

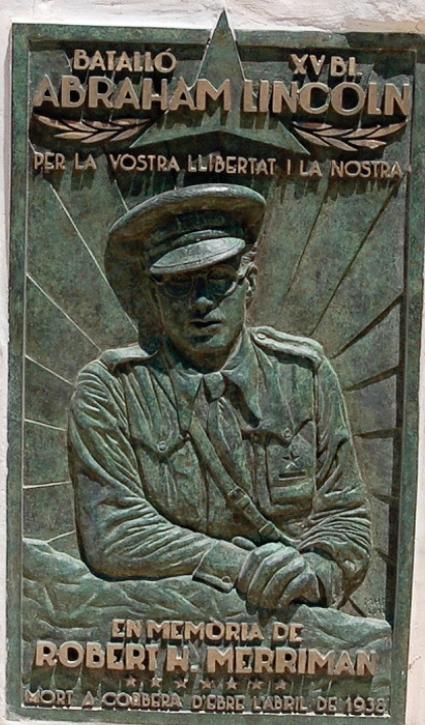
The Volunteer

FOUNDED IN 1937 BY THE VOLUNTEERS OF THE LINCOLN BRIGADE.
PUBLISHED BY THE ABRAHAM LINCOLN BRIGADE ARCHIVES (ALBA)

Robert Merriman Plaque in Corbera (Catalonia).

Murals & Monuments from Berkeley to Ybor City

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Reflections on Guernica p 10

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Mike & Karen Nussbaum p 16

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.

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Dear Friends,

ALBA connects generations. We see this in our Watt essay contest, which showcases the passionate fascination with which high schoolers, undergrads, and graduate students engage with the legacy of the International Brigades. We see it in the touching video testimonies that grandchildren of vets have been sending us in response to our call. (We plan to share them with you in the next couple of months.) And we see it in our teacher institutes, which routinely connect educators in their twenties with colleagues of retirement age.

At our most recent workshop on “The US and World Fascism: Human Rights from the Spanish Civil War to Nuremberg and Beyond,” on November 7, we were stunned to realize that two of the older participants had a direct connection to the Nuremberg trials: their father-in-law and father had served, respectively, as interpreter and lead counsel for the prosecution! Suddenly, our module on developments in international law after World War II took on an entirely new dimension.

For us, these are “goosebump moments”: they are inspiring and energizing because they affirm the importance of our work. They help keep despair at bay at a moment when the world seems to descend in a never-ending spiral of violence, producing images of bombing victims and refugees that recall the photographs from Spain that sent shockwaves through the world more than 80 years ago.

If our educational work these past 15 years has been showing us anything, it's that young people today are receptive to—indeed, hungry for—the lessons that the legacy of the Lincoln Brigade provides. These lessons are not simple or one-dimensional, to be sure. In fact, it's precisely their complexity that makes them so valuable as tools for making sense of our present.

We hope that some of the articles we're proud to share with you in this issue will inspire you in the same way—whether it's the news about a new Spanish Civil War monument on the Berkeley campus (p. 5), James Fernández's incisive reflections on *Guernica* (p. 10), or the interview with the legendary labor activist Karen Nussbaum and her no less legendary actor father (p. 16). Bernd Häber reports on his work with Arizona students to trace the lives of the International Brigade volunteers who fought with his grand uncle, while Mark Derby shares new research on two German scientists in Republican Spain. And don't forget to check out our book review section (p. 19).

All of us at ALBA—including the teachers we collaborate with—are deeply appreciative of your generous support for our work. We couldn't do this without you.

¡Salud!



Peter N. Carroll and Sebastiaan Faber, editors

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*.

ALBA NEWS

ALBA Holiday Gathering

Join us for an in-person ALBA holiday gathering on December 9 at the Spanish Benevolent Society, right below ALBA's office at 239 West 14th St. in New York City! The event will feature a live performance of a musical play featuring the wartime letters of George and Ruth Watt, based on a script by Dan and Molly Watt, followed by a reception catered by La Nacional. The house opens at 12 noon; the performance begins at 12:30pm. For tickets, visit ALBA's event calendar at alba-valb.org/eventcalendar.

January Event on Art Shields, Labor Reporter & Activist

On January 25 at 4pm Eastern time, ALBA's Nancy Wallach and Josie Yurek, along with Richard Bermack, will host an online event on Art Shields (1888-1988), a labor reporter for the Daily Worker who was in Madrid in 1939 to cover the last stand of the Spanish Republic when he was arrested and jailed by the Franco forces.

Susman Lecture Features Karen Nussbaum

On November 14, the legendary labor activist Karen Nussbaum was featured as part of ALBA's annual Susman Lecture in an online event moderated by longtime ALBA friend Margo Feinberg. A co-founder of 9to5 and Working America, Nussbaum has dedicated her life to organizing. See page 16 for an in-depth interview with Nussbaum and her father, the actor Mike Nussbaum—a longtime reader of this magazine. Ms. Nussbaum has agreed to join ALBA's honorary board, serving alongside Jeff Chang, Joyce Horman, Robin D.G. Kelley, Vikas Saini, Bryan Stevenson, and others. For a recording of the entire event, visit ALBA's event calendar or YouTube channel.

Workshop for Teachers

On November 7, close to 25 teachers from the United States, the UK, and Spain gathered online for a full-day workshop on the US and World Fascism, working on lesson plans based on the wealth of primary sources available in the ALBA Collection at NYU's Tamiment Library. ALBA's educational resources, including a carefully curated set of primary sources and dozens of lesson plans, are available for free at alba-valb.org/education/lesson-plans.

Workshop on World War II Escape Routes

On October 11, an audience of hundreds joined an online roundtable and workshop about the escape routes across the Pyrenees that were used by allied soldiers during World War II—among them, Lincoln vet George Watt. Organized by Gina

Herrmann and presented by Sebastiaan Faber, the workshop featured two experts, Meg Ostrum and John Morgan, with George Watt's sons, Dan and Steve, as special guests. For a recording of the entire event, visit ALBA's event calendar or YouTube channel.

Howard Zinn Book Fair Features Bruce Barthol

On December 3, a 37-minute videorecording of a performance by the late Bruce Barthol will be featured at the Howard Zinn Book Fair—a project of the San Francisco City College (CCSF) Labor and Community Studies Department—at the CCSF Mission Center. Written and directed by Barthol along with Richard Bermack and Peter Glazer, the footage was originally produced and streamed during the 2022 ALBA annual event. Following the screening at the Zinn Fair, the audience will be invited to join a debate about preserving the legacy of activism and of the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. Musicians and performers include Bruce Barthol, Randy Craig, Tony Marcus, Barrett Nelson, Dave Rokeach, Rachel Steiner, Arthur Holden, Leila DeMoss, and Barry Levitan.

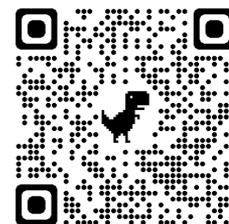
ALBA Featured in Spanish Newspaper

On November 4, the Spanish newspaper Público highlighted ALBA's educational work in a long article that also narrated the story of ALBA's founding and evolution over the years. Last year, ALBA published a curricular guide for Spanish high school teachers and students in collaboration with the Spanish government.

A New Fund for Anti-Fascist Education

The Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives, with support from The Puffin Foundation, is thrilled to announce the creation of the Peter N. Carroll Anti-Fascist Education Fund. The goal of this fund is to expand our efforts to contextualize and disseminate the anti-fascist history of the United States through the experience of the Lincoln Brigade. The often suppressed and overlooked history of these so-called "pre-mature anti-fascists" is critical for an understanding of our history and present. The fund's mission is to make sure that primary and secondary source curations of our material are available to all researchers, academics, activists, teachers, and students who need it. We can think of no one better to honor than Peter N. Carroll, who has done so much throughout his life and career to fight fascism through education and awareness raising.

With the inauguration of this fund, we invite you to join us in celebrating Peter Carroll's work and legacy. For those who donate \$125 or more to the fund, we offer a gift of a signed special edition of Peter Carroll's latest collection of poetry, *Sketches from Spain: Homage to the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*.



DONATE

Award-Winning Play on the Lincoln Brigade at the Center for Brooklyn History

On September 19, Iago Macknik-Conde, the high school student from New York who has been featured in previous issues of this magazine, gave an inspired performance at the Center for Brooklyn History of the play for which he won National History Day awards at the NYC and State competitions, making it to the national finals.

The play stages a conversation between an African American volunteer and another Lincoln, sandwiched between the opening and closing staccato news delivery of a period journalist. All parts were interpreted with authenticity by Iago himself. Iago's passion was obvious. Asked what advice he

would give to future National History Day participants, Iago said that it is most helpful to bring conviction and belief in the relevance of one's research topic.

NYC History Day is a program where students in grades 6-12 create projects based on original historical research and analysis. The CBH's inclusive policy of free entry and support for all expenses incurred in research and presentation allow for a broad diversity of entries that, like Iago's play, extend the boundaries of US history and the stories of the people who make it. I was honored to be asked to judge next year's competition, to which Iago has been encouraged to once more submit an entry.

—Nancy Wallach (ALBA Board)

“It Is Crucial to Tie the Lincolns’ Fight Against Fascism to World War II.”

UC Berkeley Approves Monument to Merriman and the Lincoln Brigade

By Sebastiaan Faber

Since April 2018, the Catalan town Corbera d'Ebre has featured a bronze plaque in memory of Robert Hale Merriman, commander of the Lincoln Battalion, who went missing in action nearby in April 1938. A copy of the plaque will be featured in a new monument on the UC Berkeley campus.

The initiative for the plaque in Corbera, which was designed by the sculptor Mar Pongiluppi, came from a research group at the University of Barcelona that focuses on history education (DIDPATRI). Soon after, the group donated a second casting of the plaque to the University of California at Berkeley, where Merriman had been pursuing his PhD in Economics. Recently, the UCB administration approved the installation of a monument featuring the plaque embedded in a large boulder and placed at the center of campus near Memorial Glade, which honors Berkeley veterans of World War II, along with a smaller informational plaque in English about the US volunteers in Spain. The two people who have made this happen are Claude Potts, the UCB librarian for Romance Language collections, and Donna Southard, who teaches in UCB's department of Spanish and Portuguese. I spoke with them in October.

Has there been any political pushback?

CP: We've always been concerned that there might be, but it hasn't really come up.

DS: The bigger concern—I wouldn't call it pushback—was

about providing more racial and gender balance in the representation of mostly historical figures connected to the campus in some way. If pushback of a political nature comes up at any point, our response will be that the university is precisely the place to go beyond reductionist interpretations of the complex political dynamics that led to the Spanish Civil War.



Is it significant to you that this monument will end up in close geographic proximity to the national ALB monument in San Francisco?

DS: Absolutely. It ties the UC Berkeley campus more closely to the Bay Area Post of the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. There are at least eight other Berkeley students who fought in Spain that we know of. So, this monument not only brings them into the discussion, but it also highlights the importance of their educational experience at Berkeley with regard to their personal evolution, which ultimately led to risking their own lives fighting

against fascism, even when their own country chose the path of non-intervention.

CP: Another link that we envision with the larger monument

The plaque donated to UC Berkeley.

in San Francisco is that it makes a symbolic bridge between ALB volunteers throughout the Bay Area who came from different walks of life yet were united for the same cause. Merriman, who grew up in the Santa Cruz mountains and came from a working-class family, joined the frontlines of the 1934 West Coast Longshoremen's Strike by volunteering in its publicity office. When Cal's football coach recruited his players to go to the docks to support the shipping companies against the strikers, Merriman responded by organizing a crew of Berkeley students and encouraged them to support the strikers, who were mostly whites, blacks, Chinese, and Filipino Americans.

How do you view the balance between the focus on Merriman—who was photogenic, charismatic, and met a mysterious death—and the need to acknowledge the broader group of volunteers from Cal and the rest of the US?

DS: Merriman was not only photogenic and charismatic; he was also one of the few American volunteers with any military training, so he became a leader. He was also tall. This physical presence made him a memorable figure to the locals, who

called him *el americano alto*. So, when the University of Barcelona's DIDPATRI research group conducted their interviews in the small town of Corbera, the focus naturally fell on him. But part of our purpose of installing this monument on campus is precisely to call attention to the broader group of volunteers, which will be acknowledged explicitly in the secondary informational plaque. We feel it is crucial to tie their fight against fascism during the Spanish Civil War into the more familiar conflict of World War II. This is why it will be installed at the center of campus near Memorial Glade, which honors UCB's veterans of the Second World War.

CP: Besides the challenge of not having a lot of information about the other volunteers from Berkeley, we also think that there is a role in heroifying individuals with physical monuments like these and Merriman is certainly a hero who has not been properly honored in this country. ▲



For a longer version of this interview, see our online edition at albvoluteer.org.

THOUGHTS ON THE MERRIMAN MONUMENT

by Linda Lustig

My father, Dave Smith, was a volunteer with the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. "Spain changed my whole life," he said. "I saw a country struggling—ordinary people, peasants, poor people. They couldn't even read or write, but when these young people came up to the front, we became an integrated army, the people struggling against the oppressing group of fascists. It left an indelible impression on my mind. So when I got back, I decided that I was going to be committed to furthering the cause of the people, whatever I did."

After returning from Spain, he worked as a machinist and a union organizer. However, over the years the effects of his shoulder wound from Spain interfered and he needed to rethink his occupation. He went back to college to complete his BA and then earned a Master's in Education. He taught science in middle and high school for many years and eventually became head of his local teachers union. In his later years he gave many talks about his experiences in Spain at local colleges on the east coast and worked briefly on curriculum with the NY vets ... long before the wonderful ALBA teaching institutes were created.

As a child I slowly learned about his participation in the Spanish Civil War but also learned to never mention it in public...I never expected to be part of public educational events and to work with my father and innumerable others on the SF Bay Area Monument, which was completed in 2008. One of our earliest supporters was Russ Ellis, a former vice chancellor and sociologist here at UC Berkeley who worked with us on community engagement.

The Monument was designed by Walter Hood and Ann Chamberlain. Walter is a Professor and Chair of the Dept of Landscape Architecture at Berkeley and a MacArthur award recipient. He told us that he had no knowledge of the Spanish Civil War until he responded to a competition for a monument design. Over the years, he spent endless hours at community and city meetings ensuring that the project would move forward.

My connection to Berkeley began as an undergraduate in the 1960's. I was arrested during the Free Speech movement and met my husband in the process. He later became an Associate Vice Chancellor at Berkeley (now retired), and he is on the Board of the FSM archives (which are in the process of being donated to the Bancroft Library).

Cal has both a monument to the Free Speech Movement and the Free Speech Cafe where students interact with each other, encounter information about FSM and there are always current periodicals to read and stay informed about the world.

It is time for Cal to add to its monuments for War Veterans (there are several here) and honor former Cal student Robert Merriman's contribution to a better world. It is fitting that it be placed near the Bancroft Library housing the Merriman archives where current students can study historical documents and consider their own future actions.

Linda Lustig is a former member of the ALBA Board of Governors.

Paul Wendorf's Letters Published in Spain

By Nancy Phillips

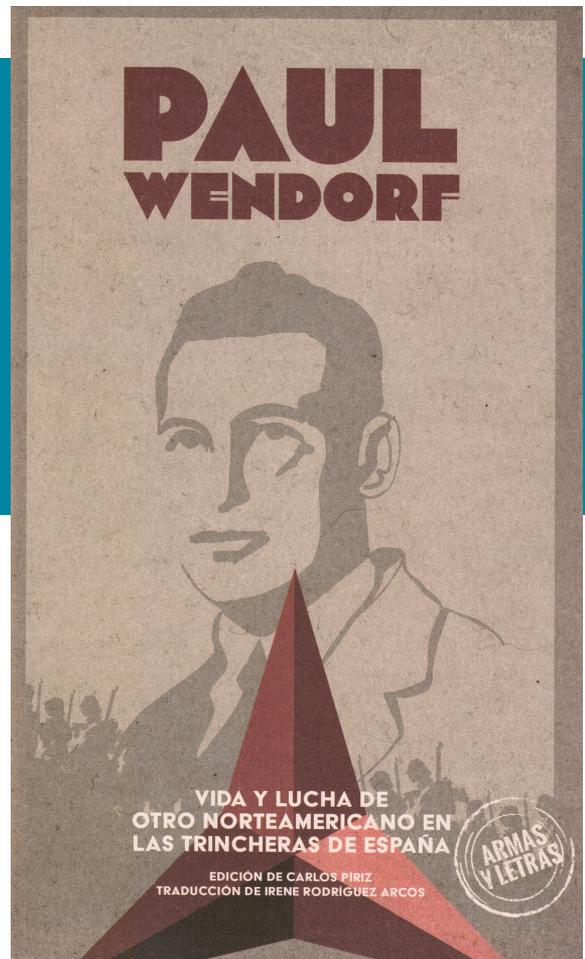
The letters of Paul Wendorf, a member of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion, have been translated and published in Spain by Salamanca University Press as *Vida y lucha de otro norteamericano en las trincheras de España*.

Paul was born November 11, 1911, in New York City into a Russian Jewish immigrant family that became prosperous. He studied history and economics at Columbia, graduating with honors in 1932. After joining the Communist Party a year later, he worked as an organizer for a white-collar municipal workers' union and as a coordinator of welfare and relief for the unemployed. He married Leona Grossman in February 1937, the same month he enlisted in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. He arrived in Spain on February 14, 1937.

During the nineteen months he was in Spain, Paul wrote about 80 letters, most of them to his wife Leona. The letters have been part of the ALBA Collection at Tamiment Library for many years. In all of them, the love between Paul and his wife is evident, even in those that involve mundane concerns about cigarettes, lost letters, lost packages, the whereabouts of friends.

But these were more than love letters. They were also historic documents, a soldier's account of his life as a volunteer in Spain during the period of the Jarama, Brunete and Ebro Battles. Two themes emerge: Paul's growing despair about the Republic's capacity to prevail militarily; and his deep commitment to the Republic. The excerpts below reflect this tension. An extensive excerpt from his last letter, with its vivid account of the historic crossing of the Ebro River and the early days of the Offensive, shows how Paul put aside his doubts. His account is full of energy, terror, and hope against hope that the Republic would prevail.

Paul arrived at the Jarama Battlefield on February 27th just in time for an attack that resulted in a horrific number of



Battalion casualties. He carried food and ammunition and worked as a stretcher carrier. The next months, he spent in the water-logged trenches at the Jarama front, until in May he transferred to a machine-gun company as a private.

In July 1937, the XV Brigade was in almost continuous action in the Battle of Brunete. Afterwards, in August, Paul wrote: "Dearest... Because I want to tell you a truth—the war will not be over very soon. The fascist counter-offensive has been stopped, and we will still hold most of our gains. But the fascists are struggling like raging beasts, and although defeat is now clearly seen for them, they have the technical means of prolonging the defeat."

In June 1938, Paul wrote to the wife of a fellow *brigadista*: "What I am trying to say, is that we, whether Internationals or Spaniards, can't be expected to keep carrying this burden forever. In a few days, we will be going up to the lines again... Whatever it is, we know it will be a similar story, an attempt to make up for equipment by daring, quickness, and the capacity of men to face superior odds."

In July 1938, Paul learned that his widowed mother had found out that he was in Spain, and that she was under a doctor's care. To Leona he wrote: "Dearest... In the letter I wrote [Mother] I said that I had come to Spain because, if I had not,

I would have had no peace of my own, in my own mind; that I had to be true to the things I believed in, the things which have made my life worthwhile. Leona, you must explain to her that life could be worth living to me only if I came to Spain—to stay behind would have been to deny myself the life I wanted. You must tell her these things, dearest, and much more; you must tell her why you let me go, all the things that make me precious to you.”

On August 8, 1938, having crossed the Ebro into fascist territory, Paul wrote: “Dearest One... Toward evening of July 24th, a battalion meeting---the Army of the Ebro (under command of Modesto, Communist carpenter, formerly of the 5th Regiment of Madrid) is to cross the Ebro at a number of points, push on as far as it can, relieve the pressure on Valencia by forcing the fascists to transfer their forces, strike a blow at fascism on the international scale. We will cross in rowboats; after the crossing, pontoon bridges will be built and we will try to get our tanks and artillery over. We have found out that the fascists have a very thin line defending the river and expect to break through without much trouble. Our Brigade will be the reserve for the Division in crossing, the 11th and 13th Brigades (Germans, East-Europeans and Slavs) will be in front. (Some smiled in relief, I smiled at their smiling because I knew from Brunete that the ‘reserve’ does more fighting and marching in the toughest places than many of the ‘first-line’ units.)

“Anyway, Viva La Republica, Viva La Ejercito Popular, Viva La 15th Brigada, Viva La Victoria. The Catalans give their peculiar cheer: tricky, treeky, treek--Rah! Rah! Rah!, a song is sung, and we go back to rest, you can’t sleep, till 12, when we move out on the road, off to the front. Long single files, each file a different Battalion or different company, hurry, hurry, shh, be quiet, while huge trucks and artillery pieces rumble along, keep quiet while the trucks pick their way among the marching files in second gear, men cursing truck drivers for breaking their lines and making them lose contact in the pitch black night, drivers cursing the men for holding them up. We get near the river. That first line should be crossing by now. What the hell’s the matter, there’s not a sound, not a shot to be heard. Turn off the road, sleep here. No, no time to drink coffee, line up, we’re marching. I grab a piece of bread, chew it while lining up. “Wendorf, Mail.” Two letters from you, each containing cigarettes. We have no tobacco. Your cigarettes give a smoke to the whole machine-gun company of the Lincoln-Washington Battalion, one cigarette to each squad. There was enough left over for another cigarette to each squad later in the day.

“We still had about a kilometer to travel to the river. Fascist artillery from across the river pounding on us on the way—march, everyone drop at the swish of a shell, march and drop, march and drop. Brigade Commissar Gates comes back from the river, eyes heavy with sleep, face hot with excitement, field glasses dangling from his neck. ‘What did you see Johnny?’ ‘A lot of water and nothing else. The Mac-Paps and 24th are over.’ Two Battalions of our Brigade have already crossed. Looks good. Labor battalion carrying wooden planks for the platoon bridge.

“Near the river, a huge swift fascist bomber comes down low, drops its load, misses us. More fascist bombers. In between bombers, we move. Suddenly on the shore, bedlam--the seamen from the British and American Battalions who are superintending embarkation are going nuts. A couple of rowboats were hit by machine gun bullets from the airplanes, full of water.

“We get into a boat. I grab the oars which are tied to the gun-wales by rope. A rope comes untied and we drift in the river for a quarter of a minute while it is being re-tied and we wonder if the next bomber will find us in the center of the river. One hundred yards of river and we are on the other bank, forming up, nervous, happy and not a fascist in sight.

“Then starts the long hike of that first day up the hills, up the mountains, following the country lanes, keeping off main roads that the fascist aviation will be watching. It’s about 15 kilometers that day, and up 3000 or 4000 feet. We march into fascist territory, with no tanks, no artillery, with an aviation busy at Valencia, men with mules who crossed the river (the mules swam), with what they could carry, rifles, machine-guns, ammunition, hand grenades, not knowing when the pontoon bridges would be built, or how many times the bombers would blow them up...

“From the next day on, we met the fascists in combat, fighting for positions, getting bombed and shelled. Our artillery finally came over and did some shelling of its own, although the fascist aviation still dominated the sky. We ate canned food, had diarrhea, the smell of the dead everywhere; no sleep for a week; my hands blistered and raw from picking through solid rock to dig machine gun pits; pants ripped to shreds by crawling around in the brush; (a Spanish comrade from another Brigade saw me walking along with my trousers flapping about my bare legs like skirts, and miraculously pulled out of his pack one of the 3 or 4 pairs of pants in Spain long enough to fit me---a beautiful pair of corduroy and gave them to me, which gave the sores on my knees a chance to heal. Some day, some Ouija Board will tell how that five foot six Spaniard came to have in that pack that pair of pants for my six feet, just when I needed them.) Strange how men’s personalities changed under the stress of this life-on-the-verge-of-death. Do you know what happened to mine? Ha! Ha! I become extremely talkative!...”

Paul was killed on August 18, 1938, in the Sierra Pandols. An article from the “Daily Worker” on August 24 included Paul’s name among those who received awards for good work in the last action.

Deepest thanks to Paulette Nusser Dubetz and Helen Nusser Fogarty who helped with the collecting, copying and transcribing of these letters over the many years that we worked on this project. The letters in English in their entirety are available in digital format here. ▲

TWO GERMAN ANTIFASCISTS IN REPUBLICAN MADRID

By Mark Derby

Marianne Angermann, a young German biochemist, joined a Madrid lab in late 1935 to work with her compatriot Franz Bielschowsky, a Jewish refugee who'd been there since 1933. When the war broke out the following year, both decided stay in Spain and serve the Republican war effort as medical personnel. Marianne's letters to her parents, newly translated, shed light on their story.

"The scientific level of Spanish medicine," declared physician and researcher Prof. Carlos Jiménez Díaz proudly in 1935, "is superior to that of other nations." He based this opinion on "Spain's ancient culture, on its profound drive for knowledge, on the serenity which this country, unaffected by World War, has given to science."

In that auspicious and assured era of Spain's Second Republic, Prof. Díaz was about to open the Instituto de investigaciones médicas in Madrid, within the University City in the northwestern suburb of Moncloa (soon to be the front line of defence against Franco's efforts to take the city). Díaz's vision, unique in Spain at that time, was for a research institute integrated with a public hospital, so that clinical practice and teaching could be combined with laboratory research. A friend and ally in this project was the professor of physiology, Dr Juan Negrín, who would later serve as the last President of the Second Republic.

Prof. Díaz staffed his state-of-the-art facility with researchers from his own country and from Germany, where he had studied in the 1920s. By the early '30s, world-leading German medical researchers could be readily persuaded to work overseas, since those of Jewish descent had been forced to leave their posts under Nazi statutes. One of those involuntary émigrés, who became head of the Instituto's biochemistry department, was Dr. Franz Bielschowsky. Another was a young biochemist named Dr. Marianne Angermann.



Although Angermann was not Jewish, as a confirmed anti-fascist she chose to exchange a comfortable life in Berlin for scientific research within the most progressive intellectual environment in Europe. In a series of vivid and colorful letters to her family, Marianne described her delight at the new workplace she shared with Franz. "The Institute is unbelievably beautiful. Everyone has their own large laboratory, larger than my big beloved one in Düsseldorf... the floor is made from a special sort of rubber—soft and light as a feather to walk on." She quickly learned enough Spanish to appreciate her new home in Republican Madrid, noting novelties such as "a black man spreading out a

sack on the street" to cool freshly roasted coffee beans.

By early 1936 the young researcher's enthusiasm was becoming tempered with an awareness of the challenges facing the fragile Republic. "Occasionally two people shoot each other. But no-one here takes that tragically. One only reads about it in the paper." These offhand observations were at first simply asides to her general delight in her new circumstances. "How good I have it here compared with the dreadful loneliness of Berlin! Almost every day someone drives me home. Here they don't let a lady pay for a tram."

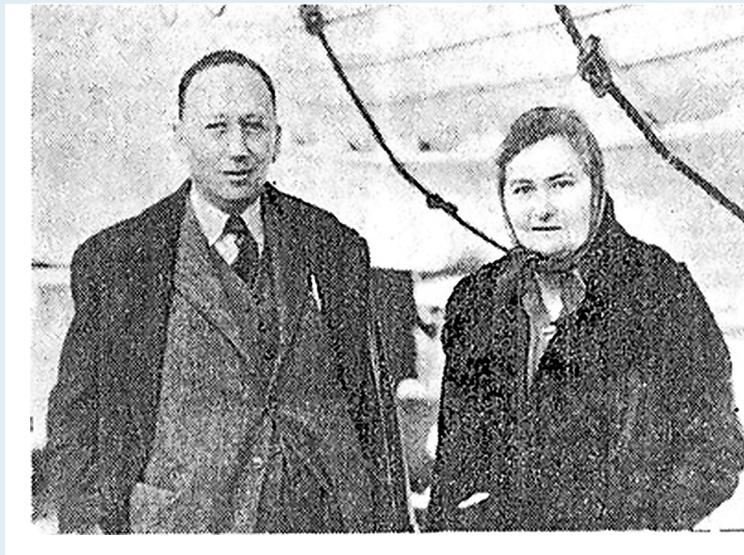
Later that year, the political situation deteriorated further, but Marianne remained enthralled with her surroundings, even in Madrid's notorious winter conditions. "It just rains and rains and everything is one big swamp," she wrote. A massive strike by construction workers in June, revealing the growing rift between anarchist and other factions of the Republican government, delayed completion of the Institute buildings but did not otherwise affect her work. Even when she reported that "everything is on strike, partly the workers, partly the employers," she did so in light-hearted terms—perhaps to reassure her parents in Berlin. "If you should get unsettling news," she told them in July, after the tit-for-tat assassinations of a socialist military officer and a right-wing politician, "then I can only say that we see practically no sign of it and life goes on."

The civil war broke out three days after Marianne wrote that letter, and even this inveterate optimist was forced to admit that her work and home life would be profoundly affected. By then, however, her own country was firmly under Nazi rule and her prospects there were similarly bleak.

From November 1936, in the face of the Nationalist advance on the capital, most of the university faculty shifted to Valencia, but she and Franz chose to remain in Madrid and support the idealistic, embattled Republic. Both spent the war working at Military Hospital No. 6 in the northern suburb of Chamartín de la Rosa: Franz as a physician with the Republican Army's medical service, and Marianne as medical laboratory chemist. Ground-breaking work in psychiatry was carried out at this hospital during the war. Its first director was Dr. Amador Pereira Redondo who, in 1937, went on to become Chief Medical Officer of the Tank Brigade.

The two expatriate Germans, who married in Madrid in July 1938, refused all opportunities to leave Spain—even when their own lives were endangered. In a letter written to her mother ten years later, Marianne recalled: "that bright morning in Madrid when terrified women ran from one hospital to another during the night, searching for their children... The evening before we had seen how German aeroplanes, Junkers, bombed their part of the city. They were testing things out on Spanish soil! Hatred of the Germans? No, disgust was the best expression back then." Despite the severe privations and dangers of wartime, Marianne looked back warmly on those times. "I wouldn't have missed any of it," she wrote, "as difficult as it often was."

By early 1939, the laboratory she had described in such glowing terms was in ruins. (It was eventually rebuilt nearby in the Franco era. The Hospital Universitario Fundación Jiménez Díaz still operates as a private teaching and research hospital.) The couple's situation



had become critical. They could expect retribution from the victorious Nationalists and could not rely on the German diplomatic mission in Spain for assistance, as Nazi-era legislation would by this stage probably have stripped them of their status as German citizens.

With great difficulty and resourcefulness, they obtained Spanish passports enabling them to travel temporarily to Marseilles in March 1939. Just before their visas expired, they received permission to enter the UK for "a visit of six months, not for employment." Nevertheless, they both found work at the University of Sheffield, where they spent the Second World War. In 1948, the couple travelled on to New Zealand, where Franz had been offered directorship of the Cancer Research Laboratory at Otago University. They spent the rest of their lives there, carrying out world-leading cancer research.

Marianne's many letters from Madrid and her subsequent addresses were copied by her parents in archaic Gothic script, difficult for even native German-speakers to read today. Yet staff in the German programme at Otago University's Department of Languages and Cultures have recently transcribed and translated these letters into English, adding meticulous scholarly annotations to explain references to people, places, events and political developments. The text is augmented by many helpful photos and other images. The first two journals of Marianne's letters, covering the period from 1935 to early

1939, have been made freely available online as "Briefe einer Antifaschistin" at otago-germanstudies.otago.ac.nz/ogs/issue/archive.

The following are extracts from Marianne's letters from Madrid to her parents in Germany:

17 May 1936

On Wednesday there was the grand viewing of the Institute by the press... Don Carlos [Dr Jiménez Díaz], who's honoured me in the last week with more scientific discussions in the last week than in all the previous months, now

only speaks Spanish with me and that's quite good because he has an excellent understanding of German. If he doesn't say we need to speak German, then that's the best indication that I'm able to express myself in this new language. Like a child perhaps, but at least comprehensibly.

21 June 1936

If you are at one of these ministries the clerk doesn't just slap you on the shoulders, he also does it to the first secretary of the minister if he happens to be pleased about something... It's quite an undisciplined life but it works and works quite well, as we can see. If the tram drivers are thirsty then they leave the streetcar standing a while and go and get a drink and make up for the delay again by driving faster...

11 July 1937

We haven't eaten sliced meat since the war began – how good it tasted!... Sardines and a piece of bread make a magnificent meal. I think that thanks to such times as these stomachs will be getting smaller. Anyway, I often think it would be impossible to have a normal meal without getting stomach aches afterwards. On the 9 we'd been married a whole year. ▲

Mark Derby's biography of Doug Jolly, a New Zealand surgeon who served with distinction in the Spanish Civil War, will be published in June 2024.

WHEN DID WORLD WAR II START? AND WHEN WILL IT END? REFLECTIONS INSPIRED BY GUERNICA

By James D. Fernández



When a visit to Picasso's *Guernica* in Madrid was canceled because of Covid, James Fernández instead delivered this lecture. This is the last of two installments.

Throughout the summer and fall of 1936, indeed, for the duration of the war, Spain would be on almost everybody's mind and retina in the US, whether they liked it or not: even escapist Depression-weary moviegoers who bought tickets to see Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936) or Victor Fleming's *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), would be regaled with pre-show newsreels that, with melodramatic music and foreboding narrations, depicted the horrors of a new kind of modern warfare being debuted and perfected in Spain. Those much-celebrated innovations in the field of aviation—which in the 1920s and early 30s had fueled optimistic dreams of a more connected and peaceful world—gave way to the nightmarish scenes projected in darkened movie houses all over the world; of the bombers of the Condor Legion—the same planes which soon would be flying over London—dropping their eggs of death on horrified Spanish civilians, who look skyward, cursing their unknown assassins: “watch and listen,” booms the newsreel narrator, “as death rains down from the sky on the defenseless civilian populations of Madrid, Barcelona or Guernica.”

These same interwar years also ushered in technological innovations in the production and dissemination of images that would make the war in Spain one of the most spectacularized events of its time.

Relatively small cameras using better and faster film stock—like those used by Gerda Taro, Kati Horna, or Robert Capa—made possible the close-up and in-depth documentation of both the

horrors and the boredom of war. New technology allowed photographs to be transmitted via phone and radio waves, permitting viewers far away to see images taken at the front just a few hours before. Photojournalism and improved printing technologies—*Life* magazine began in 1936—brought high-resolution images into the kitchens and living rooms of people all over the world. Pictures, for example, of kitchens and living rooms in Madrid or Barcelona sheared open by bombs, like so many hinged doll houses. Smaller and better movie cameras made impactful newsreels part of everyday culture. It was not uncommon for the captions of photos or the narrations of newsreels to focus as much on the technological marvels that brought the images before the eyes of the spectators so quickly, as on the object of representation of the image itself.

For most of the war, direct travel to Spain was impossible or impractical. American volunteers like Abe Osheroff, Hy Katz, or Barton Carter who wanted to join the International Brigades in Spain had to go to France first. And because their reason for traveling—to participate in a foreign war—was illegal, they needed an alibi for boarding a Europe-bound ship in New York harbor. Some of them announced rather implausibly to border officials that they were off to see the World's Fair in Paris, which ran from May to November of 1937. I doubt any volunteers actually realized their alibi and attended the Fair. They had more important things to do, like making it down to France's southern border and walking across the Pyrenees

Plucking Picasso's work from the black-and-white mediascape out of which it emerged is a form of displacement and violence—a way of forgetting through commemoration.

into war-torn Spain. But had they made it to that Fair, they undoubtedly would have found their way to the Spanish pavilion that everyone was talking about, and within that pavilion, if they got there in July or later, they would have seen Picasso's *Guernica*: one artist's rendition of what impelled the volunteers to head to Spain in the first place: carnage, or in Abe Osheroff's unwitting and prescient description of Picasso's painting via newsreel footage: "civilians gettin' plastered all over the place".

The promise of technology to improve the quality of life had been a standard theme for World's Fairs throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The 1937 International Exposition in Paris was no exception; the tagline of the Fair could very well serve as a fitting if sinister subtitle to Picasso's massive painting. "Art and Technology in Modern Life"

In an old story, a Gestapo officer visits Picasso's Paris studio in Nazi-occupied France. Poking around the place, he comes upon a large photographic replica of *Guernica*. The Nazi asks: "Did you do that?" Picasso replied: "No, *you* did."

The tale is certainly apocryphal, but it's a helpful vignette because it points us in the direction of the ambiguity of the term "Guernica." Guernica is a small city in the Basque Country of great symbolic importance to the Basque people; it also denotes an event, since on April 26, 1937, in one of the first and most dramatic examples of aerial terrorism, planes from Hitler's Condor Legion and Mussolini's Aviazione Leggionaria, carpet-bombed and strafed the town on market day for more than three hours non-stop, when the streets were full of buyers, sellers, livestock, etc.; and Guernica, finally, is a work of art, for some THE work of modern art, that was commissioned, as we have seen, to be exhibited at the Spanish Pavilion at the International Exposition of Paris in 1937.

If "What is Guernica?" is a tricky question, so too is "Where is Guernica?" Of course we can trace the sinuous trajectory of the actual canvas with relative precision: from the 34 days it spent in Picasso's Paris studio while he hastily painted it, to its subsequent summer and autumn months at the Paris Universal Exposition; later extensive touring around Europe before coming to the US for more touring; its eventual deposit at the MOMA, where it remained for decades, because the artist had stipulated that it should never be exhibited in Franco's Spain. After Franco's death and Spain's transition to democracy, and after a lengthy and complicated set of negotiations, the canvas finally did come to Spain in 1981; was installed first at the Casón del Buen Retiro, right next to the Prado, until its apparent final resting place was prepared for it, in the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia.

But where is Guernica really? There's no need to reproduce it here. Guernica—the image—is ubiquitous, and it pops up in the strangest of places—on the walls of dorm rooms, on jigsaw puzzles, on drinking-glass coasters, etc. Moreover, the era of carnage that the painting depicts and ushers in is tragically still familiar. The news might be about Ukraine or Gaza: Guernica is still an apt illustration.

A couple of years ago, less than a mile away from the Reina Sofia, where Picasso's *Guernica* is enshrined with all the sanctimonious aura of Modern Art here in Madrid, I went with a friend to see one of the strangest things one could ever imagine: a museum show of the work of Banksy, the elusive street-artist. On the way to the Círculo de Bellas Artes, we wondered how in the world Banksy's work would be curated in the context of a museum, how some of the most site-specific images ever produced since Altamira would be treated in what was being touted as a blockbuster international traveling show.

The show itself was absurd, and as we walked through its many rooms, my friend and I looked around for cameras that might be filming the spectators who were perhaps unwittingly participating in a massive Banksy reality hoax. The work was framed and illuminated and presented more or less as if it had been created for, and belonged in, a conventional art museum. And we all paraded dutifully through room after room, spending more time looking at the labels than at the works themselves and trying to come up with clever things to say about these impossibly out-of-place objects.

But by far the most bizarre element of the show for me, and the element that got us thinking and talking about *Guernica*, was the video installation that visitors were obliged to watch, seated, before being able to walk through the galleries. On a multi-screen wrap-around display, in a dizzying sequence of zooming-in satellite photographs, the original locations of Banksy's street art were pinpointed one after the other, as if they were the targets of smart bombs. Neighborhoods were presented as if seen from the nose-cone of a bomb. The textures and idiosyncrasies of those neighborhoods which, in theory, give meaning and context to Banksy's site-specific interventions, were reduced to a set of GPS coordinates. Right then and there, I was reminded of our introduction to this kind of technology and this kind of footage. It was during the Iraq invasion of 2003, when the nightly news treated us day after day after day to footage supplied by the Pentagon. Point-of-view shots of bombs homing in on their targets, doing their civilizing job of shocking and awing, supposedly with surgical precision, with nary a bloodied child, woman, horse, or bull anywhere to be seen.

On February 5, 2003, Secretary of State Colin Powell and Ambassador John Negroponte gave press conferences at the entrance to the Security Council room at the headquarters of the United Nations in New York. Armed with satellite photographs of what were allegedly weapon factories in Iraq, Powell and Negroponte stood before a huge blue curtain, and made their case for the impending and necessary invasion of Iraq. Reporters and diplomats familiar with the space chosen for this momentous press conference noticed something amiss: that blue curtain backdrop had been placed there to cover something up: the full-size tapestry of Picasso's *Guernica* that had adorned that space since 1985. When the news broke of this unusual cover-up of the *Guernica* tapestry, and ever since, all kinds of accusations and hypotheses have been thrown around to explain the change in décor for that press conference. But I'm pretty sure my friend and I might have come upon the definitive explanation as we exited the gift shop through the Banksy exhibition.

When does something, anything, actually begin? When does something, anything, actually end?

In some ways, the torn and tattered, well-traveled version of *Guernica* put forth in this painting is an extraordinarily fitting and provocative emplacement of Picasso's work, maybe even more so, I dare say, than the august room that the original painting now presides over in the Reina Sofia. Obviously, a massive canvas by Pablo Picasso is not

as out of place in a museum setting as a stencil and spray paint intervention by Banksy. And yet, the process of plucking Picasso's work from the black-and-white mediascape out of which it emerged, from the propagandistic urgency that animated it in the first place, is also a form of displacement and violence, and, paradoxically, a way of forgetting through commemoration. Frames are to art what the brackets that envelop beginning and end dates are to the flow of history, to the flow of life. Helpful and necessary? Maybe. Distorting and decontextualizing: for sure.

This painting was done by Celeste Dupuy-Spencer in 2016. It is in the Whitney Collection, and it is titled *Veterans Day*. A makeshift calendar points to the importance of that day of commemoration—someone has been crossing out the days leading up to the present depicted in the painting, which is circled in red—Veterans Day, 2016. And yet, in the entire gallery of characters that the painting references and recreates, there is not a single officially recognized veteran to be found. A newspaper clipping memorializes Cassius Clay—later Mohammed Ali's—momentous decision, at the peak of his boxing career, to declare himself a conscientious objector and refuse to serve in the Vietnam war. "I ain't got no quarrel with the Viet Cong." A draft dodger being celebrated by someone who is keen on commemorating Veterans Day. A large framed photograph represents a group of Abraham Lincoln Brigade volunteers, giving the popular front salute; these brave men and women, who, as we have seen, stood up to fascism five years before Pearl Harbour, have never been granted the official status of veterans; in fact, they were written out of most versions of the history of "The Greatest Generation."

So: how are we to make sense of Dupuy-Spencer's *Veterans Day* commemoration of non-veterans, or some might even say of anti-veterans? The painter herself gives us a number of clues. A book on the top shelf of the bookcase is titled "Art After World War I +2 +3", playfully suggesting that history is an open-ended and ongoing sequence of wars. The visual representation of the music that swirls out of the record player speaker also has a kind of open-ended energy to it, as the music would seem to



spiral out and across the threshold of the painting's frame and resound into the future. And then, of course, there is the *Guernica*.

Dupuy-Spencer's painting begins to make sense only if we recognize that the vision of history that it comes out of and that it puts forth is one that eschews conventional frames, standard distinctions, beginning and end dates carved in stone. Her veterans are not the survivors of wars that have been packaged and named and dated by

nation-states or ideological blocks; her veterans are survivors, as it were, of *The Good Fight*.

Her painting helps us realize, in fact, that once cleared of all the nationalist borders, frames, and periodizations that they forced us to learn in school, history, as Peter Carroll has been saying for years, can look entirely different to us. And we can start to trace clear through lines that run, for example, from the terrorist bombing of *Guernica*, through Hiroshima, Operation Shock and Awe, and on to the disgraceful drone warfare that we now tolerate or accept without flinching. That blue curtain in the United Nations was an attempt to block that through line, that association, between the carnage from the sky in *Guernica*, and the carnage from the sky about to be unleashed in Bagdad.

Dupuy-Spencer's painting, finally, can help us reclaim Barton Carter, Hy Katz, Abe Osheroff and Cassius Clay/Mohammad Ali as admirable veterans, in an ongoing war. Abe Osheroff perfectly sums up this war: "You resist. Win or lose, you resist." This was and is a war that begins anew every day; it's a war that pits those who insist on looking at human suffering and injustice with the distance and indifference of a satellite or a drone, who insist on looking at the victims of aerial bombardments as inevitable "collateral damage," against those who, like Picasso and Dupuy, embrace the on-the-ground perspective of solidarity and empathy towards all of those civilians getting plastered all over the place, through no fault of their own. Nation-states may declare the beginnings and ends of wars, the winners and the losers: but if we eschew the idea that nation-states are the only proper agents, protagonists and framers of history, we can see that the struggle for decency and dignity, for justice and freedom, knows no borders, no clear-cut beginnings and endings. This, the Lincolns knew. ▲

James D. Fernández is Professor of Spanish at NYU, director of NYU Madrid, and a longtime contributor to The Volunteer.

Watt Essay Prize Prompts Record Number of Submissions

By Aaron B. Retish

The Watt Essay Prize committee was excited to receive close to sixty submissions this year, surpassing the numbers from the pre-COVID pandemic. Never before did so many undergraduate and graduate students from across the United States and Western Europe submit their work.

We awarded prizes to four exceptional pre-collegiate students. In a wonderfully thought-out essay, Monica Nitu examines the long philosophical underpinnings of the Spanish Civil War, including the influence of Hegel on nationalist thought, the justification for totalitarianism, and Marx's importance to the Left. Kikyo Makino-Siller and Sohan Sahy provide detailed portraits of important individuals of the Spanish Civil War using primary sources. While Makino-Siller drew deeply on the Comintern archive to produce a rich account of the volunteer nurse Mabel Speigel, Sahy looked at the politics of the painter David Alfaro Siqueiros. Finally, the Watt Committee recognized Iago Macknik-Conde for his play about the Lincoln Brigade as the first desegregated American force.

Iago has already been featured in *The Volunteer* for his performance of his play, based in part on his family's experience. He garnered a first-place finish at the New York State History Day competition and an Outstanding Entry award at the National History Day Competition.

Two undergraduate papers stood out for their research and keen analysis. Sam Bisno of Princeton University mined the Abraham Lincoln Brigade archives for his paper "Olive Trees and Peasant Comrades," which looks at the volunteers' relationship to Spaniards as well as the Spanish environment and culture. Carolyn Ellison of Open University in Wales, UK offers a focused study of three members of the Welsh International Brigade Volunteers as part of her undergraduate thesis. Incorporating material from the National Archives, Ellison shows how the Welsh volunteers were driven by class solidarity and ideas of justice to join the fight in Spain.

Several of the graduate essays advanced our understanding of the Spanish Civil War and two made significant contributions to the scholarship. Matthew Kovac of University of California, Berkeley looks at the 1936 conjuncture, seeing the connection



between the revolt in Palestine and the Spanish Civil War. His paper "Defending Jerusalem in Cordoba: The Palestinian Revolt, the Spanish Civil War, and Anticolonial Antifascism, 1936-1939" places the Spanish Civil War in the global anticolonial movement, showing how anticolonialism and antifascism were inseparable. The second recipient, Alfie Norris, is a repeat winner, having just received the award for his undergraduate thesis. This is only the second time that a student has won the award in two categories, showing how the Watt award helps young scholars continue to explore the Spanish Civil War in their studies. Norris, now a graduate student at Oxford, wrote a wonderful thesis, "From the Back-to-Back to the Battlefield: West Riding of Yorkshire International Brigade Volunteers' Motivation, Experience, and

Legacy." Recipients of the Watt award are changing the history of the volunteers from the United Kingdom, showing that those who volunteered did so with a complex understanding of international politics and social justice. For summaries, images, and the full text of the winning submissions, visit our online edition at albavolunteer.org.

The jury for the 2023 George Watt Memorial Essay was comprised of Angela Giral (Columbia University), Joshua Goode (Claremont Graduate University), Jo Labanyi (New York University), Aaron Retish (Wayne State University), Josephine Yurek (New York City Public Schools), and Nancy Wallach (New York City Public Schools). The Watt award honors the memory of Abraham Lincoln Brigade veteran George Watt (1914-1994), a social worker, writer, and lifelong activist central to the creation of ALBA. The personal correspondence between George and Ruth Watt during the Spanish Civil War was made into a play. The script and performance by actors Vero Maynez and Nathan Payne can be found on the ALBA website. ▲

Aaron Retish, ALBA's Treasurer, is a Professor of History at Wayne State University.

The prize committee met with the recipients of the undergraduate and graduate awards. The four scholars captivated the committee with presentations of their work and conversations about the larger implications of their scholarship and what they planned to do next.



A Fan and a Photograph Tell Their Story

By Bernd Häber

When IB vet Hans Maslowski visited his family in East Berlin in 1969, he gave them a Spanish fan signed in 1938 by 31 fellow antifascists. More than 50 years later, his great-nephew finds out who they were.

The first chapter of the 2019 novel *A Long Petal of The Sea* by Isabel Allende introduces its main character, Victor Dalmau, thus: “Like almost all youths his age, Victor had joined the Republican Army in 1936 and gone off with his regiment to defend Madrid, which had been partially occupied by Franco and his Nationalist forces, as the troops who rose against the government called themselves.” The story of Victor Dalmau begins close to where the Spanish Civil War story of my great-uncle Hans Maslowski ends. Hans had emigrated to New York City from Germany in 1927 and fought against Franco in 1937-38 as a member of the International Brigades.

In 1969, Hans and his wife Anna (my grandfather’s sister) visited my parents and me in East Berlin, coming directly from the United States, and handed over a Spanish fan (*abanico*), signed by 31 members of the International Brigades, his International Brigade identity card, and two black-and-white photographs. These objects were kept in a box for years, until they resurfaced in early 2020.



In March 2020, now living in Phoenix, Arizona, I approached the Martin-Springer Institute at Northern Arizona University and asked Björn Krondorfer, its director, whether students might be interested in reconstructing the stories behind the men who had signed the fan to unveil the possible connections between the fan and the photographs. Krondorfer contacted

The fan



Ana Varela-Lago, a professor at Northern Arizona University who taught courses on modern European history. Together, they mentored and facilitated a two-year public history research project, which is documented at spanishcivilwarfan.org.

The project focused on the 31 men who signed the fan. While many were very young, some, like Hans, were almost forty. The fan was signed in Levante in the fall of 1938, when the International Brigades were being dismantled and the volunteers were awaiting repatriation. The project reconstructs the lives of the sixteen American volunteers who signed the fan along with the life of Hans, the fan's owner, who did not sign it.

The research project also traces the origin of the one of the photographs I inherited, which shows Hans with a group of men and fellow brigadistas. A seal on the print indicates that it was taken and printed as a postcard in the relative tranquility of a studio owned by the photographer Luis García in the Spanish town of Villena (Alicante). Further research, including a study trip to Villena by Ana Varela in the summer of 2022, uncovered the names of several men who posed for the photo over 85 years ago.

Since I rediscovered the fan and the photographs, I wondered what motivated my great-uncle and his fellow brigadistas to leave their homes and risk their lives to defend a republic in a country many of them barely knew. The project has offered some answers. Like other European immigrants in the group, Hans had been among the first to leave for Spain when he

boarded the *SS Paris* on February 6, 1937. But because he was not yet a citizen of the United States, his return was delayed. After crossing the border into France, he was detained in the French camp of St. Cyprien. Eventually he was allowed to leave and boarded the *SS Roosevelt* reaching New York on March 25, 1939. Like Hans, thousands of Spaniards were forced into French concentration camps. But while he returned home, they faced years of exile in a new country, like Allende's protagonist, Victor Dalmau, who began a new life in Chile.



I would like to express my gratitude to the Martin-Springer Institute and its director Björn Krondorfer, the historian Ana Varela, and the students who contributed to bringing to light the forgotten lives of these idealistic men who went to Spain to fight against fascism. While the project has focused on the American volunteers, the Martin-Springer institute is now seeking university partners in Canada and the UK to research the stories of the remaining British and Canadian volunteers. ▲

Born in East-Germany in 1963, Bernd Häber emigrated to the United States in 1996. His edition of the diary of his grandfather, Fritz Häber, who spent 16 months in an American POW Camp, is due out in early 2024. He lives in Phoenix, AZ.

KAREN NUSSBAUM: “GOOD ORGANIZING MEANS THAT YOU DON’T TELL PEOPLE THEY’RE WRONG.”

By Sebastiaan Faber

Earlier this year, we received an unexpected email from Karen Nussbaum, the legendary labor activist, asking to be put on the mailing list for *The Volunteer*. She explained that she’d read the magazine during a visit to her father, the actor Mike Nussbaum, a longtime ALBA supporter. One thing led to the other, and in November, Ms. Nussbaum was featured in the Susman lecture, as part a year-long programming series on labor.

In early 1970, when Karen Nussbaum was a sophomore at the University of Chicago—after a first year in which she spent less time in the classroom than protesting the Vietnam war—she decided to drop out to travel to Cuba with the *Venceremos Brigade*.

Soon after, she found herself in Boston, working at an office at Harvard and organizing against the war and for women’s rights. While picketing for eight striking waitresses from a Harvard Square restaurant, she was struck by the gap separating the women’s movement from the labor movement, and decided she wanted to bridge it. In 1972, with ten friends, she began issuing a newsletter called 9to5, addressed to women office workers. The following year, they launched an organization by the same name, which would eventually become 9to5: National Association of Women Office Workers and spawn SEIU’s District 925, which successfully held union drives for women workers across the country—a story told in a recent documentary by Julia Reichert and Steve Bognar. In 1980, their work inspired the hit movie *9 to 5*, with Jane Fonda, Lily Tomlin, and Dolly Parton.

In the 1990s, Nussbaum served as director of the Women’s Bureau in the Department of Labor and the AFL-CIO’s Working Women’s Department. She went on to found Working America, the community affiliate of the AFL-CIO, where she is a senior advisor today. Born and raised in Chicago, she lives in Washington D.C. In November, she



was featured in ALBA’s annual Susman Lecture.

Did you grow up in a politicized household?

Not really. My parents were New Deal Democrats. My mother was a precinct woman for the Democratic Party in our district and my father was an observer of the world around him. But my sister, my brother and I did grow up with a clear idea of what it meant to be a good person. Reading was also highly valued, because it allowed one to see oneself as part of a larger world. In the late 1960s, as that world began exploding around us, we were able to apply those principles. At that point, my parents also became more active. We’d go every Saturday for a silent vigil in front of our public library against the Vietnam war. And when my mother invited Staughton Lynd to speak about the war at our community recreation center, we got hate mail from the Minutemen, the right-wing organization, with rifle crosshairs on it. As a teenager I didn’t

understand that this could be dangerous—and I didn’t realize till later how brave my mother had been.

You went to college in 1968. Quite the year to do that.

There was no better time to become an adult. It was like the world was blowing up and you could do anything you wanted to try to change it.

So much so that you dropped out.

Politics was just so much more interesting! I February 1970, I ended up going to Cuba on the second *Venceremos Brigade*, which had been founded by the SDS in 1969. There were some 700 of us, including several people from the Weathermen. Although the whole thing was a bit of a mess, it was also very exciting to be part of a totally internationalist environment. When I got back, I realized I wanted to use what I’d been learning in the civil rights movement, the antiwar movement and the women’s movement in the context of labor. But because in those days we rejected old structures, of whatever kind, we decided to build our own. And we quickly realized that the most important thing we could be doing was to organize people across lines of difference.

Do you mean class and race?

Exactly. We wanted to organize women, for whom there were very few job opportunities. But we weren’t interested in the traditional feminist movement. We wanted to build out our own brand of feminism among working women. At that time, many women across class and

The labor movement now is a lot of strategy and tactics, but not so much vision and discipline.

race were doing the same kinds of jobs. One third of working women were clerical workers. And because these women found themselves in the same workplaces, that created a potential for solidarity across class and race that normally is very hard to find or build. We thought we should take advantage of that.

Tell me about your tactics.

We used to say: “Don’t let your words be the enemy of your ideas.” Since the women’s movement was primarily made up of middle-class white women, we left behind their rhetoric. We never used the word feminism. The women we were organizing would tell us: “I’m no women’s libber, but I believe I should get equal pay and fair promotions and be treated with respect”—all elements of the feminist agenda. We didn’t have to call it feminism to find common ground. And I think that principle is still important: It is not a good idea to impose a framework on people before they’re ready to adopt it.

That sounds like a critique of the current generation of activists...

I wouldn’t call it a critique. But I think that good organizing means that you don’t tell people they’re wrong at the outset.

Speaking of generational dynamics, how did you relate to the Old Left, which by then had suffered two decades of McCarthyism and Cold War tensions?

There was almost no continuity with the Old Left, either organizationally or at the leadership level. Looking back, I think that was a real weakness of my generation. Personally, I did connect with some older people who I thought knew what they were doing. At one point, I got in touch with a woman who’d been a Communist in her early days. At first, she didn’t want to talk to me about it at all. When I eventually drove across Connecticut to meet with her, she told me: “You have nothing to learn from us. What we did was all wrong.” But when I asked her about

her day-to-day experience, details about daily structure came out. “We’d have mass meetings on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday,” she said, for example, “because your cell meetings were on Wednesdays.” Our conversation helped me understand what it was like to operate out of a party instead of these floppy, messy mass organizations that we were involved in, and that were often not even real mass organizations.

The Cold War broke that link of generational transmission among the Left.

It certainly did. It shows that repression works, as it did after World War I, when political repression took out a mass-based socialist movement in this country. The Cold War had that same kind of effect. It meant that we ended up with a movement in the 60s where there were different storms going on—whether it was civil rights or antiwar or feminism—but there were no good structures to hold them together. This meant that as soon as they abolished the draft, the antiwar movement collapsed. Feminism got bought off, too: When professional and managerial jobs opened up, we lost class solidarity among women. At that point, the focus of the civil rights struggle shifted from fairness to opportunity. This shift took the class element out of the struggle.

Just as the 9to5 movement has a foot in the door, Ronald Reagan is elected and the labor movement goes into a long period of austerity and retrenchment. These past couple of years, though, the tide seems to be turning back to labor. Do you agree?

Public opinion has shifted but I don’t know if the structural barriers to labor power will be overcome in this period. A few years ago, I read Vivian Gornick’s *The Romance of American Communism*, a series of interviews with Communists from the 1940s and ‘50s. Some of the people interviewed are critical, some are angry, and some thought it was a good experience, but they all agreed on one thing: what was thrilling about the

movement was that there was both vision and discipline. What we have now, I feel, is a lot of strategy and tactics, but not so much vision and discipline. You need all those things. And you need to have a class-based framework for what you’re doing. Without it, it’s too easy to divide people. We don’t call it the ruling class for nothing. They rule, and they’re going to do so in the interests of profits. You need movement and passion—but you also need organization and democratic control. Without them, you may make changes in policy, but you won’t achieve any long-lasting changes in power.

Has that been a structural challenge for the Left in this country?

Yes. Michael Kazin has a great book about that, *American Dreamers*. We may make social and cultural gains, but these don’t fundamentally alter the balance of power. How do you organize for power for the long run? That is the real question that political activists need to consider. The answer, of course, may take different forms depending on the moment. Today, a priority is a united front against fascism, just like we did a hundred years ago.

You’ve spent your entire professional life building and working in organizations, from 9to5 and the SEIU to the Clinton administration and the AFL-CIO. Organizations are instruments of change, but they are also slow and inert, weighed down by their internal cultures and entrenched ideologies. When you came up, for example, the labor movement itself was deeply sexist. How do you deal with the frustrations associated with that?

I don’t take it personally. Look, I believe in the power of organization, but as you say, they can be messed up. But if you choose to change an organization from within, if you take things personally you won’t last a minute. And that’s especially true for my generation of women coming up in the labor movement. My goal was to make change for working women, and I thought the labor move-

ment was the place to do it, as one of the three mass-based institutions along with churches and political parties.

Still, even in the labor movement, making change is hard work with no shortage of setbacks.

Of course. Because of the internal dynamics you've mentioned and because any movement or an organization is always subject to outside forces, like neoliberalism and the massive onslaught of union busting we saw in the 1980s and '90s. When the sky falls, you stick it out, and then you emerge to survey the damage. It's also important to realize that the US labor movement has the worst structure and labor code of any labor movement in the developed world. It's designed for inertia.

How do you deal with those challenges?

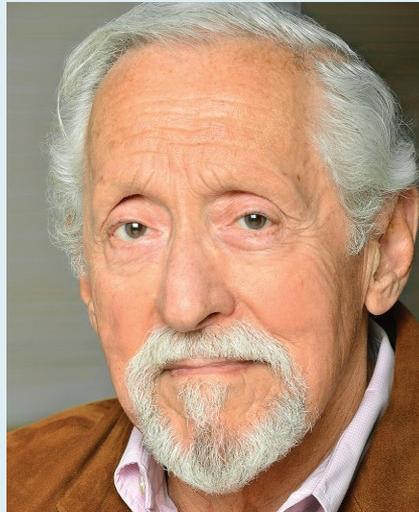
You just keep chipping away, and you keep looking for historic moments that can open things up.

In other words, be pragmatic and realistic.

Every victory generates a backlash, which hollows a movement out from the inside. Just look what Phyllis Schlafley did to women's rights in this country. You can't be naïve. You have to *anticipate* the backlash. I mean, one third of this country is solidly right wing. That's been true at least since the 1930s. When we associate the '30s with the New Deal, we forget how big and powerful the fascist movement was here. The trick is to make social and cultural change, and make it feel permanent, while making sure you're prepared for the response. And on the positive side, be prepared for opportunities to make a leap forward.

Which brings us back to the importance of organization.

Exactly. That's where the challenge is today. Over the years, I'd pose the same question to the women I'd meet: "Who do you turn to when you've got a problem on the job?" At the very beginning, in the '70s, women might say: "Well, I might call my Congressperson, or maybe I'll call the Equal Opportunity



Mike Nussbaum, who turns 100 in December, is a well-known stage, television, and movie actor and director who

Commission or 9to5." But then as time went on, people might say: "Well, I might talk to a coworker." Then it became: "Well, I might talk to my mother." The avenues became narrower and narrower—until by the 2000s, people said: "Well, I might pray to God." Collective solutions, in other words, have steadily narrowed or disappeared. And rebuilding those is a very big job. Women have become more self-sufficient individually since the 1970s and less powerful as a group.

Are you hopeful?

That's irrelevant. I'm a very positive person, and you gotta do what you gotta do. I have a five-year-old granddaughter who was practicing her letters with her mother recently. My daughter asked her child what she wanted to write. What she wrote was: *Grandma fell in a pothole*. This was true: six months earlier, I had told her that I'd been riding my bicycle, I fell in a pothole, and broke my finger. When my daughter told me the story, I thought that could be my epitaph. I'm on my bicycle, I'm pedaling along—and then *boom*, neoliberalism happens. But I get back on my bicycle and I'm pedaling along—and then *boom*, 9/11 happens, and everything shuts down. Yet I get back on my bicycle because I feel that's our obligation. In the end, we are lucky to be able to live our lives with purpose. ▲

has appeared in films ranging from *Field of Dreams* to *Fatal Attraction*. Based in his native Chicago, he is also the father of Karen Nussbaum—and a longtime subscriber to *The Volunteer*.

Do you remember when you first heard about the Spanish Civil War?

I was a freshman in high school. At the time, I thought of myself as a socialist or communist. This meant I was very much involved in the war on a mental and emotional level.

Did you go to mass meetings?

Not that I remember. It would have been hard for me to do so because my parents weren't interested in any form, and I couldn't travel on my own.

I understand that as a young man you served in World War II.

Yes. But when I joined the US army and told them my history, including the fact that I'd favored the Republic in the Spanish Civil War, they called me a premature antifascist.

Who did?

The sergeant who interviewed me. I figured that they would keep me far away from any secret work.

Did they?

No, to the contrary! I wound up working in the supreme headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Force as a sergeant sending classified messages. That's how well they watched their secrets, I guess. *(Laughs.)*

I read that it was you who cabled the news of the Germans' signing the capitulation in Paris in 1945.

I did. I signed it *Eisenhower* and then, instead of just adding my operator's initials in the lower lefthand corner, I signed my name, too.

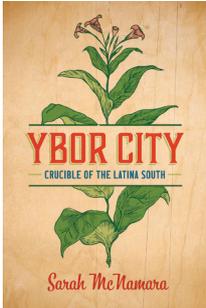
In the postwar years, do you remember meeting any veterans of the war in Spain?

No. But I've always honored them. Those men and women gave so much to be in that war. I still have a sense of awe about those people who volunteered for that war and enormous respect. ▲

Book Reviews

Sarah McNamara, *Ybor City: Crucible of the Latina South*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2023, 266 pp.

Reviewed by Cristina Pérez Jiménez



Florida is widely known as a bastion of conservative politics, and especially of Latino conservative politics. Since 1959, the Sunshine State has seen an influx of Cuban and other Latin American immigrants whose experiences have been shaped by the Cold War and anti-communist politics. But Sarah McNamara's insightful history *Ybor City: Crucible of the Latina South* takes us back to an earlier chapter of Latino political

organizing in Florida, to a community that was overwhelmingly working-class, politically left-wing, and wholeheartedly committed to the antifascist cause. Drawing from a wide array of sources, including oral histories, newspaper reporting, and institutional records, *Ybor City* examines the establishment, growth, and political development of this Latino enclave, once known as the "Cigar Capital of the World," and now incorporated as a historic neighborhood of Tampa, Florida. McNamara shows how Latino and Latina cigar workers—with their commitment to anarcho-syndicalist principles and socialist sympathies, their history of interracial organizing, and their collectivist traditions, such as that of the *lector* who read aloud leftwing literature to the workers while they rolled cigars—built a vibrant and politically progressive community in the face of what was often brutal labor repression and racial intimidation. Their story broadens our understanding of Latino politics in the state and of labor and ethno-racial community organizing in the American South more broadly, while also providing a formidable example of Latino solidarity, ever timelier in the wake of the renewed far-right politics of the Florida of today.

The Spanish Civil War represents an important episode in this local history. *Ybor City's* second chapter, "Resisting," shows how the cause of Spain and the international Popular Front movement helped coalesce the culture of labor unionism and leftist political ideologies that circulated among Latino/a workers at the time, inspiring them to fight both international and homegrown fascism. Ybor City in the 1930s saw the decline of the Cuban cigar industry in the wake of the Great Depression, as well as the rise of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and other white supremacist vigilante groups. Yet rather than feel economic despair and fear, Latino/a workers, galvanized by the Spain's antifascist crusade, resisted and organized, demanding better working conditions and state protection. Central to these efforts were women, Latina leaders like the famed labor organizer, Guatemala-born Luisa Moreno, who is a main figure in the chapter. Moreno is largely remembered for her important role as founding member of the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA), but McNamara

reframes this important later work as an outgrowth of Moreno's experiences and lessons in interracial, antifascist labor organizing in Ybor City.

Ybor City's support for a beleaguered republican Spain was swift and decisive. Community members, a large percentage of whom hailed from Cuba and Spain, felt a personal connection to the conflict and mobilized collectively. Mere weeks after the outbreak of the war, in August 1936, community leaders organized a large meeting that included representatives from organized labor, socialists, communists, and liberal political organizations, as well as protestants groups and ethnic mutual aid societies. The result was the creation of the *Comité de Defensa del Frente Popular Español*, which remained active until 1939. The popular Spanish-language local newspaper, *La Gaceta*, adopted an anti-fascist editorial line, covering local politics, union activities, instances of domestic racial violence, and other community news within the context of the fight against fascism, while also rallying support for the Spanish Republic. The *Comité*, in tandem with other sympathetic labor and ethnic associations, organized parades, marches, rallies, letter-writing campaigns, and numerous fundraising events, from picnics and sporting events to theater performances and movie screenings.

Some 24 men from Ybor City joined the International Brigades and travelled to Spain, risking their lives to fight for the Spanish Republic and the ideals it represented.

While showcasing the coalitions that were strengthened by cause of Spain, *Ybor City* does not overlook the schisms and tensions that also impacted the community. Efforts to expand the political purview of unions, for example, were not always welcomed. While the CIO aligned itself with the Popular Front, the AFL refused to join, threatened by the CIO's growing political clout and fearing that the Popular Front challenged its authority. McNamara highlights the sexist and homophobic language at times mobilized by progressive leaders and organizations. Strike breakers were deemed "*afeminados*" (effeminate), while male workers often undermined or failed to adequately support women's causes. Racial dynamics were also far from straightforward. In the context of the segregated south, Latinos' multiethnic racial composition and tradition of interracial organizing defied white supremacy and its white-black racial strictures. At the same time, McNamara highlights how racial hierarchies persisted even within the more benign racial climate of the Latino community.

These contradictions highlight the remarkably dynamic, multi-ethnic community that flourished despite the odds, shaped by antifascist and leftist principles. McNamara shows that Latino/a collective endeavors, before, during and after the years of the Spanish Civil War, were impressive in scale and scope. Latino/a workers led and supported militant labor unions, mutual aid associations, and ethnic organizations that challenged racial codes, nativism, and economic injustice while serving as unheralded crucible for intellectual, racial and ideological exchange in the American South.

Cristina Pérez Jiménez, an ALBA board member, is an associate professor of English at Manhattan College.

An Antifascist Mural

By Cristina Pérez Jiménez

Ybor City's history of Latino antifascist activism is now memorialized with a permanent historical marker and a stunning public art mural in the heart of the historic district. A collaboration between Sarah McNamara and Tampa-based Latina artist Michelle Sawyer, the landmark commemorates Ybor City's 1937 Antifascist Women's March.

In the early afternoon of May 6, 1936, *tabaqueras*, women cigar workers across Ybor City left their workstations and made their way to Ybor City's central Seventh Avenue. Dressed in black, arms linked, heels tapping in unison, some 5,000 women marched through the streets of Ybor City towards downtown Tampa. The Anglo police escorted the demonstration on motorcycles, a gesture in equal measures of protection and intimidation. The women protesters, joined by a crowd of about 2,000 supporters lining the streets, reached the steps of Tampa's City Hall by late afternoon. When Mayor Robert E. Lee Chancey appeared, a woman representative read a statement expressing support for the Spanish Republic and condemning the actions of Hitler and Mussolini:

In the name of the thousands of U.S.-born *americanas*, Spaniards, Italians, Cubans, workers, professional and business persons, who are horrified by the hideous and horrendous slaughter of non-combatants, and defenseless women and children by Hitler and Mussolini's invasive forces, we ask you as mayor of Tampa to publicly condemn this monstrous crime against humanity.

As citizens and residents of a peaceful and democratic nation, we feel morally obliged to give all possible aid to Spanish cities that defend their democratic government against fascist aggression, thus maintaining the standard of peace and democracy in the world.

This was a courageous display of multiethnic, antifascist activism amidst a climate of veritable racial terror, rampant sexism and political intimidation. Latina women put their bodies on the line, taking over the public streets as emboldened political agents committed to the cause of antifascism at home and abroad.

The public art mural commemorating this historic event was unveiled on March 30, 2023, during Women's History Month. Researched, led and created by women the mural, it highlights women's pivotal role in politics and in the workforce. It features three women. At the top is Isabel de Palencia, spokesperson for the Spanish Republic and leading member of the international Asociación de Mujeres Antifascistas. In the middle is Luisa Moreno, Guatemala-born U.S. labor organizer who resided and worked in Ybor City. At the front is McNamara's great-aunt, Margot Falcón Blanco, who participated in the march. Her profile is derived from a family photograph. Years before McNamara delved into her research on the subject, her grandmother recounted the march to her while sharing photographs of family members who had participated. All three women are profiled in the mural with a distinct yet



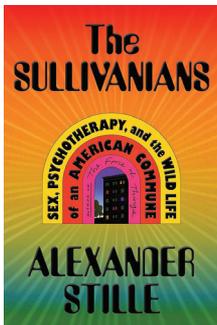
equally strong, determined and forceful gaze. Each also sports a unique red personal accessory—red earrings, a red necklace, red lipstick. These feminized adornments speak to their gendered experiences as well as their boldness, power, and socialist convictions. Including Palencia, who was not present at the march, connects these local women's demonstration to a global movement, an international network of women's antifascist activism, while the poignant, personal inclusion of Falcón Blanco recognizes the contributions of everyday women, not just those who lead movements, but also those who through their participation and support make movements happen.

The women's profiles are enhanced by the mural's many rich details. Its aesthetic and typography evoke 1930s antifascist visual culture, while the color palette conveys a cohesiveness with the area and local architecture. The women's profiles are juxtaposed to a background image depicting a multitude of female protesters, the rank and file, marching and holding signs, including one prominently displaying the message "Spain Needs Your Aid." This image is based on a photograph published in a local newspaper the day after the march. Passion flowers frame the mural, an evident allusion to Dolores Ibárruri Gómez, *La Pasionaria*, leader and representative of the international women's antifascist movement. Against the flowers, sharp white triangles, symbols of white power, protrude from the city's buildings onto the women's faces, evoking the local KKK and the looming, domestic threat of vigilante terror. The large, bold, black slogan "No Pasarán" integrates the mural's pictorial elements.

That the words "No Pasarán" continue to serve as a rallying cry against all forms of authoritarianism and oppression underlines the timeliness of the mural's message. This visually arresting mural, with its militant slogan displayed prominently in a central street in Tampa, in a state that has seen the resurgence of fascist policies, from the banning and controlling of subjects that can be taught to xenophobic immigration policies and the repression of dissent, is a powerful reminder of the urgency of solidarity and the importance of collective action. *¡La lucha continúa!*

The Sullivanians: Sex, Psychotherapy, and the Wild Life of an American Commune, by Alexander Stille. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2023. 432 pp.

Reviewed by Peter N. Carroll



In the first book written about the Abraham Lincoln battalion, Eddie Rolfe observed that the volunteers came “from every walk of life,” a phrase that has been repeated in almost every book about the Lincolns. And surely they did, though some social categories were unique or obscure.

Many medical workers volunteered but I believe William Pike was the only licensed psychoanalyst who joined the

Lincolns and showed special skills in calming soldiers terrified by the conditions of warfare. He was not, however, the only Lincoln vet who would pursue a career in psychoanalysis. His upstart “colleague” who was born Saul Cohen and renamed Saul Newton, remained barely educated in the field and was never licensed to practice. Yet he would command a cult of therapists known as Sullivanians. (Their original model was a legitimate psychoanalyst Harry Stack Sullivan.)

This amazing story, told in 400-plus pages by Alexander Stille, follows the life of Newton from his service in Spain (wounded at Fuentes de Ebro in 1937) to the launching of the Sullivan Institute for Research in Psychoanalysis which operated on the Upper West Side of Manhattan from 1957 to 1991. Its goal was to liberate a young generation from the traditional nuclear family by demanding that it radically break parental connections with their own kin and even their own children at an early age.

Newton’s biography (1906-1991) seems to follow closely the pattern of Jewish immigrants who fled Russia in the early twentieth century, attended public schools, and, in his case, wound up at the University of Chicago’s school of social work. His second of six wives was Constance Kyle, who had also been in Spain working with Spanish children in refugee camps. The outbreak of war in 1941 interrupted their studies and Ms. Kyle disappears from the story.

After the war, Newton found work with an offshoot of the Freudian movement that focused on “interpersonal psychotherapy” and stressed the social advantages of multiple relations rather than obsessing on one’s id or superego. Newton became passionate about this subject as well as the woman who would become wife number four, Jane Pearce. She had acquired her due credentials in medicine and psychoanalysis plus some inherited wealth.

Together they founded the Sullivan Institute and attracted other therapists who worked under their authority as well as student therapists and patients, developing a structure of joint living accommodations, therapeutic sessions, sexual liberation, and cultural discussion. By the 1960s and 1970s, communes had spread around the country, critical of capitalism, war, violence, marriage norms and traditional family life.

The book is loaded with case studies as eager clients pursued therapists and therapists hungered for approval from the leading man and woman: Newton and Pearce. Many of the situations appear to this reader as plain extortion. To succeed, patients and therapists alike had to grovel before the ridiculous demands of the leaders. Sometimes it meant “taxing” for extras; sometimes it was apartment allocations. Most grievous was the destruction of relationships within parent-child units. Kids were forced to leave their parents; parents were forced to abandon their kids. Women were instructed when and with whom they could be impregnated, often required to have multiple sperm donors so no one knew exactly who was whose father.

And who made all these decisions, large and small? Newton and Pearce.

Nor was their therapeutic hand light. They screamed at their patients, yelled at little children, insulted everyone. They raped their clients during therapy.

To avoid becoming victims of such behavior, residents anticipated how they could entrap someone besides themselves. Spying and snitching kept people off-balance, fearful of being expelled from the Group and losing all they had worked for.

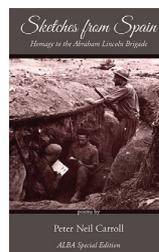
Newton became famous for his rages, but he was not alone in that leadership group. Some compared him to Hitler; the leadership’s housing, far more luxurious than the ordinary group apartments, was called the Kremlin.

Finally, Newton began losing his mind, falling asleep in his office, demanding sex from women (who continued to oblige him, though it took hours to complete intercourse as he entered his seventies and eighties). But not until 1991 did death break up his paradise.

Peter Carroll is the author of The Other Samuel Johnson: A Psychohistory of Early New England.

Peter N. Carroll, *Sketches from Spain: Homage to the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, Charlotte, NC: Main Street Rag, 2024. ALBA Special Edition. 100 pp.

Reviewed by Amanda Powell



In this powerful collection, poet and historian Peter Carroll crafts portraits of some eighty men and women who volunteered to fight in Spain. Carroll observes, “Valuable as the work of historians and archivists is, I think poetry takes the task of understanding and empathy one step further.” He preserves the voices of veterans, in shaped utterances that convey an experience of speaking with unforgettable interlocutors.

An opening poem, “Abe & Jack, Milt, Moe, Dave,” shows his relationship to them:

They were not my family. They distrusted
strangers. I could only approach them slowly ...
[...]

They lost, bad guys won—they bore failure
like primal sin or first love that comes and
goes, never leaves. [...]

Their example led me [...] to seek a role, a small role, or merely the hope of a role—to speak against injustice.

Six sections organize this testimony. “Choices,” “War,” “Saving Lives,” “Artists & Writers,” and “The Long View” are self-evident: the clear or painful decision to join; medical as well as military participation; and adjustment to life in an aftermath of far-from-defeated fascism. Perhaps unfamiliar is the sixth subheading, the notably bizarre term “Premature Anti-Fascists,” a HUAC-era accusation leveled against returning Brigade volunteers. (To Joe McCarthyites, only after the U.S. entered World War II was opposition to fascism deemed to have been patriotic; having served earlier, in Spain, smacked of Communism.)

A place name can take on the echo of a resounding, usually horrific, event, as in “the anniversary of Hiroshima.” “Spain” functions in this collection as that kind of allusive code. For James Walker Benét (1914-2012):

He went to Spain, drove trucks
into battle, returned without a scratch,
wrote for magazines, newspapers, TV.
*We weren't heroes; they are buried
in Spain, we wonder if people understand
what we did and why... We hate war
but value freedom and democracy.*

In deft triplets (3-line stanzas), another compelling account describes Chick Chakin (1904-1938), as known by a woman who loved him:

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

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 wanted to tell, but she had her pride.
He had his pride—he was going to Spain.

Concision and inevitability foretell the ending—just as she knew. This apparently flat plain-spokenness gains power in the lines, by interweaving sound-repetitions or near-rhymes across stanzas (ox / coach / squat; Spain / scared / place. The direct repetition, “he was going to Spain,” sounds a knell toward the dread foreseen, as in great tragedies:

Without him, years later, she says, we all die,
some die young. He died for a good cause.
Spain—he went to Spain. He had his pride.

Dramatic rather than lyric, scenes and vignettes are full of such ironies: risking all and perhaps losing, or not risking and forever regretting. Or, gaining possible freedom—as for Eluard Luchell McDaniels (1912-1985) a bold, frankly unreliable, memorable narrator:

A Mississippi Black youth had scant
chance in Depression times, hopped
on a freight, rode west on the blinds.

He loved to tell stories, knew not
to spoil one sticking to the facts,
seldom did he need to do that.

Again, off-rhymes (Black / scant / chance / facts / that) catch the ear and set up a subliminal signaling. These are significant words, given the *scant chance* that life would offer a Black youth unable to navigate beyond *facts* when necessary:

When fascists rebelled in Spain, he went
to war, stopped in Paris to beg the exotic
Josephine Baker for a gift. She paid.
The fascists, he said, were the same people
they'd been fighting all his life. *I hope you
get your black ass shot off*, he said she said.

He did catch a flesh wound in Spain. *I've
seen lynching and starvation*, he said, *I'd
rather die here than be slaved anymore.*

McDaniels's damning summary of life in America, and vision of changes to be won, echoes other Black veterans like Canute Frankson (1890-1941):

*[...] if we crush Fascism here
we'll save our people in America. . .
[...] There will be no color line,
no jim-crow trains, no lynching.*

That is why, my dear, I'm here in Spain.

In the same way that James Walker Benét insisted, “*We weren't heroes*,” other speakers repeatedly reject special praise. It had to be done; injustice must be fought. Volunteers in Ukraine today—serving meals, or militarily—sound the same refrain, about stepping up to aid in a war that is both a humanitarian crisis and a resistance to looming international fascism. For on-lookers aware of history, this puts the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, as Carroll's preface points out, “back in the news.”

Amanda Powell is an acclaimed translator and senior instructor in the University of Oregon's Department of Romance Languages. She is also a widely published poet.

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The Volunteer

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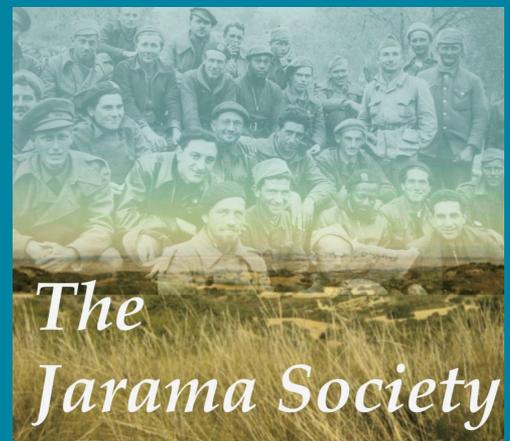
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Mural by Michelle Sawyer at 2015 E. 7th Ave, Tampa, erected in 2023 with the support of the Carlos H. Cantu Hispanic Education and Opportunity Endowment, and the Hillsborough County Historical Advisory Council.

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.