligent, vibrant, and thoughtful.

## How did the SFCE come about?

I started the ensemble 11 years ago because I felt very disconnected in the orchestra that I was playing in. Horns



sit in the back and basically, from the audience, all you see of me is a space between the first trumpet and the second horn. Musicians were not involved in any of the creative process. My conductor actually asked me once: "Can you do a little *less* with that phrase?" That was the end for me. I wanted to choose my repertoire and I wanted to connect the music to the world around us in a more meaningful way. With the SFCE, we give around 375 performances a year and every performance is thoughtfully curated. We include a diverse set of composers in every program, including women, Black and indigenous people of color, disabled people, and otherwise marginalized composers. We give detailed program notes from the

## “The story literally wrote itself.”

stage to help make the music accessible to all. Once we played a very avant-garde piece by African American composer Julia Perry based on Poe’s *The Cask of the Amontillado*. I asked everyone in the audience to channel Poe’s very dark writing and then explained that this story was about a jealous man who kills his rival and buries him behind a brick wall. Rather than having the audience tune out, they listened carefully and were able to hear the story through the very strange sounds coming out of our instruments. We also have a very robust set of educational programs for children and adults that uses music to teach core subjects and promotes listening, memory and reading comprehension skills as well as bringing world culture to our audiences. Last season included Haitian music, Aboriginal Australian song, Afro-Brazilian choros, jazz, and an entire concert dedicated to African American opera. The SFCE brings together all the things that I love: music, other arts, history, social justice, scholarship, and education. For me, it’s a dream job.

### What drew you to the Spanish Civil War and the Lincoln Brigade?

The South Florida Chamber Ensemble’s 11th season is called *Encounters with Strangers*. I wanted to hand off our 10th season, which was about America, to the new season with this concert. When I first approached ALBA about working with me on the project, I really didn’t have a fully fleshed-out concept of what I wanted to do. My original idea had been to write a fictional story about Mussolini’s daughter and Franco’s son trying to resurrect Fascism in Europe. I started doing some research and discovered the Lincoln Brigade. I knew immediately that I wanted to write about that instead. The first thing I did was buy Peter Carroll’s book and I read it cover to cover. He is an incredible writer. I’ve never been so engaged in a work of non-fiction. With that background, the story literally wrote itself. I wanted to tell the story of the Lincoln Brigade through the artists, musicians and composers who were involved so that I could bring music into the story. I also really wanted to have as much historical context as possible. I searched for actual quotes, and I included real people and real situations around a fictional love story between an African American Lincoln Brigade member and a Spanish spy.

### Can you tell me about your creative process?

I am inspired by everything around me. Sometimes an idea comes from something I see and sometimes from something I hear. The story I wrote for this project was inspired by the British actor Tobias Menzies. I had the privilege of meeting him in person in 2019 while we were on tour in Europe and the story came to me in my dreams (in which he played Billy the Kid). I find a great deal of inspiration in talking with other creatives. I spend most of my day doing research and this brings a wealth of great ideas and sometimes I am inspired by my students or my kids. Three

years ago, we did a MLK Day of Service project and my son came with me. He asked me what this milk day thing was all about. It inspired my most recent project, *M(i)LK day*—a story about civil rights through the different colors and origins of milks, which opens January 2022 in honor of Dr. King’s birthday.

### How did the audience respond to the Spanish Civil War show?

I love every one of my programs—they are like my babies. But this one is particularly close to my heart because I am of Latin American descent, and the music really spoke to me. I was apprehensive at the first show because it took place at Broward College, a community college that is not exactly known for its scholars. Yet the concert was sold out and the audience was engaged in the story, the history and the music. I was mostly surprised by the discussion afterwards. They wanted to know more about Billy the Kid. They wanted to know the names of the composers to listen to more of their music. They wanted to know why the Spanish Civil War isn’t taught in local schools. They wanted to know what living through war is like. (I could share it because I am a refugee from the Dirty War in Argentina.) They stayed to watch the slideshow of the Lincoln Brigade members who perished in Spain.

### What was your own experience like?

To be honest, the scariest part of this project was sending my story draft to Peter Carroll for his blessing. I was on pins and needles waiting for his reply. I framed it. I started my artistic career as a writer, writing songs, poems, short stories and novels and I gave it up for music. For many years I have been trying to get back into writing and this first foray has been incredibly positive, so I hope to continue. ▲



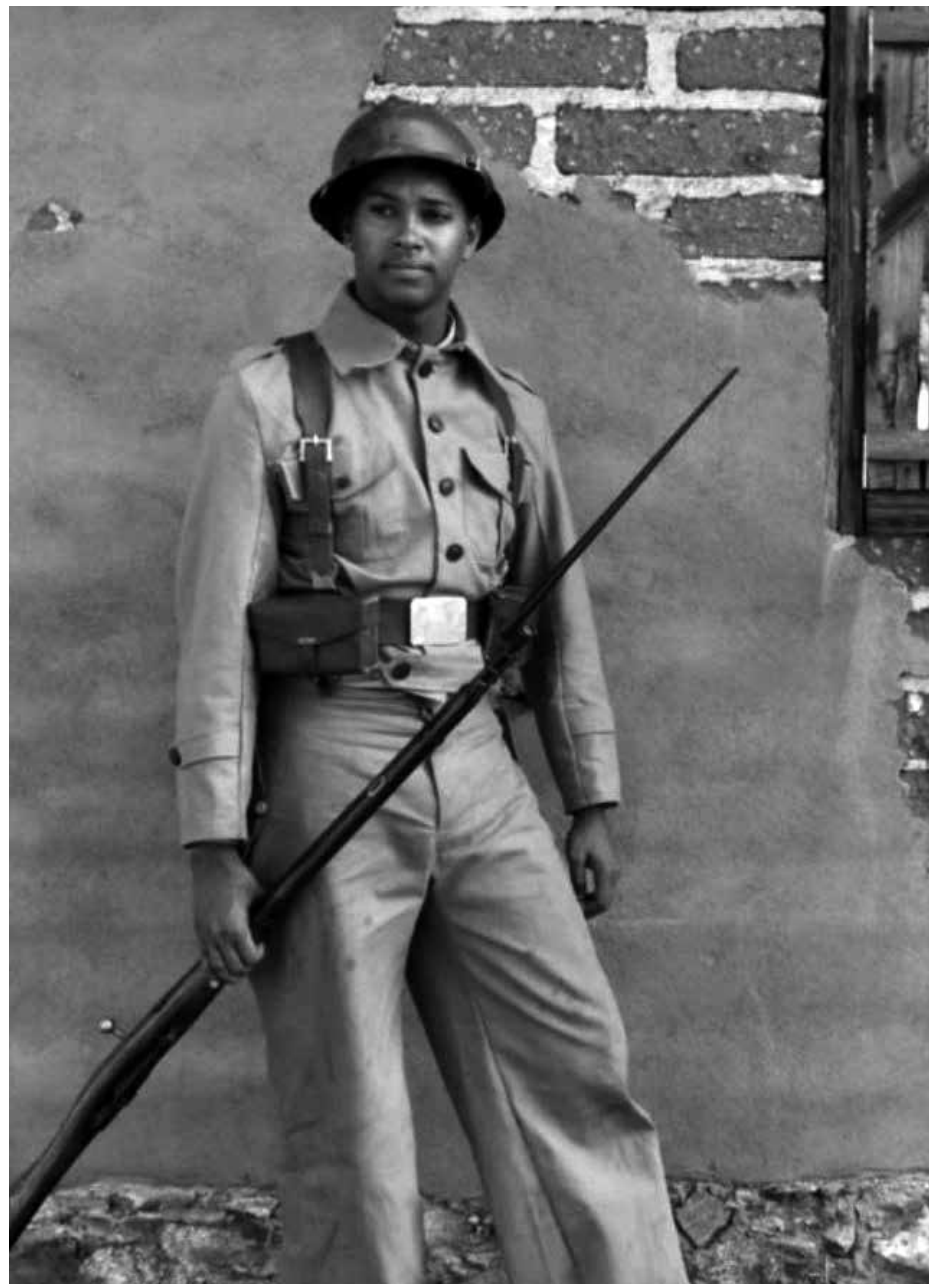
# Living Memorials: Reenacting the Spanish Civil War in 2021

By Reid Palmer

A growing number of dedicated living historians are choosing to portray the Spanish Civil War at public history events. Although they are as diverse as the Brigadistas they portray, they are united in their passion for history and desire to inspire people to learn more about the conflict.

“We cannot simply treat the past as a playground without respecting that it was often a very harsh reality to its people,” Lorraine Scripture says. She is one of the growing number of dedicated living historians portraying the Spanish Civil War at public history events. Like countless other living historians, she has spent many hours reading histories, biographies, and primary source documents to understand what the men and women of the International Brigades wore, carried with them into battle, ate, drank, and talked about. Indeed, she argues, the best living historians “investigate widely. They don’t just get caught up in the material details of an impression.” (Many living historians use the term “impression” to refer to the collection of uniforms, equipment, personal items, and research for a certain unit.) “They look at photographs, read diaries and letters, listen to the music of the time, read the popular books, read about the social movements. Dressing the part is only one part of interpretation.” Scripture works from home “making historical clothing on commission.” (On this issue’s cover illustration, she represents “the female correspondents who covered the war on the ground.”)

Although Spanish Civil War living historians are as diverse as the Brigadistas they portray, they are united in their passion for history and desire to inspire people to learn more about the conflict. “I believe it is important to understand why so many people were drawn to the cause and were willing to risk their lives for it,” Scripture told me. “I once told a friend that in a way we are a living memorial to them, and it is our duty to do it with care and respect. I am fortunate that I work





with so many talented people who do take that responsibility very seriously.”

Despite the Spanish Civil War’s relative historical obscurity compared to the US Civil War or World War II, many young people are drawn to the conflict for personal reasons. Samuel Levitt, 26, tells me he has “always loved studying and talking about history.” His participation in living history events began as a 10-year-old drummer at US Civil War reenactments in New England. But when he learned about his family’s Jewish roots and their active participation in the American Labor Movement in the 20th century, he was drawn to the Spanish Civil War. In 2016, he participated in a reenactment at Jarama. “There were 4 or 5 Brits and Americans portraying the International Column,” he told me. “Spaniards were really impressed that people cared about their history outside of Spain. It was pretty powerful. The experience inspired me to improve my impression by reading up on the war.” He believes that people can learn a lot at a good public event: “I don’t remember my AP history class, or most of my classes in modern history, talking about Americans going to Spain.” Public events like reenactments, on the other hand, can help “people understand the complexities of America before World War II and the different social movements.” After receiving his MA in History at University College Dublin, Levitt moved to France where he formed “Le Brigadiste: Reconstitution GCE,” an International Brigades living history group. Above, Levitt portrays a Lincoln returning from the trenches at Jarama at an event in Paris.

Hugh Goffinet, a 19-year-old student at Howard University who won ALBA’s George Watt Award in 2020, was drawn to the history of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion after the 2015 Dylan Roof shooting and the 2016 election of Donald Trump. Uncomfortable with the rhetoric and behavior of certain members of the American Civil War reenacting community, a friend suggested that Goffinet explore Spanish Civil War living history. As he researched the impression, he quickly found himself fascinated by the Lincolns, in particular the unit’s racial integration. “There’s a lot of problematic things about the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, and the people in it, but they were progressive for the 1930s.” Living history, he tells me, “is a good teaching tool. People always love to say ‘everyone was racist

*“The Spanish Civil War and living history community have provided a big opportunity for me to figure out who I am as a young African American man in 2021.”*



back then’ as a way of excusing the politics of that era. The Lincolns challenge that narrative. They were open to eating side-by-side with African Americans, fighting with them, living in the same housing. That’s something that people can really take away from the story of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade.”

Portraying a member of the Lincoln Battalion has had a deep personal impact on Goffinet. “The Spanish Civil War and living history community have provided a big opportunity for me to grow as a person and figure out who I am as a young African American man in 2021,” he said. “To embrace myself and be embraced by others. It’s been helpful for me as I try to uncover historical truths.” If he hadn’t learned the Lincolns, he told me, “I wouldn’t have won ALBA’s George Watt Award or known how to conduct historical research through the hobby.”

Mike Santana is a 28-year-old graduate student in History at Kansas State University working on a dissertation comparing American and Spanish counterinsurgencies in Cuba and the Caribbean. His interest in portraying the Spanish Civil War, he said, “really grew from wanting to understand how political polarization works, and how people are caught in the middle.” Santana believes that both living historians and the public need to understand the conflict from as many sides as possible and “get into the mentality” of the combatants: “The way I pitch it and draw a crowd at events is to talk about the war as a story of polarization. I recently had a tough question at an event at the Topeka National Guard Museum: ‘What side of the war would you have been on?’ I pointed to the map. ‘For many Spaniards, they really didn’t have much of a choice. It boiled down to where you fell when the battle lines were drawn. The reality on the ground is what I really want to show. I want to explain the courage of everyone. Courage needs to be honored, even if you don’t like what they’re fighting for.’ ▲

*Reid Palmer works as a Living Historian for the Calvin H. Coolidge Medal of Honor Heritage Center and a Technical Writer for a medical device company. He also writes and produces short videos about the lived experience of twentieth century wars on his website TheSmileyGI.com. In 2012, he won ALBA’s George Watt Award in the undergraduate category.*

# SALARIA KEA IN THE ARCHIVE

By Kathryn Everly

**Salaria Kea, the only African American woman to serve in Spain, sailed from New York City with the second American Medical Unit on March 27, 1937, and returned to the United States in May 1938. To understand what her experience was like, we must rely on documents scattered through various archives. But archives are never neutral.**

Although Salaria Kea's own writings are sparse and were never published in conventional formats, her story is fundamental to understanding how the Spanish Civil War represented an important vehicle for anti-racist mobilization in the United States. The list of archival sources is short. There are some important visual materials in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives housed at New York University's Tamiment Library, including well-known photographs of Kea with the American Unit, footage of Kea attending wounded soldiers at Villa Paz in Henri Cartier-Bresson's *Victoire de la vie* from 1937, and an interview in the 1984 documentary *The Good Fight* that also appears in Julia Newman's documentary *Into the Fire* (2002). Yet the story that emerges from these is complicated by the few available written sources. In several different documents, for example, Kea's fellow nurse Fredericka Martin (1905-1992)

questions the veracity of Kea's testimony. To bring out the silenced and forgotten Black experience in the U.S. and in Spain during the 1930s, it's important to Kea's testimony and Martin's doubts in a broader historical context.

Born in Milledgeville, Georgia, on July 13, 1913, Salaria Kea moved to Ohio and then to New York City to attend the Harlem Hospital Training Program, where she flourished. When Mussolini invaded Ethiopia in 1935, groups of Harlem nurses and physicians gathered medical supplies and sent a 75-bed field hospital to the African nation in support of Emperor Haile Selassie's troops. Later, when Mussolini sent aid to the military rebels in Spain at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, Black Americans saw the Spanish struggle as a continuation of Italian aggression in Africa. In Spain, Kea married the Irish International Brigadier Patrick O'Reilly. They later lived in New York City and ultimately settled in Akron, Ohio, where Kea died in 1990.

Several samples of Kea's papers are in the Fredericka Martin archive at the Tamiment. Martin worked in Spain as chief nurse and administrator of the American Hospital division, overseeing the work of 54 nurses. Martin's archive reflects the time she spent during the latter



years of her life compiling notes, conducting research, and sending out questionnaires to former Medical Bureau staff in order to write a history of the non-military presence in Spain during the war. Her project was never finished but, fortunately, all her research and correspondence survive in the ALBA Collection in New York.

In her notes, Martin questions and edits Kea's writings. In several instances she categorically rebukes the contents of Kea's articles and manuscripts in marginal handwritten notes. For example, Kea published a short article titled "While Passing Through" in the spring 1987 issue of

*Health and Medicine: Journal of the Health and Medicine Policy Research Group*. Written entirely in the first person, the piece presents much of the same information as the 1938 pamphlet "A Negro Nurse in Republican Spain," but the first-person narration gives this piece a distinctly personal register that heightens its testimonial value. "I sailed from New York to Spain on the S.S. *Paris* with the second American Medical Unit," Kea writes. "The doctor in charge of the group refused to sit at the same table with me in the dining room and demanded to see the Captain. The Captain moved me to his table where I remained throughout the voyage." In the margin directly next to this paragraph the word "False" appears in large, penciled script. Directly opposite this first handwritten note is another, smaller version of the word "false," this time next to a description of the conditions in the hospital set-up at Villa Paz near Madrid. Kea describes the quarters as overrun with cattle and explains how the peasants who had recently occupied the space were so accustomed to

## **Fredericka Martin's intervention forces the reader to take sides. Who is telling the truth, Kea or Martin?**

living in misery and squalor that "even with the king gone, they did not feel free to live in his beautiful palace."

The editorializing intervention of the penciled-in "false" is firm and absolute. It is not a question mark, for example, that would indicate a point needing clarification. Yet while this gesture delegitimizes Kea's voice as a reliable narrator, it fails to specify exactly what about Kea's testimony is not true. Martin's intervention also jars our concept of the archive as a repository of historically valid material. In a way, it forces the reader to take sides. Who is telling the truth, Kea or Martin? This dispute distracts from the point of Kea's story, which is to share her experience with racism. Her account of personal humiliation and isolation on the ship, for example, clearly complicates what, for many white nurses, was most likely a triumphant, patriotic voyage to fight fascism in Europe.

Martin's editorial accusations lead to a profound, negative impact on Kea's credibility and authority as a witness. By denying Kea her voice and agency, the marginal notes relegate Kea's narrative to a marginalized position within the archive. What remains in the archive is not Kea's own account but rather Martin's negation and refusal to accept her voice as true. This forces readers to first reestablish Kea's authority as a witness before they can begin to think critically about the content of her account.

The pamphlet "A Negro Nurse in Republican Spain" was written in 1938 to garner financial support for the Republic as it fought to hold its ground against Franco's quickly advancing forces. Issued by the Negro Committee to Aid Spain, the booklet cites the help of the Medical Bureau and North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy. The publication rallies for Republican economic support by using Kea's persona as a brave young woman who left a steady nursing job at Harlem Hospital to risk her life for Spanish democracy and to fight against rising fascism in Europe. Although the authorship of the pamphlet is vague, the text does include several direct quotes from Kea as well as word-for-word excerpts from her type-written manuscript. The mix of first and third-person narration allows for multiple viewpoints and commentary on Kea's activities while at the same time providing eye-witness testimony.

Ann Donlon suggests the pamphlet was authored by Thyra Edwards. A tireless activist who grew up in Texas, Edwards (1897-1953) had joined the Houston NAACP when it was formed in 1918. In the 1930s, she traveled through Europe, including wartime Spain. Her experience with Kea is documented in a personal scrapbook about her time in Spain and in the U.S. touring major cities seeking economic support for the Spanish Republic. The unsigned pamphlet leaves the narrative voice to Kea, who is the main character and often directly quoted. The ambiguity of authorship can be frustrating when trying to authenticate the stories and sentiment behind the words,

but if we consider the value of the multiple-voiced narrative that emerges in the document and the compelling, direct attack on racism, the text becomes an invaluable testimony of Black feminist solidarity and a metaphorical call to arms.

Much of the information in the pamphlet comments on the poor conditions at the field hospital in Villa Paz that fostered Kea's ingenuity in finding ways around the lack of resources. She filled hot water bottles with soup, for example, and boiled eggs in wine when water ran out. There are several copies of the pamphlet in various archives, but one copy in the Fredericka Martin papers is marked with handwritten notes in the margins declaring information such as the bombings and operating room conditions as "false" and "exaggerated," similar to the editorializing seen in the article in *Health and Medicine*. The handwriting is the same in the pamphlet as in the article, confirming Martin's ongoing censoring of Kea's story. A note written in the margin by fellow nurse at Villa Paz, Ann Taft, stating that "all your comments are correct," confirm Martin's questioning of Kea.

Yet Kea's fellow nurses ignore a striking feature of the Kea's narrative in the pamphlet: the introduction, which frames her experience. "The lynching of Negroes in America," the pamphlet states, "discrimination in education and in jobs, lack of hospital facilities for Negroes in most cities and very poor ones in others, all this appeared (...) as part of the picture of fascism: of a dominant group impoverishing and degrading a less powerful group." In the pamphlet, in other words, defending Republican Spain becomes a revolutionary act of transnational Black solidarity in the face of rising fascism in Africa and Europe that is directly equated to racism in the U.S.

The importance of the 1935 Italian invasion of Ethiopia cannot be underestimated as a springboard for Black political and social consciousness in the 1930s. Robin D.G. Kelley has explained that Ethiopia served as a global imaginary for Black freedom and self-rule. The outcry against the Italian invasion became a global movement that brought together many sectors of Pan-Africanism and fostered a real solidarity. "The defense of Ethiopia," Kelley writes, "did more than any other event in the 1930s to internationalize the struggles of black people in the United States." Martin's disqualification of Kea's testimony fails to acknowledge weight of this broader mobilization. It's up to us researchers to recognize Salaria Kea as the important figure in Black feminist transnational history that she is. ▲

*Kathryn Everly is a professor of Spanish at Syracuse University. Her interests are women writers, film, and the Spanish Civil War. For more on Kea, see her article "Intersectional Silencing in the Archive: Salaria Kea and The Spanish Civil War" forthcoming in the Hispanic Studies Review.*

# The Road to *Nightmare Alley*

## William Lindsay Gresham in the Spanish Civil War

By Chris Brooks

Director Guillermo del Toro's new film *Nightmare Alley* is bringing renewed attention to the author of the classic novel by the same name: William L. Gresham, who served in the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War. Yet Gresham's service in Spain is typically mentioned only because his first and most successful novel was inspired by information from a fellow international volunteer.

William Lindsay Gresham, a native of Baltimore, Maryland, later moved around the New York-New Jersey area. After leaving Upsala College, he worked a bewildering variety of jobs; among other things, he performed as cowboy and folk singer. The book jacket for *Nightmare Alley* described Gresham as having held “just about every job one man could do in a relatively short life. He was a clerk for a fire insurance company, editor of the Western Electric Kearny newspaper, typewriter salesman, demonstrator of magic tricks, a laundry worker, a secretary in a private detective agency (until they discovered he couldn't take shorthand and had been doing the correspondence by memory) and wanted to become a Unitarian minister.” In Spain, Gresham reported a more limited resume: “typist, newspaper reporter, and secretary.” In fact, Gresham always considered himself a writer and maintained membership in the left-leaning American Writer's Union until the union was shut down.

Gresham often stated that his decision to volunteer in the International Brigades was a response to the death of a friend in the Brunete campaign. He was assigned to an artillery regiment, armed with antiquated cannon, and saw action around Teruel, later moving south Alcoy, a town near Valencia.

“In Alcoy there was a wine shop,” fellow veteran Ben Iceland recalled, “its doorway shaded with hanging beads, where we would often go to escape the heat of the afternoon. There you could always find Bill Gresham, a lanky N. Y. magazine writer, huddled over a glass of wine. Gresham had thick glasses and wore a Trotsky-like beard. No matter how hot it was, he was always wrapped in his poncho and a scarf around his neck. With him, usually, was Spike, a mid-western steeplejack, who had also been a carnival worker. Gresham would pump Spike for details of his life and would see to it that his glass was always filled. Occasionally he would write in a little notebook that he kept with him. Some years after he returned from Spain, Bill wrote a novel about carnival life. Much of the material, I am sure, he got from Spike, in that wine shop in Alcoy.”

The dust jacket to *Nightmare Alley* tells us that, after returning from Spain, Gresham suffered from malnutrition and, while recuperating, began studying psychiatry. “He made friends with bookmakers, bums, ‘ladies,’ and listened to the rhythms of New York's folk-speech as heard along the Hardened Artery,” the jacket text continues. “Friends claim they used to catch him strolling down Broadway on a summer evening magnificently clad in shirt, slacks and bedroom slippers.”



Shortly after his return, Gresham's first marriage dissolved. He spiraled into despair and attempted suicide by hanging. After he lost consciousness—still according to the dustjacket text—the closet hook “came loose and he fell to the ground.” Gresham entered psychoanalysis and found work “as a salesman, magician, copywriter, and magazine editor.” He slowly built a career, regularly publishing articles and stories in a variety of magazines. In 1942, Gresham married poet Helen Joy Davidman, with whom he had two sons.

*Nightmare Alley* was published in 1946 and sold well. It was Gresham's literary triumph. Hollywood provided greater financial success when the book was adapted for the big screen a year later, directed by Edmund Goulding and

starring Tyrone Power, Joan Blondell, Coleen Gray, and Helen Walker. Gresham went on to write additional fiction and non-fiction books, but none were as successful as his debut novel.

Gresham and his wife purchased a large estate from the novel's proceeds. Their marriage, already rocky, was further strained by Gresham's bouts of drinking and infidelity. In 1949, his second novel, *Limbo Tower*, was published, but fell flat. His promising literary career began to peter out. In 1952, his wife became ill and went to England to rest. Her cousin Renee Rodriguez Pierce, who had two children and was fleeing from an abusive husband, moved into the Gresham's home to care for the children. While his wife was away Gresham had an affair with Renee. Divorce followed on the heels of Helen's return from England. As Helen and her sons moved to England, Gresham relocated to Florida and married Renee shortly after his divorce was final in 1954. In Florida, Paul Duncan writes, Gresham “joined Alcoholics Anonymous and seemed to find some sort of peace.”

Less than a decade later, Gresham contracted cancer of the tongue. Seeking to spare his family the expense of the disease—and himself the pain—he resolved to die by suicide. “On September 14, 1962,” Duncan writes, “he checked into the run-down Dixie Hotel room, registering as ‘Asa Kimball, of Baltimore,’ and took his own life.” He was 53 years old. ““I sometimes think that if I have any real talent, it is not literary but is a sheer talent for survival,” he had once told a fellow veteran. “I have survived three busted marriages, losing my boys, war, tuberculosis, Marxism, alcoholism, neurosis and years of freelance writing. Just too mean and ornery to kill, I guess. ▲

*Chris Brooks, a member of ALBA's Board of Governors, maintains ALBA's online database of Lincoln Brigade volunteers. For a longer version of this article, visit the online Volunteer at [albavolunteer.org](http://albavolunteer.org).*

# FACES OF ALBA: THE JUNAS FAMILY

By Aaron B. Retish

Like most veterans of the Lincoln Brigade, the experience of fighting in Spain shaped the rest of the lives of Stanley Junas and his family.

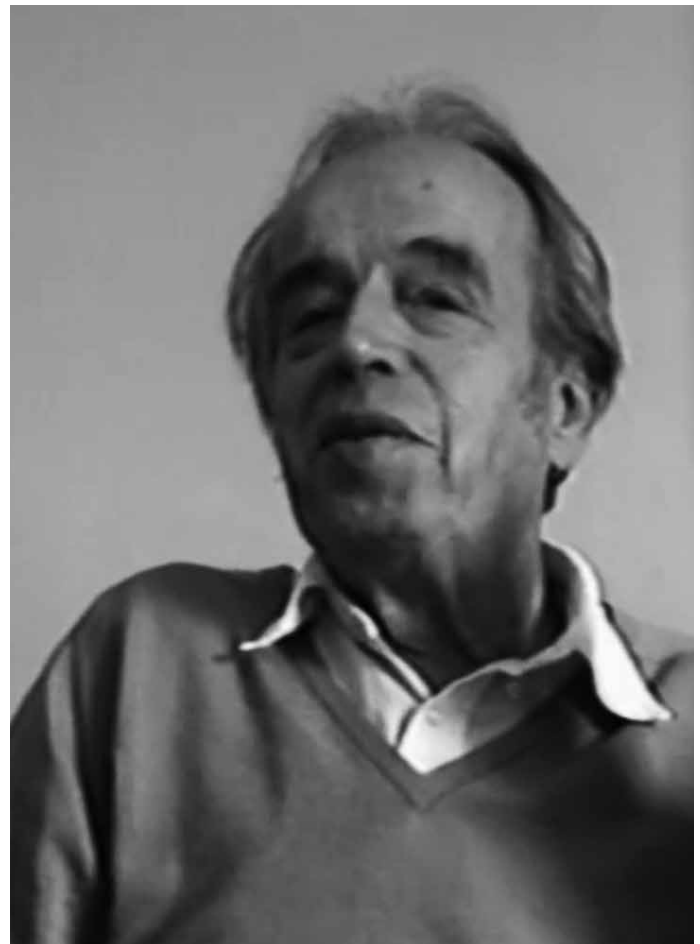
Stanley Junas volunteered in 1937, a few months after his twenty-first birthday because he was passionate about the fight against fascism and was a member of the Communist Party. After boarding a ship to England, he traversed France and crossed the Pyrenees into Spain, where he arrived in January 1938. Marching around parade grounds during his rudimentary training, he ran into a childhood friend from New Jersey whose face dropped when he saw Stan, whom he feared he would soon become another casualty of the war. But Stan survived: he fought in Belchite, drove an ambulance, fell back to the Ebro River, and left Spain after marching in the October 1938 farewell parade to honor the International Brigades in Barcelona.

He returned home a changed man—still involved in the Communist Party, but rarely speaking about his time in Spain. On May Day 1939 he married Rose Laniado, whom he had met in the fur dying trade in the Lower East Side. Rose came from a religious Jewish family from Brooklyn but took a more secular path. She had been making wigs for Shirley Temple dolls and was also active in leftist politics.

Stan took odd jobs in mechanics where he tried to learn on the job, got fired, and took up a new job. After returning from conscription in World War II, Rose's extended family invited them to move to Grand Rapids, Michigan to work in the family business. There they raised three children—Joan, Allen, and Daniel—and tried to fit in. Stan changed the Lithuanian family name from Matejunas to Junas, while Rose, who had gone by the nickname Lanni, would later change her name to Lani.

For the Junas children, the Spanish Civil War was a silent force for many years. While Stan remained a believer in the Soviet Union, he was no longer actively involved in the Communist Party. In conservative western Michigan, even receiving Communist literature in the mail was cause for trouble. Once the mail carrier told the neighbors about

***"The Spanish Civil War impressed upon Stan's children the importance of fighting for social justice."***



their mail, their children were no longer allowed to play with the Junas children. The family was still political, especially so after the stifling 1950s turned to the more permissive 1960s. They were involved in the civil rights movement and staged an organizing event for the anti-Vietnam movement. Later, Stan became active in the ACLU and the social services of the Jewish community.

It was only when he grew older and when his youngest child Daniel, now a teenager, pressed him, that his father began to talk about his experiences in Spain. In several conversations with Daniel and in subsequent formal interviews (accessible at [digitaltamiment.hosting.nyu.edu](http://digitaltamiment.hosting.nyu.edu)), Stanley filled in details of his time in Spain. Stanley saw his first combat in Belchite, soon after he arrived at the front, and the trauma of that battle would haunt him. Faced against a massive approaching army, his unit was forced into a chaotic retreat. Many of his comrades were killed. In the nearby town of Híjar Stan saw casualties that, in his son's words, "scarred his soul." Stan's unit reorganized; someone noticed that he had "mechanical aptitudes" and asked him to serve as an ambulance driver, which he was happy to do. He remained in danger, however. Daniel recalls his father recounting a story about a bomb exploding just in front of his ambulance. If he had been driving just a little faster, he would have been blown up. He also told Daniel about the maddening boredom of war punctuated by frantic moments of combat, when Stan, like the rest of the soldiers, was both brave and scared out of his mind, running in circles to try to escape falling bombs. Mostly, though, his father told him about why he volunteered to go to Spain—a point that was even more poignant as the family discussed what Daniel should do about registering for the draft for what they saw as the senseless war in Vietnam.

After the family moved to the Bay area, Stan reconnected with the community of veterans, especially his old comrade Donald MacLeod. They worked together in the Bay Area making audio tapes of local vets. Stan attended annual dinners, joined their protests, and became more active and vocal in politics.

In 1986, Daniel received a call from his father asking if he would join him on a trip to Spain for the ceremonies marking the fiftieth anniversary of the war. In Spain, they retraced Stanley's steps, accompanied by an interested Chinese journalist. They drove to Belchite and Híjar—passing the battle ground where Stan and his comrades fled the fascists—and drove down the same roads that Stan maneuvered as an ambulance driver.

The Spanish Civil War impressed upon Stan's children the importance of fighting for social justice. His daughter Joan has been active in the fight for women's rights. Daniel researched the far right and saw his work as anti-fascist. In his final years, Stan suffered from Alzheimer's. MacLeod and Steve Nelson visited him at his home in the Bay area. By that point, his memory was gone but as the two men got back in their car, they saw Stan standing in the doorway saluting his fellow soldiers.

Three years after his father's death, Daniel returned to Belchite. With Solidarity Forever playing in the background, he scattered his father's ashes at the place that had made his father who he was and shaped the lives of the Junas family. ▲

*This article is based on interviews with Joan Fisch and Daniel Junas. Aaron Retish, ALBA's Treasurer, teaches at Wayne State University.*

## TO THE EDITORS

I am writing to congratulate ALBA for the terrific workshop on Hemingway and the Lincoln Brigade in the Perry Rosenstein Cultural Series. The many names of Lincolns rang many bells for me and reminded me of the time I worked with Marion Wachtel to write our book on *Robert Merriman, American Commander in Spain*. That project opened a whole new world for me that was very inspiring.

I was born in 1937 and grew up on movies with John Wayne and others about Iwo Jima and the Pacific. But I knew nothing of the Spanish Civil War. So, the research and rich experiences—I got to attend the 50th anniversary at Avery Fisher Hall, Lincoln Center, and several of the Bay Area lunches—were very fulfilling. I follow everything and anything on the anti-fascist fight in Spain (and everywhere else in the world including, horrifically, within the U.S. now).

Congratulations, too, on all your work getting the San Francisco display and memorial up and then fixed up as was needed later. Anyhow, all best with appreciation and admiration for your ability to continue to tell of the story to new generations that need to know about Spain.

Warren L. Lerude

# RESCUING THE ARCHIVE

## A Spanish Friend of the International Brigades Remembers

By Julia Cela

**In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Spanish Association of Friends of the International Brigades (AABI) worked to collect the oral histories of brigadistas and to inventory the IB's archival legacy, which was not only geographically dispersed but often under threat. The Spanish archivist Julia Cela spent eight unforgettable years of her life on this project.**

From 1998 until 2006, while working for the for the Association of Friends of the International Brigades (AABI), I was fortunate to meet many of the volunteers who served during the Spanish Civil War to defend the Republic. For all of them, their time in Spain was the most memorable of their lives—even if some of them had been very young when they joined the Brigades. For me personally, the years I spent traveling around the world to preserve their oral and archival memory were equally formative.

My relationship with the vets started in November 1995. The Autonomous University of Barcelona had organized a conference on Spanish Civil War exiles for whose inaugural lecture the organizers had invited Juan Marichal of Harvard University and a member of the ALBA Board of Governors, a prominent Hispanist and exile. As it happened, Marichal was also my Ph.D. advisor, and when Marichal's health prevented him from making the trip, he sent me in his place. It changed my life.

On the morning of first day of the conference, as I waited on the platform to take the train to the university where the meeting was taking place, an elderly gentleman approached me. Speaking with a slight Argentinean accent, he told me that he was to take care of a Mexican woman, a friend of a friend, who was also attending the conference. He was convinced that woman was me. I laughed—I don't think there is anything Mexican about me—



and told him he was mistaken. He then introduced himself as Luis Alberto Quesada, the Argentine poet who, as a young man, had fought in the International Brigades. Thanks to Quesada I soon met the writer Antonina Rodrigo (whose biography about Margarita Xirgú I had read), her partner Eduardo Pons Prades, the Hispanist Zenaida Gutiérrez Vega, and other attendees of the conference—all of them Quesada's friends. Through them, I met a group of volunteers who were organizing a tribute to the *brigadistas* for November 1996 to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the war. They invited me to join their association of friends of the Brigades, the AABI.

In February 1996 I went to the office that the AABI had at the time on Padilla Street in Madrid and offered to help prepare the tribute. Given that I held a degree in journalism, I thought I could be most useful as a documentalist, working in the background. Although my skills did turn out to be useful, mine became less of a background role than I'd anticipated. Working with a group of professional documentalists and librarians from the Complutense University, as well as young students of Slavic languages, we prepared dossiers on all the *brigadistas* who were going to participate in the tribute, while cataloguing the documents and books they sent us.

**Marcos Ana asked Bill Susman what a brigadista was doing living in a big house like that. “This is how I want workers all over the world to live,” Bill replied.**

There is no need to recall the details of the 1996 tribute, in which many members of both VALB and ALBA participated. Once it was over, the AABI continued its work, preserving and disseminating the memory of the International Brigades, with documentation as one of its most important tasks. As coordinator of that effort, I traveled to several different countries to conduct interviews with *brigadistas* and transport the books, photographs and documents that they donated to AABI for safekeeping at the Provincial Historical Archive of Albacete.

My first trip was to New York, on the last weekend of April 1997, to attend the VALB’s annual reunion, which I’d have the privilege of joining for three consecutive years. My most vivid memory of that first US trip was a meal at the home of Bill Susman, along with the poet Marcos Ana and Ana Pérez, AABI’s president. Bill and Helen Susman lived in Long Island in a comfortable home that was exquisitely decorated but without any hint of pomposity or excessive luxury. Still, Marcos Ana asked Bill what he, a *brigadista*, was doing living in a big house like that. “This is how I want workers all over the world to live,” Bill replied.

Although we traveled frequently during those years to the United States and England, in both countries the documentation on the Brigades was well preserved—largely thanks to the work of the associations set up by the veterans and run by the vets, their friends and descendants. What concerned us more was the documentation in the former Eastern bloc, where the post-Communist governments showed little interest in the legacy of the International Brigades—if not did not view it with outright hostility. Often there were no well-organized associations to preserve the archive.

And so, in March 1999 we headed to Bulgaria where the family of a *brigadista* doctor kept a large amount of documentation of the Bulgarian volunteers,

including medical advances that had barely been studied. Thanks to the young Slavic students associated with AABI, we were able to make an inventory of those documents and smuggle them out without the authorities’ knowledge.

Although the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland had better-organized archives, we found that many of these documents were no longer of interest to the governments of those countries. Thanks to IB veterans like Vodicka in Prague and Eugeniusz Szyr in Poland, we were able to establish agreements with the main archives so that copies of these documents could be sent to Albacete. In Budapest the doors of the archives were opened to us by the Hispanist Iván Harsányi. Years later, I learned that Harsányi was Sephardic Jew who as a child had been saved from the Nazis by Ángel San Briz, the Spanish diplomat who arranged for Hungarian Sephardim to be granted Spanish passports. I still regret not having had the opportunity to talk to him about that experience.

Later that year, in August, we traveled to Bucharest, in Romania, where we were hosted by the *brigadista* Mihail Florescu and his family, as well as the children of veteran Walter Roman, Carmen and Peter. (As President of the Senate, Peter Roman had been among those who led the overthrow of Ceaucescu.) Walter Roman and Mihail Florescu had led parallel lives: they fought in Spain, belonged to the French resistance, languished in concentration camps, and did not return to their country until the end of World War II, to occupy high positions in Romania as government ministers. Roman served as Minister of Propaganda and Florescu as Minister of Oil, from 1948 until the fall of communism in 1989.

Even in the years after, however, they wielded considerable influence. Thanks to Florescu and Peter Roman, we were not only allowed to access the national archives, but even to take the documents with us to Florescu’s home to photograph and study them. During those summer afternoons with Florescu and the Romans I learned more about European history than in all my years of study.

Among the many helping hands we encountered on our travels were often the spouses of deceased *brigadistas*. For these widows, who often lived in challenging financial situations, we could provide moral and monetary support—thanks

especially to the generosity of the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, steadfast examples of international solidarity.

Many veterans also traveled to Madrid. The same Luis Alberto Quesada whom I’d met by chance on a train platform in 1995 would visit every year. I remember one afternoon when he and Marcos Ana shared anecdotes of their time in Burgos prison—nicknamed the University of Burgos—where they both spent a large part of their youth. One anecdote, which inspired Quesada’s short story collection “La saca,” has stuck with me. Luis Alberto had been sentenced to death. Every night, the prison guards would walk down the corridor until they reached the cells of the prisoners who were to be shot that night. We can only imagine the anguish of the prisoners fearing that it was their turn, and their relief when they’d hear someone else’s cell door open. Yet every morning in the prison courtyard, the other prisoners would harp on their lives: one had been left by his wife, another had some other trivial problem. One morning, tired of hearing complaints from everyone who was not on death row, Luis Alberto appeared in the courtyard with a handwritten sign around his neck that read: *No me cuentes tus problemas*—“Shut up already about your problems.”

My last trip for AABI was in 2008, when I traveled to Buenos Aires to interview the only two Argentine *brigadistas* who were alive by then: Fanny Edelman and, once again, Luis Alberto Quesada. Quesada’s wife, Asunción Allué, had passed away shortly before and Luis Alberto was showing the first symptoms of Alzheimer’s disease. We filmed the interview together with his son and grandson, both named Luis Alberto Quesada as well. At one particularly poignant moment, the old Quesada recalled that he had been arrested after he’d been betrayed by a comrade from the French Resistance, shortly after the birth of his son. In the interview, Quesada made a point of stating that he had forgiven the traitor. “Well,” added his son, with tears in his eyes, “I have not.”

Luis Alberto Quesada—who in 1963, like a rock star, had filled the Luna Park Stadium in Buenos Aires for a poetry recital alongside Marcos Ana, recently released from a Francoist prison—passed away in December 2015. Marcos Ana died 11 months later. ▲

*Julia Rodríguez Cela is a Professor of Communication at the Universidad Complutense in Madrid.*



# A Wound in the Heart

By Peter Neil Carroll

1

Mayday, the earth warms, greens, a trumpet on the car radio bleeds, Miles Davis, Sketches of Spain, the drama of rebirth, a staccato horn chases the bull in an arena, cycles of disorder. Here comes the matador, here comes the bull dripping blood from black shoulder muscle, the red cape hiding the silver sword, minor keys whipping the animal agony, driving to the fated end. It was in Spain in the Seventies I first saw the face of fascism, the Guardia Civil walking in pairs, armed with black pistols, submachine guns, also in the faces of hotel clerks demanding passports, holding them for days, just in case.... Forty years fear under Generalissimo Franco, ally of Mussolini and Hitler, who bombed Guernica, and beat the elected Republic to a pulp. I knew little about Spain's Civil War. My father had showed me a spiral-bound book of pastel drawings, Republican soldiers in arms. He had friends who fought in the International Brigades, the famed Lincoln battalion, and he refused to visit Spain while the dictator lived, but he understood and forgave why I would go there to meet a woman. Under a blazing sun, the brass blares, the taunted bull falls to its knees.

2

Spain nestles inside, its tragedy my passion. I collect stories of war, spoken history of veterans, and now in the 1990s I'm walking streets in Moscow, or searching in long-lost archives of the Spanish war. I've asked my translator, Galina, what she wanted from America. Jazz, she says and I bring her a rare vinyl of Sketches, but when I get there, she admits what she really wants is a Big Mac at Moscow's McDonald's. What has brought the collapse of the Soviet empire lingers in open air—massive potholes in sidewalks, broken windows and stairwells, two-hour queues to buy black bread, gas leaks, polluted water, drunks everywhere. Near Red Square you can watch a steady parade, brides, grooms, kneeling at an eternal flame for the anti-fascist dead. I'm carrying letters for two Spanish war veterans who will speak about death in the olive groves.

3

Morris Cohen, Bronx-born (my native land) fought with guerrillas in Spain, learned tricks of the trade for his life's work in espionage. An old brigadista hinted at Cohen's story, warned me to be careful. In the heat of the Cold War, FBI ferreting atom bomb spies, Morris and his wife abruptly disappear from New York. No one knows why,

but when agents break a Red spy ring they find photos of Cohen. Just as I'm about to fly to Russia, out of the blue I receive a letter asking me to visit Cohen at a Moscow address. Scary but exciting. It takes Galina a couple of weeks to muster nerve to accompany me. I ring the doorbell of a brick building on a quiet, tree-lined street, out steps a soldier with a weapon strapped to his back, invites us in. We have found headquarters of Russian intelligence. Galina's face drains all color. I show my letter from Cohen, the soldier stomps upstairs, returns with Boris, who looks me over and promises a reply. I hadn't told him where I'm living. Already he knows how to find me.

## 4

While I wait for his call, I track down another veteran, Percy Ludwig, tall, gaunt, expert in building fortifications in Spain. Raised in London, he speaks Cockney, his family Jewish Socialists deported back to Russia. Percy lives in a huge building, a Brezhnev blockhouse, he quips, poorly furnished rooms, floors creaky. His wife serves plates of bony fish. Framed photos show them working artillery during the big war. They were teachers when Stalin went on an anti-Jew campaign, Percy lost his job. Now in their eighties, they live in poverty, another side of Soviet failure. As I leave that night, he flashes his fist in a radical salute.

## 5

Russian intelligence calls, Boris will take me to Morris Cohen, resting in a military hospital, late stages of heart failure. Galina tags along, seriously impressed by my first-class contacts. In bed, legs swollen, his mind lucid, he asks about old comrades, talks of a happy childhood in the Bronx, football at Monroe High and Mississippi, names a friend killed down South for civil rights. I bring the conversation to Spain, his guerrilla work, setting bombs, cipherring radio codes. His voice is didactic. In fact, he never stops talking, as if starved for intimacy in his native language. I take a chance, hope Boris won't intervene, ask Morris if he regrets his life of spying. It was unthinkable, he replies, for one country to have a monopoly of such terrible weapons. All I want is peace. ▲

*Peter Carroll's "Wound in the Heart" appears in his newest collection of poetry, Talking to Strangers: Poetry of Everyday Life (Turning Point Press, 2022). For copies, email [peterncarroll@gmail.com](mailto:peterncarroll@gmail.com)*



# Almudena Grandes

## (1960-2021)

By Sebastiaan Faber

**Spanish author Almudena Grandes, who died in November, aged 61, was famed for her novels portraying ordinary Spaniards' experience of civil war and dictatorship. Against attempts to veil the past in silence, she insisted that unearthing historical memory was fundamental to building a democratic Spain.**

**B**orn in 1960 in Madrid, Grandes first made a name for herself in 1989 with an erotic novel, *Las edades de Lulú* (*The Ages of Lulú*), which inspired a film of the same name, directed by Bigas Luna and starring Francesca Neri and a young Javier Bardem. Her following novels, including the 760-page *Malena es un nombre de tango* (*Malena Is the Name of a Tango*) confirmed her status as a best-selling author of door-stopping, plot-driven page-turners.

But Grandes really came into her own as a novelist with her historically themed novels revisiting the years of the Second Republic (1931–39), the Civil War (1936–39), and the Franco dictatorship (1939–1975), with a focus on ordinary people involved in difficult political struggles. The first of these works, *El corazón helado* (*The Frozen Heart*) was published in 2007. The novel *Inés o la alegría* (*Inés or Happiness*), from 2010, was announced as the first in an ambitious series, *Episodes of a Never-Ending War*, inspired by a legendary series of historical novels penned by the nineteenth-century literary giant Benito Pérez Galdós. By the time Grandes died, she had published five of the planned six novels in the series, which together have sold 1.3 million copies to date.

Grandes was also a prominent voice in Spain's public sphere. A regular columnist in *El País* and frequent radio and television commentator, she was a strong voice on the Left calling for what has become known as the “recovery of historical memory.” In 2006, three weeks before the seventy-fifth anniversary of the proclamation of Spain's Second Republic, she wrote an op-ed in *El País* in which she claimed that the Republic had “never been as close as today.”

“This Republican Spring,” she wrote, “is finding the natural heirs of those Spaniards of 1931 in an emotionally sensitive mood.” Fear was not among those emotions, however: “Those of us who

are the grandchildren — either biological or adoptive — of the 1931 Republicans have grown up. We are the first generation of Spaniards in a long time who are not afraid. This is why we've also been the first who have dared to look back without fear of turning into pillars of salt.”

What Grandes described in her op-ed was a social phenomenon of which she'd soon become a guiding force: a paradigm shift in the way Spaniards relate to their collective past. Some six years before, Emilio Silva had managed to locate and exhume the remains of his Republican grandfather from a mass grave in the northern province of León. This would be the starting shot for a mass civic movement under the banner of the “recovery of historical memory” that inaugurated a shift in attitude toward the years of the Republic, the war, the dictatorship, and the democratic transition.

As Grandes rightly argued, while this shift was driven by emotions — curiosity, love, indignation — it was devoid of fear. The memory movement was not afraid to stand up to an increasingly emboldened Spanish right, which since the late 1990s had been embracing revisionist narratives with neo-Francoist overtones. But neither was it afraid to stand up to an institutional left that had been proclaiming for years that the only morally adequate, and politically safe, attitude to adopt vis-à-vis the period of 1931–1978 was neutral, distant, and objective — in a word, aseptic. As the late historian Santos Juliá wrote at the time, his generation was convinced that it was best to “toss the past into oblivion.” It could be studied, to be sure, but only “as history, as a closed-off past, something . . . that must be tossed aside in order to open up the only road toward that could lead us back to democracy and freedom.”

The historical novels that Grandes began writing in the early 2000s, beginning with *The Frozen Heart*, propose something radically different. Rather than modeling an aseptic relation to Spain's conflict-ridden twentieth century, they view the past through an emotional and affective lens. Rather than dismissing history as a dangerous territory and a threat to the country's survival as a democracy, they argue that certain chapters of the recent past are legacies worth recovering — not only from the moral argument that they deserve a place in the country's collective memory but because they continue to be politically relevant. “The Second Republic,” Grandes wrote in 2006, “emerges . . . as a moral example, a model of the way public life can be dignified, a clean example of politics understood as the commitment to guide a people to its future. Seen from a distance, its values prove not just admirable, but indispensable to our reality today.”

Grandes knew full well that granting the past a place in the political present is not easy. As the German term *Erinnerungsarbeit* (the labor of memory) indicates, turning historical memory into political energy is hard work. Yet this was the task to which Grandes dedicated herself tirelessly for the last fifteen years of her life — as a public intellectual and, above all, as a novelist.

If her historical novels are the fruit of that hard labor of memory — a tangible example of the way one person can relate to the past in a morally and politically relevant way — the plots of those novels, in turn, offer additional examples through the

lives of their protagonists. *The Frozen Heart*, for example, opens with the funeral of the protagonist's wealthy and beloved father — a father who, as Álvaro, the hero, soon discovers, built his fortune on the victims of Francoist repression. Álvaro's dilemma is personal (How do you redefine your relationship to a dead father once you realize that he was evil?), but it is collective too. His quandary reflects that of an entire generation of Spaniards who have been hesitant to criticize the Franco period because it might force them to morally revise their own family history — not to mention its wealth and social status.

The novel resolves this moral dilemma through a double resolution. First, Álvaro falls in love with a descendant of the same Republican family whose possessions his father pillaged. Second, digging into his family's past, he discovers that his father's mother was a relatively prominent Republican who died in a Francoist prison. Yet despite the relative simplicity of this resolution — and its hint of melodrama — the novel does important political work. In the end, Grandes not only invites her readers to relate to the collective past in an affective rather

than aseptic way; she also shows that it's possible to do this beyond the framework of genealogy. The affective relation to the past that her work models is not limited to the virtuous — but apolitical — love we feel for our mothers, fathers, grandmothers, and grandfathers. Rather, it's an affective relationship that, by going beyond filial lines, can turn into a civic or political commitment.

For Grandes, writing historical fiction was an act of taking sides. For many Spaniards, reading her work was also. As a best-selling novelist deeply committed to the cause of historical memory, Grandes made it possible for her thousands of readers to establish an affiliative bond with chapters from their collective past absent from secondary history education, and which academic historians had long declared too toxic for public access. That remains her legacy for today. ▲

*Sebastiaan Faber is chair of ALBA's Board of Governors and teaches at Oberlin College. A version of this obituary appeared in CTXT: Contexto y Acción and Jacobin.*

## BOOK REVIEW

Sebastiaan Faber, *Exhuming Franco: Spain's Second Transition*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2021. 286pp.

Reviewed by Joshua Goode

The verb to bury has three different roots; one connotes covering in the earth; another, to be of a place; the third, to borrow. At first blush, that last root seems surprisingly disconnected. But when one contemplates the notion of the

buried past, buried history or buried memories, this last root of burying makes more sense. Any good historian, or therapist for that matter, will note that when one retrieves a memory, or contemplates a past event, there is usually a particular purpose for calling it up, as if borrowing it for one's present purposes. In his newest book, *Exhuming Franco*, Sebastiaan Faber captures this multiple meaning well as he explores the use and abuse of

memories of the Spanish Civil War and the Franco Regime in present-day Spain. For some, burying Franco and the Francoist past was to make it disappear. Calling it up now is painful and threatening. For others, the past was always there, being saved for later, awaiting its exhumation. Its return now is potentially salutary. Faber's book is a careful account of the multiplicity of meanings and purposes that calling up memories has today in Spain.

While Faber is probably best known to readers as an editor of *The Volunteer*, he is also one of the most important authorities on the memory debates in Spain. He is the author of two books and numerous articles on the subject. He also has a sharp and worldly eye about Spanish politics and history and their place in more international conversations. *Exhuming Franco* is a good example of his approach. The historian, Tony Judt, once described the postwar period in Europe as defined by how different countries came to terms with their actions during World War II. Here, Faber demonstrates how Spain fits into Judt's assertion. The presumption used to be that Spain was an outlier in this postwar reconciliation, confronting its past only in terms of how the Franco regime wanted to present it, never acknowledging crimes or making amends. Then, during the Transition to democracy, leaders followed Franco's propaganda with a concomitant squelching of any historical reckoning through a firm belief that to move on from the past, one had to keep it buried, unexamined. As Faber makes clear, Spain is no longer an outlier. In fact, the past two decades have observed the rise of a large-scale memory movement there. No more are pacts of silence or blanket amnesty laws of Spain's transition years easily abided or blithely supported. Grass-roots organizations and individuals have engaged in efforts to locate mass graves from the Civil War and exhume



the bodies of loved ones. Ferocious debates among academics, journalists, and many others about crimes that took place over the last 80 years are now playing out in talk shows, books, film and television debates. Laws dedicated to historical memory have been passed in 2007 and again in 2020. Official markers and monuments of the regime are slowly being removed. No longer being saved for later, history is everywhere being yanked up from ground. What makes Spain different is not that this reckoning is taking place but figuring out why it took so long to occur and deciding what happens now.

Faber offers a lucid answer to these questions. First, he provides introductory chapters that lay out the ways that Spain has uniquely unearthed and dealt with the past. He begins with the exhumation of Franco's remains in 2019 from the Valley of the Fallen to their reinternment in the family's plot. It is a good moment to begin with as this transfer seemed to fall so flat. Greatly anticipated and symbolically important, still, many found much to criticize in the way the event was covered, discussed, and justified. There was too much focus on Franco and too little on his victims. Some naturally saw the event as a chance to ruminate not so much on the Spanish past but on the Spanish present. Yes, the transition to democracy was now over. The important question became what comes next? In a small but telling detail, Faber points out a concerning note in the fact that so many members of the Spanish far right party, Vox, today are so young, born well after Franco's death. What fantasy do they imagine when they wear signs (as they do) that say, "Make Spain Great Again"?

After laying out his themes in the introductory chapters, Faber revisits them through more than a dozen interviews with key figures who have written about Spain's memory debates or who have worked at the center of them. The portrait that emerges is the many ways the past is used in contemporary Spain. Faber talks to Catalans who view the memory fights through the lens of recent state action to suppress regional independence movements. Some university professors see the educational system as the primary site of contest about the past and its meanings. Journalists focus on the role of the media in understanding the memory movement. Others fixate on the role the judiciary has played in letting perpetrators go or holding only some to account. Some want reparations and truth commissions. Others provide interesting views of the need for, or impossibility of, a national museum dedicated to the Spanish Civil War, like the museums on the Mall in Washington, D.C., or the Memorial to Europe's Murdered Jews in the heart of Berlin. Some describe the need to remove monuments and change street names as essential tools to fix Spain's democracy. Others view these efforts as empty gestures. Still others demand more of the moral outrage that would stem from putting on trial those who committed crimes of murder, corruption, expropriation, during the war and the regime—for which they were offered amnesty or immunity *en masse* in 1977. By

presenting different people talking about the same topic, Faber's book reveals a rather erudite and complex debate about the use of the past in Spain. The book has the feel of a respectful, well-informed and informative debate in Hyde Park corner.

There is one last theme that emerges in these pages that is perhaps the most essential and disheartening. Many of Faber's interlocutors decry the parlous state of historical awareness in Spain about the Civil War, the Franco Regime and even the Transition. Some of the problem is educational. There is a shocking dearth of time spent on the Civil War or Franco in Spanish primary and secondary education. Faber also tells a revealing story about Spanish demographics: the population of Spain increasingly has the same relationship to the events of the Spanish Civil War or the Franco Regime or even of the early years of the Transition that they have to the Inquisition. They were all historical events, over long before much of the population was even born. Over 40% of the current Spanish population was born after the ratification of the 1978 Constitution. Unmitigated moral outrage is hard to maintain if historical actors are disappearing and if the population is not even aware of their crimes. This too is not just a Spanish phenomenon and concern; Judt's postwar period is ostensibly over.

The conversation with Emilio Silva that concludes the book touches on all these themes and brings Faber's argument and framing of the work to its sobering finale. Silva, who co-founded the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory, has led the movement to dig up the bones of Republican soldiers and other victims of Francoist forces. He is the obvious person to begin and end this book. His work has always attacked that core divide in the roots of burials: to make disappear or to save for later. The problem for Silva is not that there is too much talk about the past. There is still too much reluctance to have a real reckoning. And this reluctance is born of the habits formed in Spain's Transition and its pact of silence. Silence begets ignorance and ignorance plus time is the enemy of reconciliation. Teaching history is the only way forward: "If we think of Spain as a tree whose roots reach in the soil, it's clear that we are not drinking from the Second Republic or other progressive periods. The subsoil that feeds is still drenched in Francoism." ▲

*Joshua Goode is the book review editor for The Volunteer and an Associate Professor of History and Cultural Studies at Claremont Graduate University. He is the author recently of "Spain's Neutral Holocaust, or The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Otto Skorzeny: Spanish Confrontations with Genocide in Francoist and Post-Franco Spain" in Sara Brenneis and Gina Hermann, eds., Memories of the Holocaust: Spain and World War Two (2020).*

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April 30, at 4pm EDT, live on YouTube and Facebook. Including the ceremony for the **2022 ALBA/Puffin Award** for Human Rights Activism, granted to Life After Hate.

## **MAKE ANTI-FASCISM PART OF YOUR LEGACY!**

What you leave to friends and loved ones—and the causes you champion—are ways of expressing your hopes and dreams for the future. As you make your plans, please consider joining the Jarama Society by including ALBA in your will or living trust or naming us as a beneficiary of your estate. ALBA accepts legacy gifts in any amount. Help us to continue and expand our educational mission of teaching future generations about the sacrifices made by the Lincoln Brigade in their fight against the global threat of fascism. Your gift to ALBA will help ensure that today's young people learn about the experiences of volunteers in Spain, as well as their broader dedication to social justice at home.



If you have questions or would like to discuss your options, please contact ALBA's Executive Director Mark Wallem at 212 674 5398 or [mwallem@alba-valb.org](mailto:mwallem@alba-valb.org).