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The Volunteer

FOUNDED IN 1937 BY THE VOLUNTEERS OF THE LINCOLN BRIGADE.
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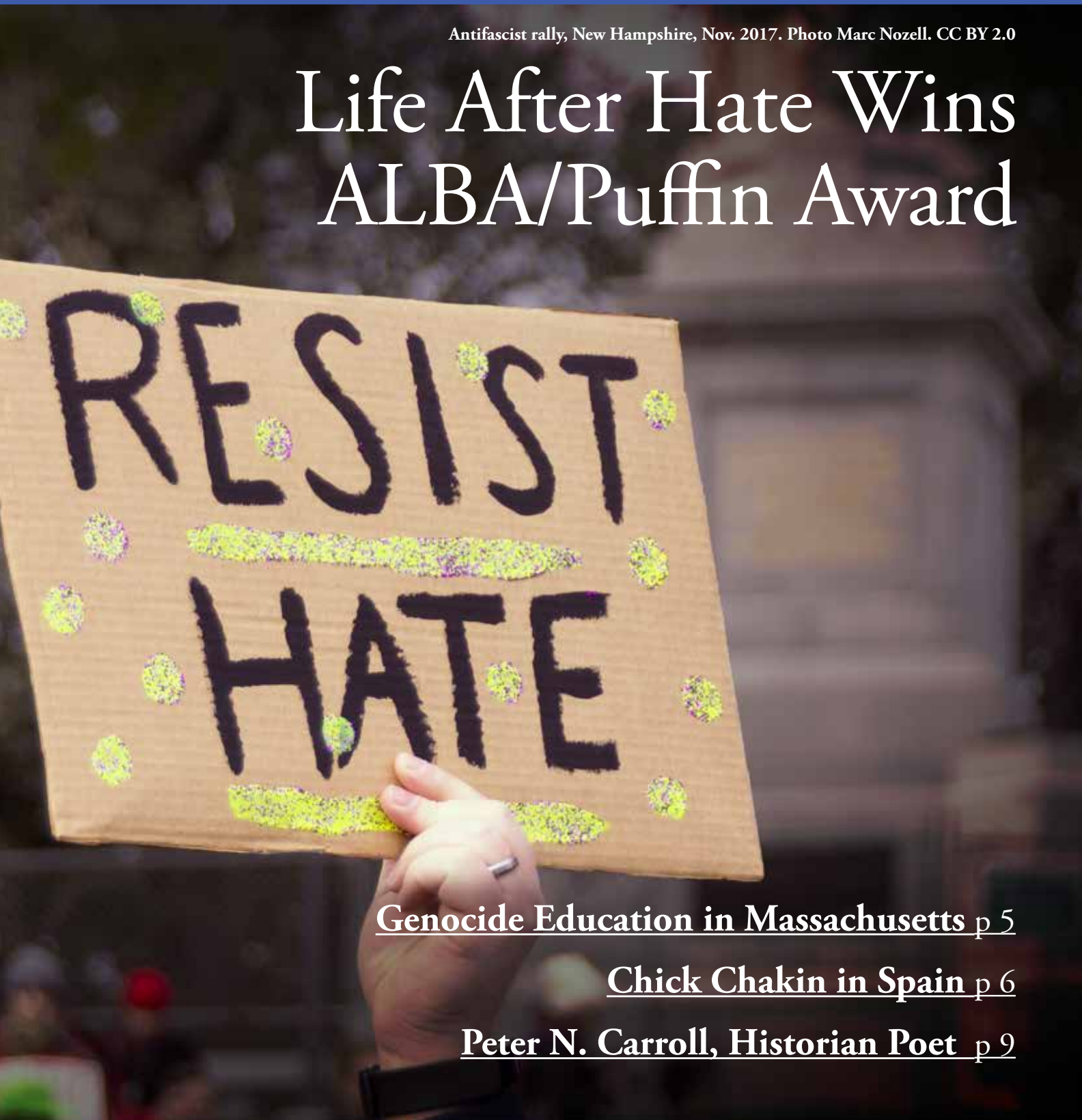

Antifascist rally, New Hampshire, Nov. 2017. Photo Marc Nozell. CC BY 2.0

Life After Hate Wins ALBA/Puffin Award

The Volunteer
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.

IN THIS ISSUE

Dear Friends,

As this issue goes to press, ALBA is wrapping up a busy, program-filled spring. A highlight, no doubt, was our online gala on April 30, which included the ALBA/Puffin Award for Life After Hate (see p. 3), along with stirring music and thought-provoking conversations about the relevance today of the legacy embodied by the International Brigades.

How their legacy applies to current events—including the Russian invasion of Ukraine—is an important question about which our community has engaged in a productive debate (see p. 20 and our online edition).

Beyond diverging views on issues like these, however, we can agree on one thing: In a world that's facing war and destruction, ruthless imperialism, and a newly emboldened far right that seems determined to walk back a century's worth of progress—from academic freedom to abortion rights—it is more important than ever to honor, study, and discuss the Brigades' steadfast commitment to antifascism and progressive internationalism.

This is the core of ALBA's mission. It guides everything we do: from our work with teachers (read about our latest five-week institute on page 3) and the Perry Rosenstein Cultural Series (with four workshops so far in 2022), to the essay contest named in honor of Lincoln vet George Watt, who was also highlighted in April in a moving production based on the correspondence from Spain with his wife Ruth (see p. 3).

In this issue, we feature a moving portrait of volunteer Al Chakin (p. 7), interesting new research on the music broadcast on the radio in Republican Spain (p. 17), and a piece by our teaching partner, Rich Cairn, on Massachusetts' exciting new educational standards on genocide (p. 5). This issue also features a special section dedicated to my co-editor, Peter N. Carroll, to acknowledge his pioneering work as an historian of the American volunteers in Spain and his many decades of service to ALBA.

All of us at ALBA share the deep conviction that our work—teaching history, inspiring activism, and upholding human rights—is as necessary and important as it ever was. Yet all of us also know that the only reason we can continue to do it is thanks to your generous, steadfast support. From all of us, we send you a heartfelt *gracias.*

¡Salud!

Sebastiaan Faber, Co-editor

PS: Keep an eye out in the coming months for our Summer Appeal, which will include a special offer. And remember to support our teaching programs.

PS (2): Last year we accidentally jumped volume numbers mid-year (from 38 to 39). The error has been corrected for this volume.

The Volunteer needs your help!

Every three months, ALBA is pleased and proud to send you this publication. We know that so many of our readers treasure it, and we value your feedback, your encouraging words as well as your constructive criticism. We strive to make the publication a forum for the exchange of information and ideas of interest to the ALBA community.

Each edition of The Volunteer costs $7,500 to publish. Would you consider donating at this amount to cover the cost of one edition? Your name would be prominently displayed (with your approval) in that edition, as the single donor who made that edition possible. We know this is a big "ask"! If you are able to consider a gift at this level, to sponsor an edition of *The Volunteer*, please contact Mark Wallem directly at mwallem@alba-valb.org.

Please know that we appreciate every gift, large or small, that comes our way. Thank you for your generosity and your support of *The Volunteer*.

Participants in ALBA's 2022 Gala.

ALBA NEWS

Life After Hate Receives ALBA/Puffin Human Rights Award at Gala

At a moving, content-filled annual gala on April 30, Life After Hate received this year's ALBA/Puffin Award for Human Rights Activism. Founded in 2011, LAH helps people leave violent far-right and white supremacist groups to connect with humanity and lead compassionate lives. Co-founder Angela Jackson received the award on behalf of the organization. Ms. Jackson, formerly part of the right-wing extremist movement, is now an anti-hate activist.

Presented live online by ALBA's María Hernández Ojeda and Cristina Pérez Jiménez, the gala featured a keynote address by the Spanish journalist Miquel Ramos, author of a recent book about the grassroots struggle against neofascism; music by Barbez and Miriam Elhajli; addresses by Neal Rosenstein of the Puffin Foundation and ALBA's Aaron Retish and Mark Wallem; and an update from last year's award winner, My Brother's Keeper. Also included were an interview with the filmmaker Almudena Carracedo about memory and antifascism, and excerpts from a conversation between Hunter College students and children of Lincoln vets. For a videorecording of the entire event, which was edited by Amy Linton, visit ALBA's website at alba-valb.org.

ALBA Board Welcomes New Members and Staff

ALBA is thrilled to announce two new additions to its Board of Governors: Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha of Flint, Michigan, and Prof. Cristina Pérez Jiménez of New York City. Dr. Hanna-Attisha is a pediatrician, professor, and public health advocate whose research exposed the Flint water crisis, revealing that children were exposed to dangerous levels of lead. She is now the director of an initiative to mitigate the impact of the crisis. Her great uncle, Nuri Rafail Kutani, served as a volunteer in the Spanish Civil War. Cristina Pérez Jiménez is an assistant professor of English at Manhattan College, where she specializes in U.S. Latinx and Caribbean cultural studies with a focus on race and ethnicity, migration and diaspora studies, urban studies, and histories of the left and ethnic social movements. Meanwhile, the ALBA office welcomes Cole Stallone as Communications Associate. Cole, who holds a BA and MA in History from NYU, developed an interest in ALBA while working with archival material at the Tamiment Library.

Young Actors Read George and Ruth Watt's Letters

On April 9, Vero Maynez and Nathan Payne, two Berkeley-trained actors, movingly interpreted excerpts from the Spanish Civil War correspondence between Lincoln volunteer George Watt and his wife Ruth. Stage-directed by ALBA's Peter Glazer and presented by María Hernández-Ojeda, the event brought the online audience

Nathan Payne, Ruth Watt, Vero Maynez, and George Watt.

to tears. The performance was based on a script by Dan and Molly Watt, who joined in the Q&A afterward. The Watts have made the entire script available for educational purposes through ALBA's web page, where you will also find a recording of the event.

Perry Rosenstein Cultural Series: Workshops

The "workshops for everyone" offered as part of the new Perry Rosenstein Cultural Series (PRCS) have 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 experts who provide participants with reading and viewing materials in advance and then lead a lively, interactive discussion. After two fall workshops on Hemingway and two on Spanish Civil War posters, this February featured one on Spanish immigrants in the US, offered by Cristina Pérez Jiménez and James D. Fernández. In March, Jo Labanyi and Gina Herrmann offered a class on Women and the Spanish Civil War. Coming up on June 23: a workshop on Poetry and the Spanish Civil War, with Anthony Geist. To sign up, visit ALBA's website.

ALBA Screens Documentary on Historical Memory and Francoist LGBT Repression

On June 8, as a kick-off to Pride Month, ALBA will offer an online screening of *Bones of Contention*, a 2017 documentary film by Andrea Weiss. An online panel discussion of the film will include Emilio Silva, whose Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory (ARMH) was the winner of the 2015 ALBA/Puffin Human Rights Award. Silva is featured in the film. The event is jointly sponsored by ALBA and the Center for LGBTQ Studies (CLAGS) of the CUNY Graduate Center. Also appearing on the panel will be the film's director Andrea Weiss, and CLAGS' Shaka McGlotten, Professor of Media Studies and Anthropology at Purchase College-SUNY. Look for the invitation in your email or consult ALBA's website.

Successful Institute for Teachers

In March and April, ALBA offered a five-week online workshop to close to 30 teachers from the United States and elsewhere, working with the Collaborative for Educational Services of Massachusetts. "It was really great that this course prioritized primary sources as a way to actively engage students," a participant wrote at the end of the course, "I will utilize this in human rights and memory courses I teach forever!" another said. "This has probably been one of my most enjoyable historical/educational experiences I've had," a third commented.

Spanish Government to Publish ALBA Curricular Guide

An extensive, 75-page curricular guide about the Lincoln Brigade, written in Spanish by James D. Fernández and Sebastiaan Faber, will be published soon by the Spanish government. Based on primary sources from the ALBA collection at the Tamiment Library and Spanish archives, the guide will be made available free to secondary school students and teachers in Spain.

Catalan Government Inaugurates "Alvah Bessie Program"

In the presence of Dan Bessie and Sebastiaan Faber, the Catalan government officially inaugurated its plans to exhume, identify, and repatriate the remains of International Brigade volunteers who died in Catalonia. Named after ALB vet Alvah Bessie, the program invites interested family members to submit genetic material and be entered into a database. More information at justicia.gencat.cat/ca/ambits/memoria/Recerca/Programa-alvah-bessie

Stop Forced Sterilization. Rachael Romero. (1977). San Francisco Poster Brigade. Library of Congress. https://www.loc.gov/item/2015647473

Massachusetts Passes Genocide Education Legislation

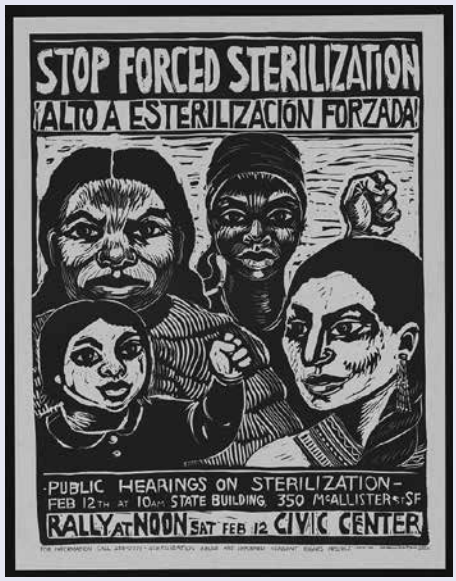
By Rich Cairn

A new educational law in Massachusetts encourages teachers to teach about genocide—including cases in US history— in the context of human rights. The connection with ALBA's teaching institutes is clear.

In December of 2021, running counter to efforts by Republicans in many states to pass classroom censorship laws, Republican Governor Charlie Baker of Massachusetts signed S. 2557, An Act Concerning Genocide Education. Massachusetts became the 21st state to pass similar legislation. The effort in Massachusetts followed many years of sustained effort.

The Massachusetts law places the study of genocide in the context of learning about human rights broadly. Rather than singling out specific instances, the bill encourages the study of the characteristics of genocide and its many cases across world history, including current instances. The law also directs students to learn to "reject the targeting of a specific population and other forms of prejudice that can lead to violence and genocide." The state will provide professional development to ensure effective, high-quality implementation of the law.

Massachusetts-based Emerging America has partnered for many years with ALBA to offer a graduate course for teachers: America and World Fascism: From the Spanish Civil War to Nuremberg and Beyond. A spring 2022 section of the course again explored ways that teachers can aid students to understand how fascists could gain power and commit brutal acts of genocide with broad public support. Teachers found consensus that the letters of Lincoln Brigade veterans and other documents made available by ALBA are a vital resource to help students ground their understanding in the complex experiences of real people from history. Teachers were disturbed also to learn of the ordeal of Spanish refugees after the fall of



"The state will provide professional development to ensure effective, high-quality implementation of the law."

the Republic. Russia's invasion of Ukraine provided a poignant background to the course.

Teachers in the course also discussed how to address controversial and difficult material. They examined strategies to help students to avoid common pitfalls such as "presentism" (judging the past from today's perspective) and false equivalence (seeing all sides in any conflict to be equally culpable and equally brutal). Key strategies for in-depth understanding and intellectual integrity include providing students with adequate context for each document and allowing students to explore a rich set of primary and secondary sources in varied media from multiple perspectives. Above all, teachers must help students practice backing up claims with relevant and reliable evidence and with solid reasoning.

Emerging America curated a list of Resources for Teaching about Genocide: www.emergingamerica.org/blog/resources-teaching-about-genocide. The list includes teaching resources from leaders: Facing History and Ourselves, Learning for Justice (education program of the Southern Poverty Law Center), Anti-Defamation League, and U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

In current work to draft Disability History curriculum, Emerging America applies the study of genocide to campaigns by U.S. Eugenicists across the 20th century to involuntarily institutionalize and sterilize people with disabilities. Emerging America's new curriculum emphasizes the agency of disabled people. So the lessons on eugenics begin with objections to eugenics in primary sources from contemporaries in the early 20th century. A centerpiece of the lesson traces that resistance forward to a 2012 North Carolina program to set up an Office of Justice to Sterilization Victims and to pay compensation to thousands of disabled people forcibly sterilized by that state.

Rich Cairn is a Civics and Social Studies Inclusion Specialist for the Collaborative for Educational Services, where he founded the Emerging America history education program in 2006. He is a national leader in service-learning, civic engagement, and Disability History.

Chick Chakin's Last Chance

By James Stout

Like many participants in the 1936 Popular Olympics in Barcelona, Alfred Chakin was a talented athlete. He was also a committed antifascist.

Al Chakin was 32 when he visited Barcelona for the first time, but between his bad knee and the incessant energy of his youthful charges, the wrestling coach already felt old. The knee which had ended his Olympic dreams probably didn't enjoy the long voyage on ships, trains, and buses that he took from New York to Barcelona. Yet despite having all but given up on his hopes of Olympic glory, he was now in Barcelona to compete in the Olympic games.

Like many participants in the 1936 Popular Olympics, Abraham Alfred Chakin, known to his friends as Chick, was a talented athlete. He'd wrestled his way from a working-class immigrant home to Cornell and very nearly onto the 1924 Olympic squad. Like those of many Lincolns, Chakin's parents had fled anti-Semitism in Europe and come to settle in New York in search of a better life. In Chakin's case, his family had left Russia when he was less than a year old. Thirty-one years later, he returned across the Atlantic to fight a new kind of bigotry that was emerging in Europe. His intention was to show the world the strength and diversity of anti-fascism though participation in a huge sporting spectacle. But after arriving in Barcelona in the third week of July 1936, he quickly found that if he wanted to turn back fascism he would need to fight outside of the mat.

Officially, Chakin was the coach of the US team for the Popular Olympiad, but "big brother" might be a better term. By 1936 he'd experienced victory, defeat, injury, and just about everything else that sport can throw at an athlete. He'd started wrestling in school and by his final year at Cornell, Chakin's team was undefeated and won the Eastern Intercollegiate Wrestling Association title. Chakin took the individual title in the 135lb weight class. He took summer school classes to finish up his degree.

He'd narrowly missed out on selection in the 1924 games, beaten out by two wrestlers who went on to win gold and silver. After graduating on September 25, 1926, with a BA, Chakin won the 1927 Amateur Athletic Union Niagara District Wrestling championships, an Olympic qualifying event. Despite this, he didn't make the team in 1928 and had probably all but given up on seeing the world.

Instead, he pursued a master's degree at City College New York and taught physical education. It was there that he met Jennie Berman. Although she was just four months older than Al, Jennie, a social worker and a Communist firebrand, was a much more experienced activist. She graduated from Syracuse University in 1925 and headed directly for the city to join the Communist Party and begin organizing. The year before they married, she had made headlines when she led New York's Jewish community social service agencies in a walkout for union recognition. It was through her that Al developed his politics and deep-rooted dislike of fascism and inequality.

His team for the Barcelona games had been cobbled together on short notice and little money. Most of them were avid participants in the workers' sport movement on the east coast, and keen to test themselves against fellow workers from around the globe while also showing their solidarity in the face of a growing fascist threat. Much to the delight of the organizers in Barcelona, the team contained both Black and white athletes—including the 19-year-old Charley Burley, who at one time seen as the best pound for pound boxer in the world.

Burley was something of a celebrity, even to Chakin, who was thirteen years his senior. As a mixed-race boy in the rapidly dying coal towns of Western Pennsylvania, Charley hadn't had an easy upbringing. He and Al seemed to get along, and on the way to Barcelona they'd spar on the deck of the Transylvania. But even before they landed in Europe, the team would have their commitment to equality tested.

Walking into dinner after four days aboard, Chakin's team found their table moved for the third time. Apparently, some of the more "high-class" passengers had objected to taking their dinner in view of the team's Black members. The team put their collective foot down and refused to move. Despite his diminutive stature, Al Chakin had the air of a man who was confident in starting fights because he was confident in finishing them. The table stayed put, and the team ate together with other passengers.

The team slowly wound its way through Europe, landing first in Dublin then in Glasgow. From there, they took a train to London for a round of press interviews before setting off south to catch a ferry to France. Chakin got his own sub headline in the *Daily Worker*, where he was billed as a "college champ" with a "grand smile and grip." "Alfred knows his stuff, believe me" the *Daily Worker*'s sports editor assured his readers beneath an image of Chakin with his unmistakably wide grin and flat nose. On the train, they played Pinochle, grew accustomed to being slightly famous as the story of the games spread through unions and the left-wing press, and met an Englishman


OLIMPIADA POPULAR
BARCELONA
22-26 DE JULIOL 1936
OLIMPIADA POPULAR, 22-26 JULIO
OLYMPIADE POPULAIRE, 22-26 JUILLET
VOLKS OLYMPIADE, 22-26 JULI
PEOPLES' OLYMPIAD, 22-26 JULY
COMITE ORGANITZADOR
RAMBLA SANTA MONICA 25
(C.A.D.C.I.)
BARCELONA
PUBLICITAT COLL · TALLERS 7 · BARCELONA

Alfred Chakin, October 1937. ALBA Photo 11-0630. Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

named Mike Samuelson who invited them to his home on their return trip and brought them drinks.

However, their return, and much of the rest of their trip, would not go quite as smoothly as their voyage through the UK. On arrival in Catalonia on July 16, the team drank up the revolutionary atmosphere of July 1936. With the Hotel Olympic already full, they were assigned rooms in the Hotel Europa, a Catalan Modernist building just feet from the bustling *Boquería* market and yards from the Rambla. Finding themselves exhausted from nearly two weeks of travel, the team of dedicated athletes did the sensible thing and headed out for a night on the town. Over the next few days, they trained in the stadium and drank in the bars.

But on the day the team had been hoping to show the sporting prowess of anti-fascism, they ended up getting a different show altogether. On July 19, instead of leaving for the stadium, they ran to their balconies as gunshots rang out around the city. The hotel doors were locked, but soon some of the athletes were able to take advantage of a lull in the fighting to get some food and help the Catalans build up their barricades.

By the time they got out, the air was thick with smoke and the stench of cordite. Despite the chaos, the athletes all organized a march from their hotel to the stadium, where they worked out and assumed that they would still be competing. After all, the coup had clearly been snuffed out by the decisive action of the Catalan workers. Then more shots rang out, and they were forced to flee as the soldiers in the Montjuïc Castle just 800 meters away fired into the stadium.

With the games postponed, the US Consulate told the team in no uncertain terms that if they did not leave, they would no longer be receiving the assistance of the consul. Besides, there could be no games without the locals and most of them had already set off for Zaragoza. Feeling dejected, they boarded the Ciudad de Ibiza along with the Belgian, Swiss, and other delegations. They traveled to Paris and competed in an athletics meet there before heading back to the USA to watch from afar as western governments abandoned their Spanish and Catalan counterparts and fascists embraced the rebellion they'd seen defeated by the Catalan workers.

At a fundraising rally back in New York, Chakin said that "if they weren't class conscious before" they arrived in Barcelona, the athletes "certainly were after they saw the workers." Chakin's own consciousness was also changed by what he saw. Despite his age and dodgy knee, he couldn't stand watching from the sidelines. While this is hardly an admirable quality in a coach, it's what led him to volunteer to fight in Spain. On July 7, 1937, he set sail for what would be his final trip across the Atlantic aboard the Queen Mary. He arrived in Setcases on July 18, 1937, exactly a year after he had gone to sleep in the Hotel Europa and awoken to the sound of gunfire. This time, there was no hotel door to keep him safe and Chakin quickly found himself, once again, fighting.

He served as quartermaster of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, better known as the Mac-Paps. Although named for Canadians, the Battalion was mostly comprised of US volunteers. His record in service there is sparse, he must have been present for the Mac-Paps' finest hour at Teruel, but he did not survive the chaotic retreats around Caspe. At some point, as the Mac-Paps trekked from Azuara to Lecera hounded by fast moving Whippet tanks, Chakin went missing and was never heard from again.

Berman had joined him in Spain at first, helping to create the first Art Therapy program for children traumatized by war. But she returned to the US without Chick. She'd agonized before he left, wondering if telling the doctor about his bad knee was the right thing to do. It was a decision she lived with for the rest of her life, as she recounts in the documentary film *The Good Fight*. Chakin, along with a dozen other CCNY alumni and faculty, is memorialized in a plaque at the college today. Although he might have felt old by surrounded by students, then athletes, then soldiers, Chakin never lived to see his 35th birthday. He never quite made it to the opening ceremony of an Olympic games either, despite trying out for three. He'd spent his life fighting for everything he wanted; he died fighting for something he believed in.

James Stout's PhD in History focused on the construction of Catalan anti-fascist identity through sport in the Second Republic. He now works as a journalist covering conflict and displaced people.

"I'm an Anarchist."

By Sebastiaan Faber

Peter N. Carroll—renowned historian, poet, and (co-)editor of this magazine for more than twenty years—has been involved with ALBA for four decades. Time for a tribute.

Peter Carroll and Milt Wolff watch Pete Seeger.

Peter Carroll, future historian of the Lincoln Brigade, was about to turn 14 when he first suspected he might be a red diaper baby. The idea horrified him—it was the height of the Cold War.

On an October evening in 1957, the day the Russians launched the first sputnik rocket, Peter and his father, Louis, happened to be driving past the United Nations building in New York. "They kept the lights on late," Louis said. "They must be worried." There was something in his tone that disconcerted his teenage son. A couple of months later they were talking at the kitchen table when Peter made a disparaging remark about "Communist dupes." His dad looked him in the eye, grinned, and said: "You should know that your father was a red."

Peter was shocked. "He might have punched me in the stomach," he writes in his 1990 memoir, *Keeping Time*. The truth was that he didn't know what to do with the information and explained it away. "I assumed that communism was merely a part of his youth, somewhere between childish and naïve, and that he was as embarrassed as I was by the past," he writes. "In any case, it seemed safer—politically, psychologically—to let the matter rest. I was terrified that someone might find out."

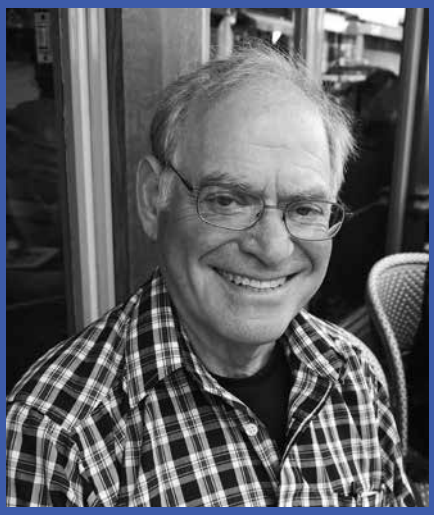
Fourteen was also the age that Louis Carroll, an academically and musically precocious son of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, had graduated from high school in New York City. It was 1929. After the Great Depression hit that fall, Louis found himself making a living as a nightclub piano player and gigging with his older brother's band. A talented composer and arranger, he founded a music production company, got involved in left-wing politics, and in 1934 married a Jewish girl, a child of immigrants like himself. Their son Peter Neil was born nine years later. After a wartime stint in the army, Louis Carroll swapped the unstable music business for a steady job as a music teacher at a New York City junior high school. His political past was buried.

"I never got any more clarity about it," Peter Carroll, now 78, told me when we spoke in December 2021. "In retrospect, I assume my father was in the Young Communist League, but I'm not sure. The next time I had a serious discussion about politics with him was in the mid-sixties, when I was in getting my Ph.D. I was taking a seminar on US diplomatic history. At that time, it was common wisdom among historians that the United States had fought Britain in the War of 1812—whose 150th anniversary had recently prompted several new books—to protect its national honor. I said something connecting that same idea with Lyndon Johnson's stubbornness on Vietnam. My dad countered with a Marxist kind of analysis. Once again, I felt embarrassed."

And yet Peter's own views were about to shift. As an undergraduate at Queens College, he was on the editorial board of the student newspaper, *The Phoenix,* which challenged the administration for banning left-wing speakers (the Communist Ben Davis and Malcolm X) by organizing a strike of classes for free speech. Soon afterward, an editorial against the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) led the college president to punish the editors with "disciplinary probation, with warnings of potential expulsion." It was his first taste of McCarthyism.

Like his father, Peter was academically precocious, enrolling in college at 16 and entering graduate school on a fellowship, at Northwestern, when he was 20. Three years later, he'd finished his dissertation on Puritanism and the American Wilderness; he landed his first academic job, at the University of Illinois, Chicago, in 1968—just as his thesis was being published. A few months later, he was hired at the University of Minnesota with full tenure. The lightning-quick transition into

Peter Carroll, photos Jeannette Ferrary



Peter Neil Carroll was born in New York City in 1943 and grew up in the Bronx and Queens. After graduating from Queens College, he received his doctorate in History from Northwestern University in 1968. He taught at the University of Minnesota until 1974, after which he worked as a book reviewer for the *San Francisco Bay Guardian* and other venues, and as an adjunct lecturer at Stanford, among other universities. Carroll is the author and editor of some 20 books, including *Puritanism and the Wilderness: The Intellectual Significance of the New England Frontier* (1969); *The Free and the Unfree: A New History of the United States* (1977); *Keeping Time: Memory, Nostalgia, & The Art of History* (1990); *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade: Americans in the Spanish Civil War* (1994); and *We The People: A Brief American History* (2002). Since 2008, he has published eight volumes of poetry, including *A Child Turns Back to Wave* and *This Land, These People,* both of which have won the Prize Americana. Carroll chaired ALBA's Board of Governors from 1994 until 2010; he continues to serve on ALBA's Board and co-edits its quarterly magazine, *The Volunteer.* He also chairs the Advisory Committee of the Puffin Foundation and the Activist Gallery of the Museum of the City of New York. He lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with the photographer and writer Jeannette Ferrary.

academic respectability—not to mention life-long job security—coincided with further political awakening. "The more I became concerned about the Vietnam War, the more my landscape broadened," he told me. "I realized that there were interests involved—exploitative capitalist interests—and that the domino theory was not just about the evils of communism, but really an urge for capitalist expansion. By the time I got tenure, I was actively antiwar and pretty involved in the civil rights movement."

Your father died young, in 1976. Did he ever tell you anything more about his own political past?

Very little. I got some more details from my mother in the years after his death. She told me they had attended political events together, including meetings on the Spanish Civil War. My father's older brother had been a communist and had many close friends in the International Brigades. My guess is that my father followed his brother, whom he admired, into the party. But I could never ask my uncle directly because he died in 1958.

Why was your father so coy about his politics?

It was pure McCarthyism. Don't forget that to be a teacher in New York City he had to sign a loyalty oath. I have a childhood memory of moving apartments in the Bronx. My dad had been boxing up his books. His father-in-law, who was a life-long socialist and union man, would come around the house around supper time. One evening, as my grandfather was leaving, my father handed him a bag full of pamphlets and books. I remember he told him to get rid of them, but to be sure to drop them in the trash further down the street so nobody could tell where they came from. He was cleaning out his left-wing stuff.

Did he steer clear from politics after the war?

Not quite. At his school, he helped create the teacher's union and led the first strike of public-school teachers in New York City in April 1962. I was an undergraduate at Queens College by then. I remember asking him if he wasn't worried about losing his job. He replied that for him it wasn't a matter of choice, but of being able to face himself in the mirror every day.

Let's go back to your time in Minnesota. It's 1969, you're 25, and you're a tenured professor. That must have been some sort of record.

Yes. I think I might be the youngest person ever to get tenure at a US history department.

But then, five or six years later, you decide to resign and make a living as a freelancer. That strikes me as a remarkably nonconformist gesture for someone who, until then, seemed to be on a perfectly conformist path—and an accelerated one at that. How did the academically precocious kid and brilliant historian who was embarrassed about his father's politics become such a rebel?

At Minnesota, I'd become politicized, both inside the university and out. I enjoyed teaching and doing research but ultimately, I wasn't happy being an academic. Tenure had come easy—my first book came out almost immediately, and at the time, that was that—and seemed easy to give up.

In your memoir, you write: "My future was so secure that I had no future at all." You felt burdened, you write, by "the incongruities of my professional identity, the image of the scholar": "I was always embarrassed by the luxuries of the lifestyle and the dubious value of the work. I always felt like someone living unfairly on welfare." But you also suspected that your discontent might be generational.

Yes. In fact, I spent the last year of my tenured academic appointment on a fellowship interviewing 25 former classmates of mine from grad school, most of whom by then were about ten years out. I wanted to find out why I had gotten myself so stuck in academia and why I was now so uninterested in it. As it turned out, about half of the people I talked to had switched careers.

What else did you discover?

For one, all the professors, men and women, had little studies in their house: once they closed the door, nobody could bother them. None of the non-academics had dens like that. Also, among my cohort group, only the academics had gotten divorced at that time. I realized that the academic world was very selfish.

Do you mean selfishness as self-serving or as self-isolating?

Both. It was a selfishness cloaked in academia's sense of self-importance. These professors of history all thought themselves more important than other working people. You have to remember that in the early 1970s, the university was

still a very traditional, male-dominated world. My education at Queens College and Northwestern, too, had been very traditional. I'd learned nothing about Black history, for example. No women's history or Native American history, either. I had to learn those fields after graduate school, also because by then my students demanded it.

And you did.

Of course. Just look at my books, including my survey of US history, *The Free and the Unfree,* which I cowrote with David Noble in the mid-1970s. In fact, I still try to keep up with those fields.

Yet your first book was on the colonial period.

Technically, my field was US intellectual history. What I really wanted to do was to work on the nineteenth-century philosopher William James: the idea of a closing frontier and how he was responding to that with the idea of an open-ended universe. But to satisfy my curiosity, I had to go back and start in the seventeenth century, when white settlers from Europe first came to America. Stupidly, that meant I was automatically classified as a colonial historian. But that wasn't my love.

How did you end up writing about the twentieth century?

After resigning from Minnesota, in the mid-1970s, I moved to California and started looking for freelance gigs. I ended up as a badly paid, one-course adjunct at San Francisco State while working as a book reviewer at the same time. That didn't pay well either, but I could scrape by doing a lot of reviews—and those were often on books about twentieth century topics.

Is that how you ended up connecting with the veterans of the Lincoln Brigade?

Wait, you are skipping an important chapter here. You're not asking the right questions. (*Laughs.*)

Right. Do I remember correctly that you first made a trip to Spain?

That's correct—and the key to that trip is a woman. See, I'd been married young, even before starting graduate school. That first marriage had ended in divorce. After leaving my job in Minnesota, I lived in London for a while doing research on psychohistory. In 1972, a woman I'd met in Minneapolis, who was of part Irish and part Gibraltarian descent, suggested I join her on a trip to Spain—Franco Spain. I'd never been to the country and did not speak the language. In high school, I'd studied French. We traveled around Spain for about five weeks. I fell in love with the country—and with the woman as well. From then on, back in the Bay Area, I took every chance I had to review new books about Spain. One of the first was *Guernica: The Crucible of World War II* by Gordon Thomas.

So you arrive at the Lincolns by way of Spain.

Exactly. In 1975, the San Francisco *City Magazine,* which had been founded by Francis Ford Coppola, the filmmaker, asked me to do a feature on the San Francisco Book Fair. There I came upon Alvah Bessie's *Spain Again,* which had just been published, as a pair of paperbacks, with a reedition of *Men in Battle.* I interviewed Bessie. Bessie invited me to a screening, at someone's home, of Abe Osheroff's film *Dreams and Nightmares,* where I first met Milt Wolff and other Bay Area vets. Ed Bender then invited me to attend the annual reunion of the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade (VALB), which was always held in February, around the anniversary of the Battle of Jarama. There, I met Jack Lucid. Him I also interviewed; he died a few months later. Shortly after, I did oral histories of two African American vets, Luchelle McDaniels and Vaughn Love, as part of an oral history project called the Radical Elders.

Was it hard to get them to talk to you as an outsider?

By then, the vets knew who I was. I'd been coming to the reunions and other events, and I'd written about them in the *Bay Guardian.* Plus, by the early 1980s, the vets realized they were getting old. There were more and more illnesses, even funerals. The Bay Area post decided to found an Associates' organization, for which they picked about six or seven of us. It turned out that at least five of them were active members of the Communist Party, but I didn't know that at first.

ALBA existed by then already, too, correct?

Yes, it did, but I didn't hear about it until much later. In any case, at one of the first meetings of the Bay Area post with us Associates present, one vet started saying he didn't like the idea of having associates. Others told him to shut up, since the matter had been voted on and settled already. By happenstance, I had another appointment to go to, so I'd planned to leave early, and I did. But the vets thought I'd walked out because I was insulted. Next thing I knew, I received a couple of nice letters, including one from Milt Wolff, asking me to reconsider my decision. (*Laughs.*) So that gave me an in as well.

What kind of work did the VALB Associates do?

I remember we picketed the Democratic National Convention in 1984 because the vets were seeking their benefits as World War II veterans. I was also involved in the 50th anniversary celebration in 1986, which was organized in New York by Bill Susman and ALBA, with a great show that Bill Sennett and I helped bring to California. And then we raised money to send ambulances to Nicaragua. The idea for that had come from Ted Veltfort, a vet who'd been an ambulance driver in Spain. All that took a lot of time and energy, but I loved doing it. It left me very satisfied.

When did it occur to you that you could write a history of the Lincoln Brigade?

One day, Milt Wolff called me up to tell me his ex-wife had just sent him three boxes of old papers. I could have them if I wanted them. Of course, I said yes. He brought them over, dumped them at my front door and said: "You do whatever you want with them, I don't care." They included photocopies of every letter he wrote home during World War II. That's when I realized I had a book in me.

Did Stanford University Press say yes right away?

It wasn't Stanford at first. Through my agent, I had an advance from a trade publisher that allowed me to start working: do interviews, collect materials, visit archives—including, of course, the archive at Brandeis that had been gathered by Victor Berch, who knew more about this stuff than anybody.

What happened with that initial publisher?

They thought there wasn't sufficient interest in the Lincoln Brigade. So then Peter Stansky at Stanford, who had written a book about Orwell with Billy Abrahams, who was my editor, brought me into Stanford University Press.

By then your book was already done.

It was. But in the six-month delay caused by the publisher switch, the Moscow archives opened and I rewrote a couple of sections. *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade* came out in 1994.

As Hemingway learned the hard way with *For Whom the Bell Tolls,* the vets are not easy to please. How did they receive your book?

Well, they called a meeting! (*Laughs.*) Of course, there were complaints. One widow said I'd made fun of her late husband because I'd printed the little ditty that his fellow soldiers had made up about him, things like that. But Robert Colodny, who was a legitimate historian at the University of Pittsburgh, wrote a tremendously positive review, comparing my *Odyssey* to Homer's *Illiad.* After that, I remember the vets calling me up: "Guess what? We accepted you!"

Did they?

Not everybody did. I had little falling out with Ralph Fasanella because I'd written that he had deserted. The thing is, he'd told it to me himself, on tape. And I had corroborating evidence from about 15 other sources—who all added that Ralph was a good guy and they didn't give a damn about it. The book did well. For several years, it was Stanford's best-selling title.

If you could write another book on the history of the Brigade now, thirty years later, would you change the story in any major way?

No, although there'd be a lot of minor additions that'd be of interest.

Would it be different to write about the vets without them looking over your shoulder?

Not really. I didn't let that stop me then, either. The rules were clear, and I could rely on my journalistic ethics. A couple of people requested not to be named by name, and some, like Harry Fisher, withheld documentation from me—including a contemporaneous letter from him about the death of Oliver Law, which he had witnessed. I never got clean with him about that.

Is there new research that would compel you to change the arc of your narrative?

Again, not in a big way. I still believe, as I did then, that had Britain and France intervened in the Spanish war on the side of the Republic, there may well not have been a World War Two. Then again, you never know. Other things that I suspected then are clearer now. For example, the fact that the Brits were quite happy to have Mussolini tied up in Spain because they thought it'd weaken the Axis powers, should war come with Germany.

And beyond geopolitics? Has your vision of the vets' politics or ethics evolved since the 1990s?

I think there were some veterans who were fanatic or loyal Communists who made some strategic errors. Talking to Milt Wolff over the years, he admitted the VALB endorsed some things they shouldn't have. On the other hand, the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade were the only left-wing organization that wasn't wiped out during the McCarthy period.

Was that due to the sheer grit of the vets?

Of some of them, yes. They were tough. At the time ALBA was founded, there was a rival organization led by Pete Smith. I am not clear on what its vision was exactly, but it was different from what Bill Susman and his group wanted to do with ALBA. Still, it's telling that ALBA's original bylaws specify, in their very first paragraph, the mechanism by which, and under what circumstances, a member can be expelled! (*Laughs.*) In fact, around the time ALBA was founded, in the late 1970s, the VALB was in crisis because the Communists and the anti-Communists were constantly at each other's throats over issues such as Israel. Things got really messy. At that point, they resolved the crisis by deciding that the vets, as an organization, would only be involved in three things: issues related to Spain, the vets' personal needs, and the history of the Lincoln Brigade.

In addition to the *Odyssey* and your other books and essays on the Lincolns, you've also written about them as a poet. What's the difference for you between the historical and the poetic mode of writing?

The source for poetry is the other half of my brain, the creative side. Which is not easy to access. When I pick up a pen, my first instinct is still to start writing prose. I often have to read poetry, others' poetry, to get my head in the right place. But then something will start to cook. It's an emotional thrust. Do you remember the first section of my poem "The Wound in the Heart", that starts out: "Mayday, the earth warms, greens, a trumpet on the car radio / bleeds, Miles Davis's, Sketches of Spain, the drama of rebirth"? What happened was that I was sitting in my car waiting for a fellow poet to come out of his house because we were going somewhere. Then Miles Davis' *Sketches of Spain* comes on the radio, and instead of getting out of my car, I waved my friend in. We just sat there and listened to the entire thing. That brought back everything you could imagine.

You also have touching poems on Milt Wolff and Jack Lucid.

It's part of my love life. That's really what it is.

If you were a precocious academic, as a poet you're more of a late bloomer. Your first collection of poems, *Riverborne,* came out in 2008, when you were in your mid-60s. When did you start writing poetry?

I wrote poetry in fragments when I was in graduate school, not a lot, and very influenced by Allen Ginsberg. Too many words, too much testosterone. Then in 2000 I had heart surgery. I was planning a book on Ginsberg and his times—the same way people have written about Walt Whitman and his times. In fact, I'd started working on that project, which I gathered would take me about five years to finish. But then, after my surgery, I decided I could not afford a five-year plan. I thought I'd try poetry instead. I joined a couple of workshops and got the idea for a trip down the Mississippi, which became *Riverborne.* I got about 40 rejections before the right guy picked it up and published it. Poetry is now what I'm writing primarily.

You left academia almost 50 years ago. But you never stopped writing and teaching—still a pretty academic kind of life, if you ask me.

Yeah, but I haven't been on a committee, or even attended a committee meeting, for any purpose! *(Laughs.)* And that saves an awful lot of one's lifetime.

It's not like VALB and ALBA don't have committees…

The point is that there is no bureaucracy in my life. I'm an anarchist. I choose where I want to be and what I want to do, most of the time.

How about teaching? You've taught high school teachers since the 1970s and offered an annual course on film and history at Stanford for close to forty years.

I'll tell you the truth. I was very fortunate to have taken a couple of courses at Queens College from the philosopher John McDermott. He changed my life. And you know what? That's exactly what everybody says who has been a student of his at one point or another—or at least that's true for the 50 or so of them that I have talked to.

Carroll at the inauguration of the Lincoln Brigade monument in San Francisco, with mayor Gavin Newsom. March 30, 2008.

When I first met McDermott, I was a C student. I didn't know what I was doing. McDermott made me serious.

He set you straight.

Yeah, he did. In fact, I dedicated *Keeping Time,* my memoir, to him. When it came out, in 1990, I thought I'd send him a copy. He was teaching at Texas A&M at the time. Then one day I got a phone call in the morning. "Is this Carroll, Peter Carroll?". "Yes," I said. "I don't know who you are," he said, "but thank you." And then he went on to tell me a very sad story: His wife of 42 years had left him, his children had him arrested for drunkenness and alcoholism—for his own protection, because in Texas you can do that—and he had just got out of six months of rehab when my letter arrived with the book. "I love you," he said. We became very close friends. He died in 2017. But what I wanted to say is this: Since 1968, I never once walked into a classroom without saying to myself: I have to be as good as McDermott today. ⮝

ALBA Before and After Peter Carroll

By Daniel Czitrom

The 1992 annual ALBA Board meeting promised to be tense—and it was. The main agenda item involved a proposal to spend $4,000 to send Peter Carroll, who had recently joined the Board, to Moscow for research into the newly opened Russian Archives. The records of the International Brigades had been sent to Moscow just before the Republic's collapse in 1939, where they had gathered dust for a half-century. Peter was just completing his landmark history, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, and his trip would also explore the possibility of ALBA retrieving the long-lost records of American volunteers in Spain. The ALBA Board at the time included numerous vets, some of whom expressed strong doubts about funding Peter's trip. Perhaps they feared what might be found within those records—negative evaluations, records of desertions, expressions of long-abandoned political views— but none of these were ever expressed openly during debate. Some thought the $4,000 was way out of line with ALBA's budget and its previous expenditures. In the end, those of us who stressed ALBA's obligation to gather, preserve, and disseminate the history of American volunteers in Spain won out. Peter made his trip, and it marked a critical turning point for ALBA.

When Steve Nelson, national commander of the Veterans of the Lincoln Brigade (VALB) invited me to join the Board in 1986, ALBA was a small, underfunded organization, still largely dominated by a handful of Lincoln veterans. We had no endowment, no full-time staffer, and no clear mission beyond preserving the Lincolns' historical legacy. We were insular, focused mostly on encouraging donations to the ALBA collection (then housed at Brandeis University), and communicating with long-time friends and supporters of (VALB). As we tried moving ALBA toward greater visibility and more secure funding, I can still recall our contentious debate in 1988 over whether we needed an executive director. We hired Danny Duncan Collum that year as our first ED, for the princely salary of $15,000, another important step in ALBA's coming of age.

In 1994, after a four-year stint, and just starting a family, I stepped down from chairing the ALBA Board of Governors. My successor was Peter Carroll. He has been the driving force behind the growth and expansion that ALBA has enjoyed over the past 25 years. His leadership transformed ALBA in so many ways. His work with the Puffin Foundation led to a large teaching grant and the annual ALBA/Puffin Rights Award, first given in 2011. His careful attention to fundraising, within the vet community and elsewhere, created a substantial endowment for the first time. Peter also led creation of our Teacher Institutes, the single most effective program we have for educating students and teachers on all aspects of the Lincolns' history and its continuing relevance in today's world. He helped create the San Francisco Monument to the Lincoln Brigade in 2008, and his energy today has led to its restoration and rededication after years of neglect. His work editing *The Volunteer* continues to this day. And his landmark 1994 book, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, so deeply researched and thoughtfully written, remains the single best history of Americans in the Spanish Civil War.

Peter will be the first to tell you that all his ALBA work has been deeply collaborative, and that our growth has also depended upon the contributions of many Board members, past and present. Yet his leadership has been the key. We are deeply grateful for Peter's outstanding commitment, persistence, and vision through all these years. ⮝

Left: With Milt Wolff, 1990s. Right: In New York, 2019

Voices

The happy surprise of hearing "I would like to give some money" must have taken aback whomever answered the telephone that day at ALBA. I was calling in my role as Executor of the Alger and Isabel Hiss Estate. I had found my way to ALBA through an old friend and fellow political activist, Victor Navasky, then-Editor in Chief of *The Nation*. The person at the other end of the phone must have taken my name and number and that was that—until I received a call back from Peter Carroll.

Thus began both my long relationship with Peter, and, as a Board Member, with ALBA. Peter's tremendous enthusiasm for ALBA showed from the moment I met him. Through conversations with this interesting man with a New York accent I discovered the sad truth that without the help of the United States, France and England, Franco could not be defeated. These many years later I am grateful to be in the position of being able to give a donation in my own name so that Peter may continue his work passing on his tremendous knowledge and passion to teachers throughout the United States and beyond.

—Ellyn Polshek

We heard their stories: Abe, Milt, Moishe, Bill, Abie Smorodin, George Watt, Ginny Malbin, Bill Bailey, so many others—Jarama, Belchite, the Ebro... Ordinary people who did extraordinary things, and you wrote their stories. Thanks to your vision and leadership, ALBA grew, and their legacy lives on. Gracias, Peter. ¡Salud, camarada!

—Anthony L. Geist

I first became aware of Peter Carroll when his book on the American Lincoln battalion hit my desk in 1994. Prior to that moment, there were plenty of books on volunteers from all countries including the USA but not until then an entirely satisfactory account of the role of Americans in Spain. Peter Carroll's book immediately became the go-to source because of his thorough trawling through all available sources and the sensitive way in which he dealt with it. To the copious material available at Brandeis University and the Hoover Institution, he added the comprehensive Brigade documentation held in Moscow. Even more profitably, he interviewed a large number of survivors who not only gave him frank interviews but also large amounts of documentary material. The quotations from these interviews and letters gave his book an extraordinary emotional force. Nevertheless, despite his empathy with the volunteers and their cause, Carroll managed to assess the evidence critically and impartially.

The consequence was a deeply humane, intensely moving, but completely reliable work about the experience of the volunteers which remains as important today as it was in 1994. It is a book teeming with revelations yet perhaps its most original feature is that it is a book not just about about the Spanish Civil War but also about American radicalism—on which Peter is an expert and of which he is a great example. Reading that book was the beginning of a near thirty-year friendship. As we met frequently in London and in San Francisco, I learned that he is not only a learned scholar but also a terrific human being, always fun to be with and always dispensing knowledge and insight along with humor.

—Paul Preston

Inaugurating the Paul Robeson Blvd, 2009.

For more than two decades Peter 's wisdom, friendship, and historical insights have aided The Puffin Foundation and our mission in countless ways. He serves as the Chair for the Puffin Gallery of Social Activism's advisory board at the Museum of the City of NY, sits on the committee to choose the annual Puffin Prize for Creative Citizenship, and chairs Puffin's own advisory Board. But most importantly, Peter is always being there to offer sage advice, suggestions, and of course always an outstanding a poem.

—Gladys and Neal Rosenstein

I first "met" Peter Carroll. through the *Odyssey* and later got in touch with him about my own related research. He's always been an unstintingly generous and thoughtful source of scholarly support.

The *Odyssey*, to which I have returned time and again over the years, is still *the* standard work on the Lincoln volunteers. Not only for its meticulous and exhaustive historical scholarship, but also because it traces the whole arc of the brigaders' biographies, from the Great Depression and the war in Spain to their lives of resistance and activism in Cold War America. It is a shining model of holistic history writing. Peter tells with a humane, yet forensic eye—and with a radical poet's grace—how the vast repressive weight of the Cold War at the heart of the "free West" irrupted into real human lives.

The stakes in understanding the Lincolns' story have only become greater today, as the inhospitable political and economic order that is now inheriting Western Cold War legitimacy continues self-interestedly to "unsee" the significance and potential of Spain's democratic Republic and of the international volunteers who defended it. It's hard to overstate the importance of Peter's book as a powerful counterweight to that "unseeing."

For me personally, the *Odyssey* is one of a core set of "luminous" books I've read over my life as a historian—books whose after-image lives on in the mind to assist and enrich the collective challenge to us all: to keep producing critically engaged history, lucidly told. Thank you, Peter.

—Helen Graham

To Peter Carroll, poet

Poetry is something more scientific and serious than history
—Aristotle

First we undo the knots in the massive rope of history.
Then we unbraid the rope itself,
teasing apart the strands of lived experience.
We later display handy lengths of single spindly filaments
as if they were somehow history or life itself.

Painting, here; photography, over there;
sculpture, someplace out of the way lest we bump into it.
Pamphlets and posters, somewhere else yet (as far away
as possible from the serious stuff, please)
Magazines, in the flea market, or recycling bin.

Poetry? Poetry?

Isolate and archive separately all the fluids and flows of life itself.

Tuck away all the books in the stacks, like so many dead in their call-numbered niches.

Sacco and Vanzetti? In the KF section, sixth level.
Emmet Till? E section, third level.
Leo Frank? DS section, second level.
Oliver Law? Off-site. You're in the wrong cemetery.

Or are you?

—James D. Fernández

At the Nation Dinner with Colin Kaepernick, winner of the 2017 Puffin/Nation Prize for Creative Citizenship.

Two Poems

His Knee

He had a trick knee. Otherwise,
he was built like an ox, an Olympic-
class wrestler, a collegiate coach.

He was also political, committed,
willing to take risks. When civil war
came to Spain, he volunteered to fight.

He was going to Spain. She was scared,
she knew all about his knee. She'd seen
him half-squat, pull the joint into place.

He passed the medical exam. He was going
to Spain. The doctors found nothing wrong.
She wondered if they'd looked at his knee.

He could lose his life or someone else's.
She wondered if she should tell. He had his
pride, she had pride. He was going to Spain.

His pride, he would never forgive her. She
saw the ship sail from the westside dock. She
waved, cried. She had her pride. She sent

a box of Fanny Farmer chocolates. He sent
her thanks and his love. She knit gloves
and a sweater. He sent postcards, letters.

Then the letters stopped. She knew what not
to think. She had her pride, but she thought
anyway. She called headquarters every day.

No one knew anything. She knew what that
meant. Her fault? What could she have done?
He was going to Spain, whatever she'd done.

Years later without him, the old woman says,
we all die, some die young. He died for a good
purpose. He had his pride. He went to Spain.

—Peter Neil Carroll

The Spectrum

War began as predicted, a vision of fire.
I pulled the blanket over my head, safe,
thousands of miles from personal tragedy.

Maybe I should send my blanket to the Red
Cross, they could forward it to a child in
Ukraine. Surely that's the least I could do.

Not enough, though. Maybe tomorrow I will
purchase a box of soft diapers for a children's
hospital in Kyiv or a can of condensed milk.

I saw a photo of a woman weeping in the street,
her arms bare, blood on her naked legs, shoeless.
Clothing. That's what she needs, a little warmth.

Yes, I realize, the wounded need bandages, anti-
biotics, plain aspirin in an emergency. It's okay
to send medical aid. They call it humanitarian.

I know there are many Doctors without Borders
already there, and volunteer cooks boiling soups,
and stews to nourish folks who have lost kitchens.

Those helpers are so brave, sincere, real *menschen*.
I should support them, too, but will money arrive
in time to save a country? Can I buy an ambulance?

Can I drive an ambulance? That's a peaceful way
to help strangers trapped in a war. It would be good
for my conscience. But can one person matter?

What the soldiers who are fighting really want are
more weapons and ammunition or, better still, tanks
and rockets. They could use airplanes and bombs.

But stop there. They must be only old-fashioned bombs
built on TNT. Not atom bombs or hydrogen bombs
because that could kill too many people plus animals.

Where does it end? What is it the right thing to send,
to help someone in trouble? Or a whole country? As if
I could draw a red line on a spectrum or cross over it.

—Peter Neil Carroll

Music on the Radio in Madrid during the Spanish Civil War

By Yolanda F. Acker

The Spanish Civil War is often viewed as the first in which radio was used as a political and military weapon and an important instrument of propaganda. Apart from its use to motivate troops and demoralize the enemy, it informed the population with an immediacy that was impossible for the press to replicate. The radio provided a welcome means of entertainment and distraction amid the devastation and hardship. But what role did radio music play in the conflict and what type of music was heard in the capital during the war?

The origins of radio in Spain date back to the early 1920s. At that time, all radio stations were privately run and listeners were required to pay a fee—making ownership of a device closely linked to social status. The number of private receivers in the country was relatively low (around 300,000 for a population of 24 million by 1936). Nevertheless, people often gathered in bars, restaurants, social clubs, and union organizations to listen to the radio. Loudspeakers installed in the streets and public spaces, including schools, hospitals and factories also increased its range. During the war, windows were ordered to remain open with the volume turned up so the radio could be heard by as many people as possible. Many Republican tanks were even equipped with a radio.

One of the first and most important radio stations in Spain at this time was Unión Radio, founded in 1924 by the communications impresario Ricardo Urgoiti Somovilla (1900-1979). The Urgoiti family business also had dealings in other areas of Spanish culture, such as film production and the press. In the space of just a few years, Unión Radio established a network covering most of the country, from Seville to San Sebastián, in addition to Madrid and Barcelona. Located in the heart of Republican Madrid, in what is now its iconic Gran Vía, at the beginning of the war Unión Radio Madrid boasted the biggest audience in Spain, making it a prime target for the Francoist bombardments. In early 1937, the station transferred its headquarters to safer ground in the basement of the daily newspaper *ABC*, in the Calle Serrano, moving to a quieter location, a villa in the C. Martínez de la Rosa in March. Much of the music heard in the capital during the war emanated from these studios. The station proudly claimed that no music by fascist composers had been broadcast since the beginning of the uprising.

Music was a vital part of Unión Radio Madrid from its inception. The station's repertoire mainly consisted of reproductions from its vast record collection and classical chamber music, either performed live in the studio or retransmitted from nearby locations. From 1925 to 1929, it regularly broadcast live chamber music performed by its resident quintet: José María Franco (piano), Julio Francés (violin), José R. Outumuro (violin), Conrado del Campo (viola) and Juan Ruiz Casaux (cello), who performed several times a week. In 1931, after the declaration of the Second Republic, a new sextet was formed. During the first year of war, the sextet's performed several times a day, before political information and communication took priority and the presentation of live music dwindled. Controlled by a Workers' Committee, consisting of members from Spain's two largest trade unions, Unión Radio Madrid was instrumental in promoting the work of the Communist agitation organization Altavoz del Frente.

Founded in August 1936 by the Peruvian-born Communist writer and politician César Falcón (1892-1970), Altavoz used various forms of cultural expression to create political unrest and resistance to the fascist rebellion. It was perhaps best known for its emblematic armored trucks equipped with large, powerful speakers. By November 1936, Altavoz boasted as many as twenty of the iconic trucks, each equipped with the latest technology that the American Student Union had helped to fit. At the front, the trucks projected cinema and broadcast revolutionary music and Republican songs that could be heard up to 25 km away. The organization consisted of various sections, each run by an expert in the field, except for Radio, which was controlled by a Commission consisting of members from all the other sections. The Music section—with strong links to the Radio—included a large group of prominent Republican composers and critics including Salvador Bacarisse (the station's artistic director since 1926), Rodolfo Halffter, Adolfo Salazar and Óscar Esplá. It was presided over by the young composition student Carlos Palacio (1911-1997), best known as the composer of the *Himno de las Brigadas Internacionales* (1936).

In August 1936, the Communist party instructed Palacio to set a book of poems about the war by the popular Madrilenian poet Luis de Tapia to music. He approached a small group of composers in the capital to each choose a poem. Many were members of Altavoz themselves and would go on to form part of the Consejo Central de la Música the

Cover of Altavoz del Frente magazine.

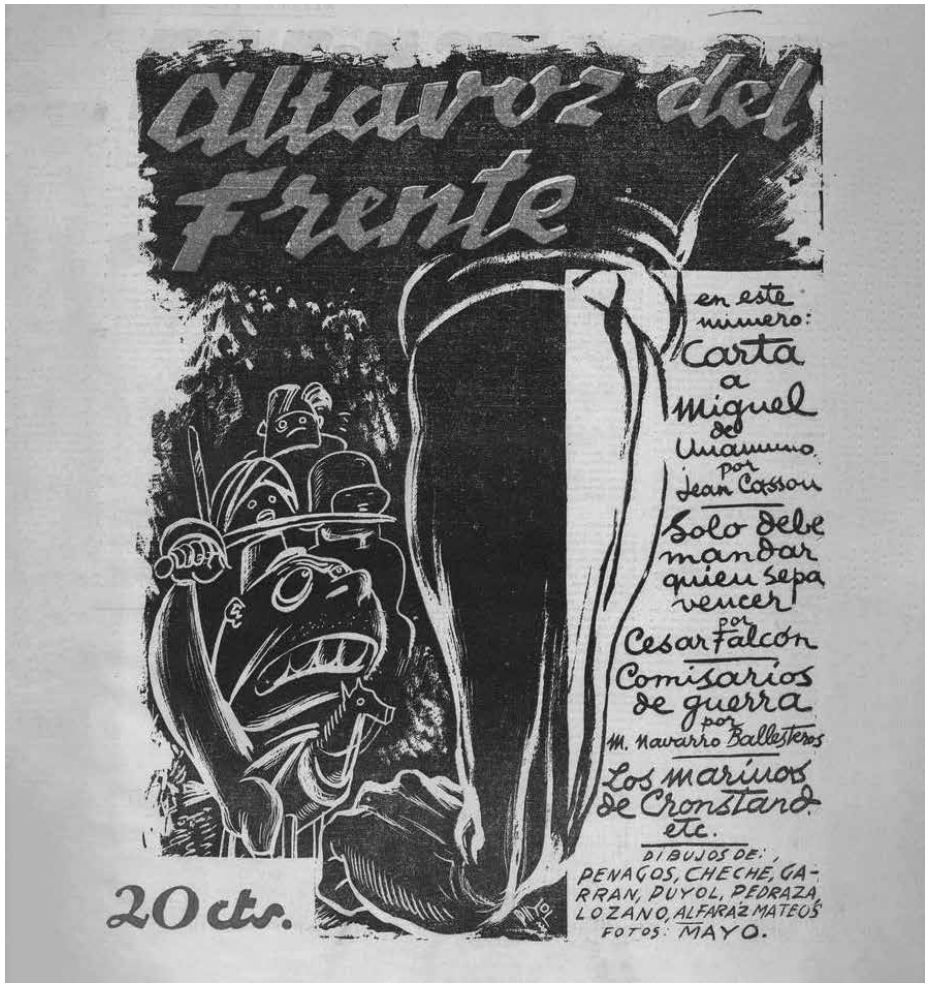
following year. The last remaining text fell to Palacio himself and went on to become the most popular of all: *Compañías de Acero*, often considered the "Spanish Marseillaise".

One of the most important aspects of the radio was its use as a vehicle for the popularization of popular political songs and anthems that were broadcast day and night. Listeners in Madrid were introduced to the musical versions of Tapia's poems, as well as other revolutionary songs, by tuning into the radio program of the same name, "Altavoz del Frente," Palacio hosted on Unión Radio. The fifteen-minute program, broadcast every night at 9:00 p.m. from 14 September 1936, benefited from a significant budget and provided political and cultural information, poetry, and music. Every night "Altavoz del Frente" opened with Palacio's harmonization of a melody from a scene from the Soviet film *The Sailors of Kronstadt/We are from Kronstadt* and ended with *The Internationale*. In between, there were live performances of the songs set to Tapia's poems.

"Altavoz del Frente" was undoubtedly one of the most interesting and important radio programs of the Civil War period on either side, as well as one of the most successful of the Republic. But the station provided a platform for other musical events, all tightly bound up with the Republican cause. There were live broadcasts of theatre, retransmissions of operettas and political rallies incorporating band and choral music in a bid to promote a strong and united front, and benefit concerts organised to raise money for the wounded and spread the anti-fascist message. These featured some of the most prominent Spanish and foreign musicians, groups and artists, perhaps none better known than the singer, actor, political activist Paul Robeson (1898-1976).

On 27 January 1938, the world-famous bass-baritone was invited to give a concert at the studios of Unión Radio Madrid that was retransmitted by all the stations in the Republican zone as well as to Latin America. Accompanying Robeson over the airways were two of the performers who were most active in Madrid during the war: the soprano Ángeles Ottein—responsible for the organization of a whole Spanish Opera Season at the Teatro de la Zarzuela in mid-1937—and the violinist Enrique Iniesta. Robeson presented his versions of the songs "How Long?" and "Native Land," among others, which he dedicated to the Spanish anti-fascists and workers.

Not only did radio transmit the drama of war in real time in Madrid, but it entertained and boosted morale among both the population at large and the soldiers fighting in the trenches. It provided the perfect platform for the repeated broadcasting of political songs and anthems to vast local and foreign audiences, helping to forge and maintain a united anti-fascist spirit. At the same time, the radio was suited to more intimate musical genres, including chamber music, which often accompanied political and propagandistic speeches. Whether performed live in the studios of Unión Radio or retransmitted from the Delegación de Propaganda y Prensa in Madrid to the whole country and even the world, such endeavors helped to ensure that access to art music was no longer the privilege of an elite few. The radio's close and constant reliance on music during the Spanish Civil War only heightened its potential as a tool for the mass dissemination of Republican propaganda and the democratization of art and culture. ▲



"Altavoz del Frente" was undoubtedly one of the most interesting and important radio programs of the Civil War period on either side.

Dr Yolanda F. Acker is Visiting Fellow at the Research School of Humanities and the Arts, Australian National University (ANU). For a longer version of this article, see our online edition at albavolunteer.org.

Spain and the War in Ukraine

By the Editors

The Russian invasion of Ukraine—which ALBA forcefully condemned—has unleashed a fascinating debate about historical parallels with the Spanish Civil War. Below, we offer some excerpts of the arguments wielded. See *The Volunteer*'s online edition at albavolunteer.org for the complete texts.

The Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives (ALBA) condemns the invasion of Ukraine by Russian military forces. The resulting destruction, chaos, and loss of life is the sole responsibility of President Vladimir Putin, who has perverted the concept of anti-fascism to justify imperialism and these despicable violations of human rights. ALBA stands in complete solidarity with the Ukrainian people as they suffer these unprovoked and unjustified attacks. —ALBA Board of Governors, Feb. 24, 2022.

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[T]empting as it is to compare the [wars in the Ukraine and Spain], doing so does more to obscure than to explain either of the conflicts. In some instances, I see the analogy relying on distorted frames inherited from the Cold War; in others, it seems to be driven by blatant opportunism. […]

Much as in civil war Spain, Ukrainian cities are being bombarded and civilians are dying, while those attacked are putting up an unexpectedly persistent defense against a much stronger enemy. As in Spain, the war is producing seemingly unending streams of refugees. And, as in Spain, the war seems to reflect an unusual degree of moral clarity – "It's a conflict that has a clear good and bad side," one U.S. veteran told The New York Times – while the fate of the world seems to hang in the balance.

Yet historical analogies are never perfect, rarely useful and often misleading. For one thing, the geopolitics of today has little connection to the 1930s. In 1936 there was no NATO, only a weak and ineffectual League of Nations, and no threat of nuclear war.

Furthermore, the volunteers who joined the International Brigades in 1936 from Europe, the Americas, the Middle East and Asia have little in common with the combat veterans and Ukrainian nationalists who are signing up today, and whose politics […] are vague and may skew to the right or far right. While the Russian invasion clearly violates Ukrainian sovereignty, those defending Ukraine represent ideologies that cover the entire political spectrum.

By contrast, very few of the volunteers in Spain had military training or experience. And if Osheroff knew that the Spanish war was also his to fight, it was, as he explained, because he'd grown up steeped in progressive politics.

He and his fellow brigaders were driven by the internationalist solidarity that's the bedrock of the labor movement, but they also knew they had a personal stake in the struggle. Many of them were Jews and immigrants; they belonged to a generation that, as the historian Helen Graham has written, was resisting "attempts, by fascism, either alone or in coalition, violently to impose ethnic and class hierarchies both old and new across the whole continent." […]

Invoking the Spanish Civil War to frame the invasion of Ukraine as a clash between fascism and anti-fascism, moreover, plays into the Kremlin's narrative, which seeks to portray the "special military operation" as an effort to "denazify" its western neighbor.

—Sebastiaan Faber, "Ukraine's foreign fighters have little in common with those who signed up to fight in the Spanish Civil War," *The Conversation* March 17, 2022

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[…] I am afraid that by saying we cannot and should not compare, you elide and preclude addressing what to me is most significant here-- that the war in Ukraine has evoked such associations for so many of us, especially for those who are either from Eastern Europe, or have deep familial connections to the region (for whom the memory of WWII and post-war authoritarianism is very real and visceral) and/or study the history of the SCW and/or WWII in Eastern Europe in particular. […] I have moreover heard and seen many comments made by relatives of volunteers in Spain and particularly by Jews whose relatives fought Nazism/Fascism in WWII (like my own—both in the Red army) and/or perished in the Holocaust, for whom these associations are quite palpable. This too cannot be ignored. […]

[Y]ou conclude by providing a concrete comparison of how the 'West' left the Republic and now democratic Ukraine to their fate. To me, that conclusion contradicts your main premise and suggests that perhaps the position of let's not compare here, remains somewhat constrained by ideology. […]

[I]t is *way* too early to provide a profile of all of the international volunteers headed to Ukraine. […] [O]f course it is frightening to consider how neo-Nazis are going to take advantage of this horrific war Putin has unleashed (whether they be self-identified neo-Nazis headed to Ukraine or the frightening right-wing extremists in Russia who are having a heyday), but that is not *the* story of the international volunteers going to Ukraine, yet one that some on part of the left seem to highlight.

Beyond the actual volunteers going to participate in combat, the mass outpouring of international solidarity for Ukraine once civilians were clearly being targeted so brutally, including humanitarian relief and a point of focus for many Jewish communities, is also elided by your argument.

—Michal Friedman, Professor of Jewish Studies and History at Carnegie Mellon University (Facebook) .

Book Review

Dorian L. (Dusty) Nicol. *"Miss Spain in Exile": Isa Reyes' Escape from the Spanish Civil War.* Eastbourne and Chicago: Sussex Academic Press, 2021. 240pp.

Reviewed by Clinton D. Young

The photograph on the cover of *"Miss Spain in Exile"* is a carefully backlit, immaculately coiffed, sepia-toned publicity shot that exudes a certain type of mid-twentieth century glamor. The adventures of Isa Reyes in the 1930s—traipsing through louche nightclubs on the French Riviera, representing war-torn Spain at the 1938 Miss Europe contest, being propositioned by Benito Mussolini's son-in-law—are equally as glossy as that photo and almost demand to be made into a movie (preferably filmed around 1942 in luminous black-and-white). So, what on earth are the memoirs of a now-obscure nightclub dancer doing as part of the Cañada Blanch Studies on Contemporary Spain? With an introduction by the eminent historian Paul Preston, no less?

As the title suggests, this is a memoir of a Republican refugee from the Spanish Civil War. As Preston points out, Isa Reyes' experience of exile does not fit the traditional refugee narrative. Born Conchita Boncells de los Reyes, Isa (her eventual stage name) grew up so ensconced in bourgeois society that her mother's most damning epithet was the term "vulgar." Although her father's substantial law practice allowed them to live in the comfort of a toney neighborhood near Madrid's Parque del Retiro, politically he was inclined towards socialism. This tension between bourgeois propriety and political idealism drives the most fascinating part of Reyes' story, its dramatic opening. Isa, her father, and her sister were vacationing in a mountain village in Ávila when civil war erupted in July 1936. As the war shifted from an abstraction heard over radio news to lived experience, Isa discovered that her socialist father was helping local priests and landowners escape from Republican-controlled territory. This episode proved key to her burgeoning political awareness. Despite her privileged background and her growing fame as a performer, after fleeing Spain for the relative safety of Paris, Isa Reyes would experience the gathering political maelstrom not from a position of privilege, but from the standpoint of an exile.

It has clearly been a labor of love for Dorian Nicol to prepare his mother's story for publication. Nicol has "adapted" (to use his word) his mother's unpublished and unfinished memoirs, written shortly before her death in 1991. To help place Isa's activities in the context of contemporaneous historical events, he has added some content to the memoir, including historical background before each chapter and some short epilogues that note personal intersections with his mother's story. Those looking for the traditional academic apparatus of explanatory notes or details of editorial intervention in the text will be disappointed, and occasionally this does the narrative a disservice. It is something of a surprise to figure out that the husband of Isa's Aunt Encarna, who had essentially abandoned his family, was actually the journalist José María Carretero. Under the pen name "El Caballero Audaz" he was a significant propagandist for the Nationalists, disguising himself in order to remain in Republican Madrid and spread disinformation. As it turns out, Isa Reyes was surrounded by people antagonistic to Republican ideals. Nevertheless, Nicol's work is clearly a labor of love, and it would be churlish to dwell on this book's limitations when the story it presents is so compelling.

It is commonplace to point out that the Spanish Civil War frequently tore families apart, but Reyes' memoir shows how families lived with seemingly unbridgeable political divides. Aunt Encarna and Isa's cousin Alma, who took in the refugees, were sympathetic to Franco, if not outright supporters of the Nationalist cause. At first, the need to maintain a respectable Parisian address would force the women to band together. The necessity of earning a living is how Isa ended up in show business, first as a model and then in a flamenco act with her cousin Alma. But as Europe inched closer to war in the late 1930s and as "Alma and Isa" became more successful, Isa would be put into situations normally untenable for a Republican refugee—including being booked for a performance in Berlin in 1939 to celebrate Adolf Hitler's 50th birthday. The attempt to bridge the divide between the two Spains is also at the center of the event that gives the book its title. Selected by *Le Monde* to be the Spanish representative to the 1938 Miss Europe contest, Reyes did not want to be used as a reason to enflame political passions, especially because her father was serving in the Republican government. While all the other contestants appeared carrying their national flags, Isa appeared with a white banner emblazoned only with "España" in gold thread. Politically it was a brilliant stratagem, highlighting her position as an exile without formally declaring a side in the conflict.

It is this duality that gives the story of Isa Reyes—a Republican refugee with wide access to Europe's exclusive social circles—such interest and piquancy. As she witnesses the ending of an era and a social order that had dominated Europe for over a century, her memoirs do more than capture the faded glamour of those twilight years of the 1930s—especially in these unsettling times where our own political and social systems are under so much strain. One of the most memorable episodes in the book is Reyes' encounter with an aging cavalry officer while on tour in Poland. His discussion of their mutual love for the music of Chopin leads to this observation: "the Spanish people and the Polish people understand each other … we are both a romantic and a cultured people who understand chivalry and appreciate the beautiful things in life. I hope our people will prove adequate for the modern age, which I fear does not attach so much importance to those things."

In the twilight years before the Second World War, the story of Isa

Reyes demonstrates that the issue was not that the Spanish people proved inadequate for the twentieth century. It was the modern age that failed the Spanish people, and the Spanish Republican exiles in particular, much as the 21st century seems on the verge of failing so many the world's marginalized peoples today. ⮝

Clinton D. Young is Professor of History and Dean of the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Arkansas at Monticello. A specialist in the cultural and musical history of modern Spain, he is the author of Music Theater and Popular Nationalism in Spain, 1870-1930 *(LSU Press, 2016).*

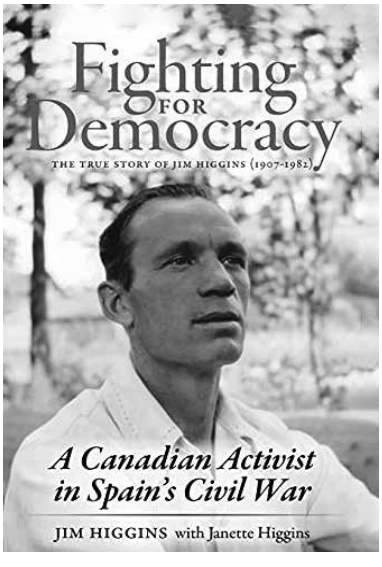
Books all-too-briefly noted

There are moments when books arrive far faster than the editor can find reviewers for them. As a result, *The Volunteer* has decided to inform its readers of these works and, in turn, portray the breadth and depth of new work in the ever-growing corpus about the Spanish Civil War and the people who fought in it. We offer these short reviews, more than announcement but not quite as in-depth as longer reviews, to acknowledge the on-going legacy of and interest in the Spanish Civil War.

—Joshua Goode, Book Review Editor.

Jim Higgins (with Janette Higgins), *Fighting for Democracy: The True Story of Jim Higgins (1907-1982)*. Victoria, B.C.: Friesen Press, 2020. 196pp.

Reviewed by Joshua Goode.



Is it promising, confusing or brave for a memoirist to open his work with him staring at a painting entitled *Unknown*, and commenting: "…I even saw something of myself in it?" Without giving much away, the anecdote, whether intentional or not, proves to be ironic. This memoir, written by Jim Higgins and compiled and edited by his daughter, stands out for how much it reveals not just about Higgins, a volunteer who fought in the Canadian Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, but about the story of so many who volunteered to fight in Spain during the Civil War. Higgins began drafting his memoir at the behest of his children after he had already turned 70. Yet, the manuscript lay unpublished when he died in 1982. Janette Higgins, the author's daughter, has carefully, transparently, and responsibly reassembled, edited and presented it as a testament to her father. The memoir provides a gripping version of a life deeply marked by the Depression, the turn that led to fighting in Spain, and then the post-Civil War experiences of family, politics, organizing, trauma and joy that defined Jim Higgins. In many ways, Higgins's story is reminiscent of other volunteers' experiences. But he had some fame in his later years, too. He was well-known in Canada from the story of saving the life of a nine-year Spanish boy whom he had pulled from the raging Ebro River during the 1938 battle. Higgins was famously reacquainted with that boy, Manuel Alvarez, now a middle-aged man in 1978, who had by chance become a resident and citizen of Canada. Alvarez's own book about his life and his rediscovery of Higgins, *The Tall Soldier*, and the promotional tour brought Jim Higgins into the spotlight. Yet, most interesting is the fact that in Higgins's telling, this act of heroism was just one small detail in a long list of wartime experiences. Overall, this juxtaposition of great and small is balanced with the overall poignancy of the story of the daughter's devotion to reassemble her father's life. In the end, it is the depth and range of this portrait of a man who, after the war, gardened, painted, worked in a factory, kept secrets, fought for worker's rights and built a life for himself and his family that most mark this book. ⮝

Peter Rutkoff, *Before Che: M-26-7*. Gambier, OH: XOXOX Press, 2019. 284pp.

Reviewed by Joshua Goode.

An emeritus professor of American Studies at Kenyon College, Peter Rutfkoff has produced a work of fiction that juxtaposes International Brigaders in the Spanish Civil War with the fighters preparing for the seizure of the Army barracks in July 1953 that launched the 26 July Movement and began the Cuban revolution. Written as a report from the *New York Times* writer, Herbert Matthews, to the paper's publisher, Arthur Hays Sulzburger, Rutkoff's book is an attempt to illuminate a "history that will remain in the shadows," a history not of the events but of the people and their political motivations that fueled the political commitments of the Left in the middle of the twentieth century. Camaraderie, characters and character play the most central roles in this narrative. We follow four main figures, both fictional and real-life, as they prepare for among other events, the battle

of Brunete and the storming of the Santiago military site. That Rutkoff takes liberties with facts is not a surprise as the purpose of the narrative is to focus on why people fought and what bound them together, rather than providing a purely historical account of what happened. That Oliver Law survived Spain and fights in Cuba is not too distracting because he is meant to show a through-line of heroism and leadership that defined both times and both places. Along the way, one meets some of the key figures from the Spanish Civil War and the Cuban Revolution, Enrique Lister, Ernest Hemingway, Martha Gellhorn, Fidel and Raúl Castro. But Rutkoff's focus is on his fictional characters, and his descriptions of decades-long friendships and intimacies that are really fueled by the political affinities that link his characters: African-American soldiers, the Cypriot volunteer, the Cuban revolutionary, and men and women more generally. Through these characters, we are meant to see a continuum of ideas, commitments and politics that binds Spain in 1936-1939 to Cuba of 1953.

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