

# The Volunteer

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

18by Vote activating voters ahead of the 2022 Georgia Runoff Election. Photo Jessika Landon.

## Mobilizing the Young 18by Vote Wins ALBA/Puffin Award

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Founded by the Veterans of the  
Abraham Lincoln Brigade

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

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Dear Friends,

If we have learned one thing from political and judicial developments over the past couple of years, it's that we cannot trust that the basic rights that past generations fought so hard to conquer are, and will remain, secure. The Supreme Court's overturning of *Roe v. Wade* is a case in point—but voting rights, too, are continuously threatened in this country. These past years we've learned, the hard way, that we cannot rest. The fight for our fundamental rights, it turns out, requires constant vigilance. We need all hands on deck—especially in this election year.

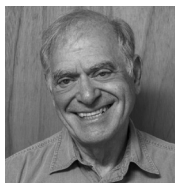
This is where the amazing work of 18by Vote comes in, the recipient of this year's ALBA/Puffin Award for Human Rights Activism. An entirely youth-led organization, 18by Vote works tirelessly to help young people understand how and when to vote. Most importantly, they help them understand *why* it is so vitally important to exercise their right to cast a ballot—and why it's worth defending that right tooth and nail. 18by Vote creates sustainable civic leadership among young people who have been historically excluded from positions of leadership and power. Founded in response to low youth voter turnout in the 2016 general election, they have since activated hundreds of thousands of young people across the country to engage civically.

Fighting for democracy is what the volunteers of the Lincoln Brigade were all about. Featuring an organization like 18by Vote today is fully in line with ALBA's mission to leverage the Lincolns' legacy to educate the U.S. public, and young people in particular, about the importance of social and political activism.

In this issue, we're proud to feature stories that, all in their own way, bring that point home—from James Fernández's moving reflection on the painter Ben Shahn, who was close to many Lincoln volunteers (p. 5), to the touching story of Bill Wallace, a Scotsman who in his 80s found out about his brave mother Chrissie, a nurse who died during the Spanish Civil War (p. 10). For more on the label "premature antifascist" that the Lincoln vets would turn into a badge of pride, see David Walsh's incisive piece on page 15. Marta Martín Núñez introduces us to young Spanish photographers who are returning to the Civil War for inspiration (p. 8). Our online edition at [albavolunteer.org](http://albavolunteer.org), meanwhile, features several additional articles, including excerpts from two new memoirs by Lincoln Brigade descendants and an interview about Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

As you well know, none of our work would be possible without your continued support. Your generous donations will allow us to continue reaching out to new audiences, both young and old, for years to come. *Mil gracias* for all you do.

¡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](mailto: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/Puffin Award Honors 18by Vote

The 2024 ALBA/Puffin Award for Human Rights Activism will be awarded this May 4 to 18by Vote, an organization that creates sustainable civic leadership among young people who have been historically excluded from positions of leadership and power. Founded in response to low youth voter turnout in the 2016 general election, 18byVote has since activated hundreds of thousands of young people across the country to engage civically.



"I am thrilled to accept the ALBA/Puffin Award for Human Rights Activism on behalf of 18by Vote," said Ava Mateo, Executive Director. "In alignment with the legacy of the International Brigades, young people are continuing to rise up in support of human rights, but they need our support to make their voices heard at the polls this Fall. This award will be transformational in our ability to activate young Americans nationwide during and beyond the 2024 election."

"18by Vote is doing absolutely critical work, helping young people understand and navigate the voting system and be active participants in democracy who demand that their voices be heard and acted upon," said Jack Mayerhofer, Chair ALBA Human Rights Committee. "This type of work is desperately needed both for presidential elections but also for the many other elections and civic opportunities that take place in between them. Given what these elections could mean for democracy both in the US and abroad, 18by Vote's work is needed now more than ever."

"The all-white and male founding fathers did not include the right to vote in the Constitution," said Neal Rosenstein, President of The Puffin Foundation. "As a result, our country has seen more than 200 years of struggle for emancipating, expanding, and protecting the electorate. With efforts to disenfranchise voters only increasing in recent years, it has fallen on youth champions like 18by Vote to help educate their peers and increase youth participation in elections. We owe them our thanks and look forward to their work ahead."

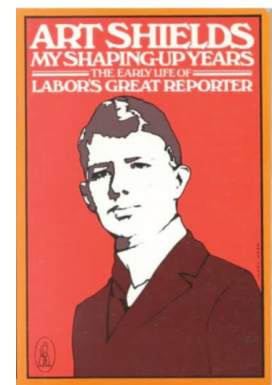
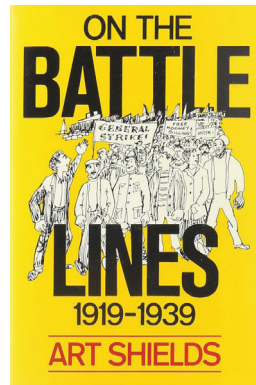
One of the largest monetary awards for human rights in the world, the ALBA/Puffin Award is a \$100,000 cash prize granted annually by ALBA and The Puffin Foundation to sustain the legacy of the

experiences, aspirations, and idealism of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. It supports contemporary international activists and human rights causes. A philanthropist and visionary, the late Perry Rosenstein of The Puffin Foundation created and established an endowed fund for this award in 2010. The award will be granted during an in-person ceremony in New York City on May 4. Those interested in attending please contact the ALBA office at [info@alba-valb.org](mailto:info@alba-valb.org).

## ALBA Features Art Shields, Labor Reporter & Activist

On January 25, ALBA's Nancy Wallach and Josie Yurek, along with Richard Bermack, hosted a widely attended 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.

Art Shields, at right, interviewing young people for an article in the *Daily Worker* in 1949. Daily Worker Archive, Tamiment Library.



The two volumes of Shields' autobiography.

## Black Antifascism in Spain and Beyond

On February 26, four scholars shared recent research on the history of Black antifascism—and the crucial experience of Black volunteers in Spain—in an online roundtable, followed by a lively Q&A with Jeanelle Hope and Bill Mullen, whose book *The Black Antifascist Tradition: Fighting Back From Anti-Lynching to Abolition* is forthcoming with Haymarket; Ariel Mae Lambe, whose book *No Barrier Can Contain It* talks about Cuban antifascism and the war in Spain; and Anna Duensing, who is working on a book on the Black antifascist tradition in the civil rights movement.

## Letters from George and Ruth Watt Performed in April

On April 14, the anniversary of the Second Spanish Republic, ALBA invites you to attend a theatrical performance of *George & Ruth: Songs and Letters of the Spanish Civil War*, written by Dan and Molly Watt and based on the letters that ALBA co-founder George Watt and his partner Ruth wrote to each other during the war in Spain. The performance, which will include live music, begins at 1:30pm in the ALBA building on 239 West 14<sup>th</sup> St. The house opens at 1pm. For tickets, visit <https://alba-valb.org/2024/02/30693/>.

## Grandchildren's Testimonies Online

The overwhelming response from the grandchildren of Lincoln veterans to ALBA's invitation to submit a video testimony has given rise to a webpage featuring 22 moving videos. See [alba-valb.org/grand-tribute-project/](https://alba-valb.org/grand-tribute-project/) for details and stay tuned for an event in the fall featuring these testimonies.

## New ALBA Spanish Civil War Film Club

Starting this spring, ALBA will launch a new series of workshops for teachers and the general public as part of the Peter N. Carroll Fund for Anti-Fascist Education: a Spanish Civil War Film club. Every month, an expert will lead a discussion about a feature film inspired by the war in Spain. For more information, see ALBA's event calendar at [alba-valb.org/eventcalendar](https://alba-valb.org/eventcalendar).

## ALBA at the Howard Zinn Book Fair

The SF Bay Area ALBA post screened *The Eyes of the World Were on Madrid* at the Howard Zinn Book Fair at San Francisco City College Mission Campus on December 3. Several people in the audience sang along with the Spanish Civil War songs based on performances at Lincoln Brigade reunions. After the film, Richard Bermack began a discussion by reciting the lyrics to "Taste of Ashes," Bruce Barthol's haunting Spanish Civil War ballad. An emotion-filled Peter Carroll described it as one of Bruce's best compositions, recalling memories of Bruce and his contributions to keeping the legacy of the Lincoln Vets alive.

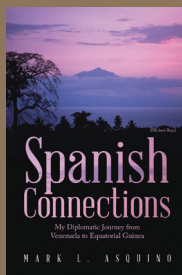
Randy Craig followed, recalling his work with Bruce and stating that Bruce will be remembered as a keeper of the flame. Randy also talked about his own work performing the SCW songs and the strength and empowerment he gets singing them. Joan Keller, who was Bruce's partner and is the daughter of vets Ruth Davidow and Freddie Keller, also praised the power of "Taste of Ashes."

Donna Southard, who teaches Spanish at UC Berkeley, shared information about the plaque honoring Robert Merriman, a graduate student at Cal who became a commander of the Lincoln Brigade and an officer of the 15th International Brigade. Merriman died in Spain. Hemingway credits him as one of the inspirations for Robert Jordan, the hero of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. The plaque was created by the DIDPatri group at the University of Barcelona and will be installed on the UCB campus.

Sidney Gurewitz, daughter of Helen Sobel, described another plaque to a relative of hers who fought in Spain. Chilean Ernesto Viscarra thanked Archie Brown and other Lincoln Brigade members of the ILWU for their stands against the US backed coup in Chile and for their opposition to the contras war against Nicaragua in the 1980s.

The ALBA group also had a book table at the event. Peter Carroll displayed a galley proof of his new book of poems, *Sketches from Spain*, comprised of profiles of Lincoln Brigade vets. The table also featured Judith Berlowitz's novel, *Far From Home*, about a German Jewish woman who goes to study science and medicine in Spain in the 1930s and becomes a nurse in the Spanish Civil War.

## Two New Memoirs of Lincoln Vet Descendants



Two accomplished Americans in their seventies whose family members fought in the Lincoln Brigade have recently written memoirs in which this legacy takes center stage. Mark L. Asquino (born in 1949) is a Foreign Service officer who retired in 2015 after a long career with postings including in Latin America, Europe, Central Asia, and Africa. Richard Rothman (born in 1952) is Special Pro Bono Counsel to Weil Law Firm, where he previously served as co-head of Complex Commercial Litigation. In 2023, Rich was honored with the New York Law Journal's prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award.

"You had an uncle who fought and died in the Spanish Civil War," Mark Asquino's mother told him when he was 14 years old, "in a hushed, conspiratorial tone as if she was sharing a state secret—something we needed to keep hidden from the Soviets." "My mother's words," he adds, "would be the beginning of my lifelong fascination with Spain." Asquino's memoir, *Spanish Connections* (2023), narrates a diplomatic journey that ended in Equatorial Guinea, Spain's only former colony in sub-Saharan Africa, where he served as U.S. ambassador. In the years before, he lived several times in Spain, both during and after the Franco dictatorship.

Rothman, in his forthcoming memoir *Finding Ruby*, identifies as the proud grandson of two Lincoln Brigade veterans, both on his mother's side of the family: Rubin Schechter, who died in Spain, and Harry Nobel, who ended up marrying Rubin's wife, Richard's grandmother. As Rothman explains, his book "is about my journey to understand, and unfolding discoveries about, the twin sides of fervent idealism": "the force that was so strong as to impel these young men to put their lives on the line in a foreign civil war waged in a country to which they had no connection," and "the blind idealism that led Harry, my grandmother and so many others who survived after Ruby's death to sacrifice their lives to the U.S. Communist Party for decades until it imploded in the late 1950s."

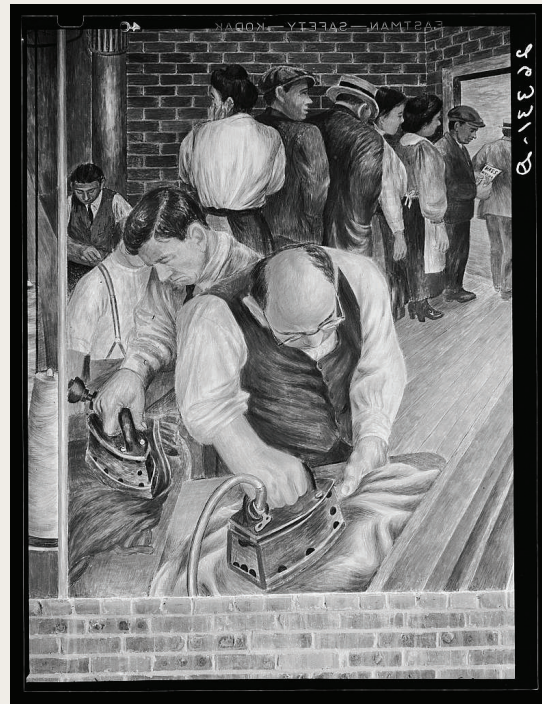
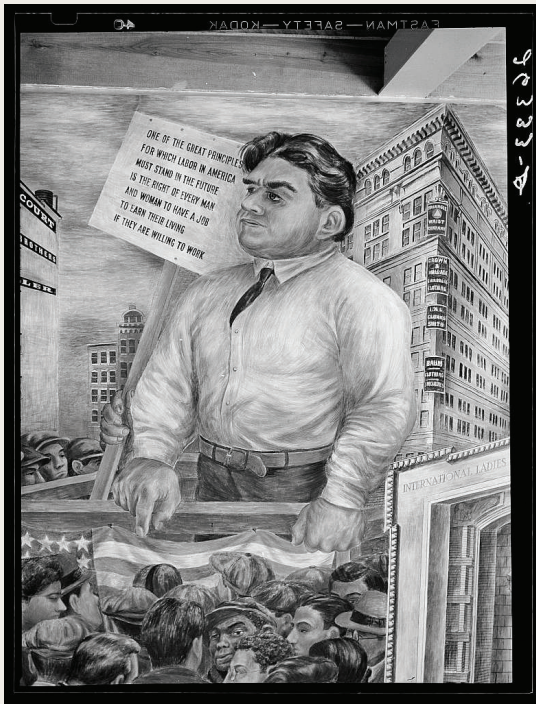
Check out *The Volunteer's* online edition at [albavolunteer.org](https://albavolunteer.org) for excerpts of both memoirs.



# Ben Shahn Returns to Spain, or the Intangible and Untimely Heritage of Anti-Fascism

By James D. Fernández

We talk about the “return” of Picasso’s *Guernica* to Spain, even though that massive painting had never been here before its “repatriation” in 1981. The magnificent show “Ben Shahn: On Non-Conformity” curated by Laura Katzman and on display until February 26 at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, elicits a similar sense: an arrival that feels like a return, a journey abroad that is a homecoming.



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

Painting here; photography over there; sculpture, someplace out of the way where we won’t bump into it; pamphlets and posters, somewhere else yet (as far away as possible from the serious stuff, please). Magazines and newspapers, in the flea market, or in the recycling bin or landfill. Books, tucked away in the stacks like so many dead in their call-numbered niches.

Sacco and Vanzetti? In the KF section, sixth level. Haywood Patterson and Jim Crow lynchings? In the E section, third level. Leo Frank and antisemitism? In the DS section, level four. *Guernica*? *Guernica*? Off-site. You’re in the wrong cemetery.

Or are you?

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Ernest Hemingway created what has become for many the iconic portrait of an American volunteer in the Spanish Civil War. Robert Jordan, a taciturn loner, the rugged WASP outdoorsman from Montana. But Ernest knew better.

In Spain, Hemingway got to know a fair number of the real 2,800 women and men who would volunteer to fight fascism in Spain some five years before Pearl Harbor, earning for themselves the Cold War epithet of “premature anti-fascists.” (As opposed to “timely” or “tardy” anti-fascists, one must presume.) Hemingway knew how the volunteers were mostly children of immigrants or immigrants themselves, raised in the teeming Depression-era ghettos of major U.S. cities. He knew that, unlike Robert Jordan, who seems to materialize out of thin air onto the austere *meseta* of war-torn Spain, these volunteers emerged, like the visible part of an iceberg, out of vibrant and vast mobilized working-class communities. Communities sensitive to injustice, seasoned in solidarity and collective action, indifferent to borders. Hemingway knew—or

should have known—that for every woman or man who walked across the Pyrenees into Spain in cardboard-soled shoes, there were tens of thousands of fighters back home, who saw Braintree, Massachusetts, Scottsboro, Alabama, Flint, Michigan, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and Belchite, Spain, as battlegrounds in a single war. Their war.

Ben Shahn is perhaps best seen as a rank-and-file member in this army of anti-fascist volunteers for freedom. A *brigadista internacional* who fought elsewhere and otherwise. This becomes clearer than ever when his work is exhibited in the same building as Picasso's *Guernica*.

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Direct references to Spain are not very common, as far as I can tell, in Shahn's work. His love of Goya comes through in some pictures and prose. In his advice to young artists, he urges them, in addition to working as potato farmers or grease monkeys, to travel "to Paris and Madrid and Rome and Ravenna and Padua." There are some images of Spain, of the Spanish Civil War, in his source files. And of course, we don't know how many times he may have stood before Picasso's *Guernica* all those years it was on deposit at the MoMA. We do know that the Museum invited Shahn to participate, alongside Stuart Davis, Juan Larrea, Jacques Lipschitz, José Luis Sert, and Alfred H. Barr, in the famously contentious symposium on the "meaning" of Picasso's painting that was held at the MoMA on November 25, 1947. It is not clear if Shahn actually attended this epic debate over whether the bull or the horse was meant to be Franco.

And yet, to the discerning eye, signs of Spain are everywhere in Shahn's career, in his archive. Like this undated note from a certain Joe Vogel:

*Dear Ben,*

*I saw Lou and he told me that you were in town but I couldn't locate you. I am sorry to hear Ezra was ill. I should like to see you next time you get here.*

*I got back on September 8th. Am feeling good except for an ulcer duodenal—Am going to see a doctor today.*

*I saw a photograph of yours at the World's Fair in-Paris Exposition.*

*My Leica got lost at the front but who cares—I was too busy to look for it.*

*Lou told me you are going to do a fresco job in Hightstown—also that you might need a plasterer etc.*

*Could you get me something—as I am absolutely broke—I may and may not get on the WPA.*

*I have lots of material to work from and if I get an opportunity I'll get down to work right away.*

*I hope to see you soon in NY. Best regards to Bernarda,*

*Joe*



*Hemingway knew these volunteers emerged, like the visible part of an iceberg, out of vibrant and vast mobilized working-class communities.*

Joseph Vogel had been Shahn's assistant on the ill-fated Rikers Island murals (1935). This Polish-born photographer-lithographer-draftsman shipped off to Spain in January of 1937 to join the International Brigades; he returned to NY aboard the SS *Paris* in September of that same year, broke, Leica-less, ulcer ridden, and in dire need of work. He most likely saw the Paris Exposition on his way to Spain in January; had he gone to the Exposition on his way home from Spain he probably would have mentioned to Shahn having seen Picasso's painting, which had been installed over the summer. Of course, in Madrid and on the Córdoba front, Vogel would have already seen quite a few of his own *Guernicas*—"lots of material to work from" is a haunting turn of

phrase. And soon enough, he would be haunted by even more horror; Vogel would be among the military photographers who documented the liberation of Auschwitz in 1945.

Before leaving for Spain, Vogel published several works in *Art Front*, the journal of the short-lived Artists Union, as did a few other artists, who would also end up in Spain in the International Brigades, such as Judson Briggs and Phil Bard. Some issues of this publication have survived in the Ben Shahn papers at the Smithsonian Archive of American Art. And although, as far as I can tell, Shahn's name does not appear in any of the issues of the journal, he was clearly involved in the project, and deeply invested in the interconnected issues it expounds and explores. Shahn's partner and collaborator, the artist Bernarda Bryson, was secretary of the Artists Union that created and sponsored the publication. On the pages of *Art Front*, even before 1936, Spain is everywhere. Until the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July of 1936, most of the artists in the *Art Front* circle were "Against War and Fascism." But after the coup led by Francisco Franco, and supported by Hitler and Mussolini, many of these artists would drop their opposition to war, at least to this particular war. Spain, they came to hope and dream, would be the tomb of fascism once and for all. Alas, it wasn't.

Tragically enough, though, Spain would be the tomb of roughly a thousand American anti-fascist volunteers, including a remarkable number of artists and writers, including several cultural workers from Ben Shahn's circle who are prominently featured in texts and images on the pages of *Art Front*.

Take for example, Paul Block, a sculptor and one of the founders of the Artists Union. His eulogy appears in the October 1937 issue of *Art Front*.

In the town of Azuara, near Belchite in the Spanish province of Aragon, a mound of fresh-turned earth covers the body of Paul Block, sculptor and American soldier of the International Brigade... Paul



*Joseph Vogel, Shahn's assistant on the ill-fated Rikers Island murals, shipped off to Spain in 1937 to join the International Brigades. Shahn was a brigadista who fought elsewhere and otherwise.*

Block was one of the ablest leaders of the New York Artists Union... It was he who conceived the idea of the Public Use of Art Program, a program which has already enabled the New York Union to bring government sponsored art to a popular audience increased by thousands, and which is the essential groundwork for the wide plan for a democratic American culture... We know that Paul fought for his fellows in Spain with the same zeal and brilliance that characterized his work for his fellows in America. We can best pay tribute to him by giving our energies to the objectives for which he worked and died. It is by virtue of the efforts of those who share the qualities so richly present in him that success will come in the struggle for democracy in Spain and for a democratic culture in America. (Oct, 1937).

This obituary is accompanied by a portrait of Block drawn by C. Yamasaki, a photograph of a piece of sculpture by Block, and a remarkable post-script, that further underscores the seamlessness of the lives of art and commitment led by this extraordinary circle of culture workers.

Word has come that four other members of the Artists Union have given their lives in the fight against fascism in Spain: Sid Graham, Malcolm Chisholm, Jim Lang, Van der Vost. Graham and Chisholm were recruited into the Artists Union by Paul Block in Spain.

While in the trenches of Spain, Paul Block was recruiting for the Artists' Union back in New York! Different battle, same war.

*Art Front* gave extensive coverage to the first strike organized by the union that Paul Block so ably led before shipping out to Spain. Though not printed in the magazine, the Smithsonian archives do contain an iconic photograph of that strike featuring, on the front line of the march, a handsome bushy-haired student of drawing and painting at the Arts Students League: Edward Deyo Jacobs. Jacobs' best friend, his fellow artist Doug Taylor, is almost certainly also somewhere in the crowded photograph, or perhaps just out of frame. Jacobs and Taylor were inseparable in the US. Some two years after the historic job action immortalized in the photo, they both enlisted in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. In Spain they would prove to be inseparable as well. The two of them served as mapmakers in the Mackenzie-Papineau battalion, and they both disappeared during the chaos of the Ebro retreats. Witnesses report that Jacobs sprained an ankle during the frenzied flight from the fascists, and that Taylor refused to leave his side. They were never

heard from again. A fellow volunteer, Len Levenson, recalled how somewhere in Spain, Jacobs and Taylor had acquired a large heavy volume of Goya etchings, which "they lugged in and out of combat, and which served them as a constant source of reflection and discussion."

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Joseph Vogel; Judson Briggs; Phil Bard; Lou Block; Edward Deyo Jacobs and Doug Taylor: all of these culture workers emerge from the same milieu as Ben Shahn. In fact, these figures practically constitute a gallery of portraits of the kind of omnivorous creative person that Shahn calls for in the almost Terentian advice he offers to young artists in the 1956-57 Eliot Norton Lectures he gave at Harvard. Published with the title *The Shape of Content*, it is as if Shahn were saying throughout these talks: "I am an artist, and as an artist, nothing human is alien to me."

Go to college and go to an art school, or to two or three of them. Travel to Paris, sure, but also travel to Alabama. Ignore national borders, because ideas and injustices and rays of light do just that. Learn as many languages as you can. Work as

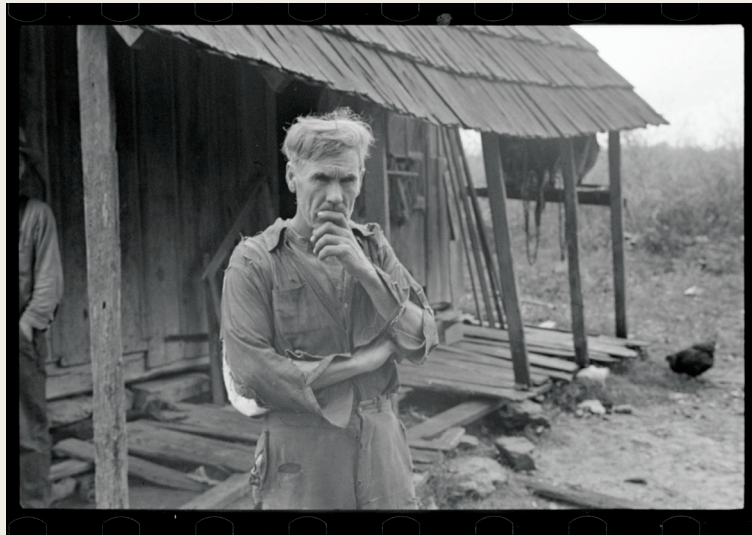
a potato farmer or as a grease monkey. Get down and dirty. Live art. Smell, feel, taste, hear and see everything you find in front of you. Put yourself in front of all manner of things. Shun sterile and sterilizing distinctions: between high and low; producer and consumer; abstract and figurative; propaganda and art; education and art; art and life itself. "Never be afraid to become embroiled in art or life or politics; [...]; and never be afraid to undertake any kind of art at all, however exalted or however common..."

Remember, Shahn seems

to say, that a paintbrush, a chisel, a trowel or a Leica are all just tools of your trade, but so too is a megaphone, a typewriter or a picket sign.

In 1937, Vogel, Briggs, Bard, Block, Jacobs and Taylor took the extraordinary –but logical– step of adding to Ben Shahn's antifascist toolbox, a rifle. And now, 85 years after the apparent end of the conflict in Spain, Shahn has reported to duty on the Madrid front in the on-going battle against fascism. ▲

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



# A RETURN TO A PLACE WE'VE NEVER BEEN

## How Contemporary Spanish Photo Books Redefine the Memory of the War

By Marta Martín Núñez

CONTEMPORARY SPANISH PHOTOGRAPHERS ARE FINDING NEW WAYS TO RETURN TO THE MEMORY OF THE CIVIL WAR, DEPARTING FROM THE SOBER DOCUMENTARY APPROACH THAT WAS DOMINANT UNTIL RECENTLY.

Julián Barón's haunting photobook *El laberinto mágico* (The Magical Labyrinth, 2019), which you can leaf through here, features superimposed color photographs of soldiers and militiamen in battle wearing historical uniforms and carrying Spanish and Republican flags. The images seem to take us to a place we have never been—and yet it feels familiar. Although Barón's photographs immediately make us think of the Civil War, their vibrant colors are surprising, even suspicious. And if we look carefully, we also discover objects from our present—a fire extinguisher, a microphone, a baseball cap—in the trenches among the militiamen. More surprising still are the spectators who seem to enjoy the show, raising their cell phones to record the scenes. In fact, what Julián Barón's camera documents are re-enactments of mythical Spanish Civil War battles, which for several years now have been held on the very locations where those battles took place. Still, the photographs act like a *trompe*



*l'oeil*: They generate time tunnels that connect past and present and force us to think about the present from the wounds that the war—now turned into a spectacle—have left in our society, while at the same time inviting us to reflect on the workings of collective memory.

Barón is one among several contemporary Spanish photographers who are seeking to recover the past to engage in conversations about the present. The same year that *El laberinto mágico* came out, 2019, saw the publication of *Flowers for Franco* by Toni Amengual, which questions the survival of El Valle

de los Caídos, where Franco was buried; *War Edition* by Roberto Aguirrezabala, which links the great wars of the 20th century—including Spain's civil war—through stagings and documents; and *Cristos y anticristos* (Christs and Antichrists) by Javier Viver, who inserts photographs and propaganda posters from the Spanish war into a 1932 edition of the Gospel according to Matthew. In 2020, David García published *El paseo*, featuring photographs of locations holding mass graves from the war, while *Hombrecino*, by Susana Cabañero, tells the story of the photographer's grandfather alongside her own story as granddaughter who wants to know what happened. These are just a few examples among many. Despite being very different, what these projects have in common is a desire to move beyond the strict documentary approaches that predominated in memory photography of the preceding twenty years.

The boom in Spanish memory photography took off in 1999—much later

*Memorias revolucionarias*, Martí Llorens (1999).



*The boom in Spanish memory photography took off in 1999—much later than in film and literature, where the wave of historically-themed stories began in the 1980s.*

than in film and literature, where the wave of historically-themed stories began in the 1980s. According to Antonio Ansón, the Spanish photographers who worked in the postwar years belong to the “generation of silence,” while those working during the years of the Transition, in the 1970s, can be identified as the “generation of oblivion.” Neither of the two addressed the Spanish Civil War, either out of fear or a need for distance. This changed around the turn of the millennium, almost coinciding with the first exhumation under the supervision of Emilio Silva, in Priaranza del Bierzo (León) in the year 2000. From that point on, Spanish photographers rediscovered the war as a central theme. As the earth was stirred, it seems, so was the photographers’ memory.

The first Spanish-Civil-War-themed photobook published in 1999, *Memoorias revolucionarias*, is a rarity today. It is a small album of photos taken by Martí Llorens during the shooting of the Spanish Civil War film *Libertarias* (Vicente Aranda, 1996) in the streets of Barcelona. Llorens, moving around the movie set, shot the film’s extras and then treated the images to make them look old. In the book, these photographs are accompanied by fictional stories about the individuals portrayed.

In a sense, Llorens’ daring project, which straddles fiction and non-fiction, was twenty years ahead of its time, foreshadowing the photographic experiments that would emerge in 2019. The predominant trend during the first twenty years of memory photography memorialist was, by contrast, a sober documentary approach, as the generation of grandchildren of the Spaniards who lived the war, mostly born in the sixties, worked to make visible what for so many years had remained hidden from public view. They used photography to reveal Franco’s crimes and to give a face and a voice, and thus recognition, to the victims.

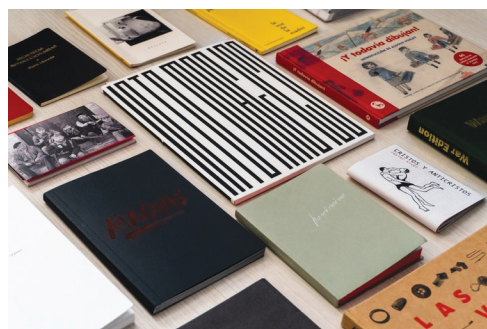
Many of these early projects, by artists such as Clemente Bernad, Francesc Torres or Montserrat Soto, focus on documenting the work of exhumation of mass graves. They use photography as a document: evidence in the face of



impunity. Others, such as Ana Teresa Ortega, seek to identify the spaces of repression or travel through the landscapes of horror. Gervasio Sánchez, Sofía Moro, and others portrayed the victims and the disappeared, sometimes through their relatives. Still others, including José María Azkarraga and



Juan Plasencia, focused on recovering the underground stories of the guerrilla, the maquis. Their projects are mainly thought of as photographic exhibitions, which we have been able to preserve thanks to the catalogs published. In a country where Franco’s crimes have not been judged and there has been no official recognition of the victims, these photographers have done crucial work to reveal—and fill—the gaps in the country’s collective memory.



Starting in 2019, however, a new generation of photographers, born in the late 1970s and early 1980s, begins to move beyond documentary forms. Rather than simply representing historical memory, they seek to reflect on its construction. And instead of trying to fill gaps, these photobooks reveal them in all their emptiness, embracing experimental processes that often resort to photomontage. They also tend to deploy a certain ambiguity, use games of dislocations and dissonances, be performative, and emphasize a subjective or autobiographical point of view that requires the active participation of the public.

While the documentalists’ work was primarily shared in exhibits and exhibit catalogs, these younger photographers prefer the format of the photobook, a medium that allows the reader to assume a more active, experiential role. It’s perhaps not a coincidence that this new approach emerged around the time of Franco’s exhumation from the Valley of the Fallen. Once again, stirring the earth stirred collective memory, albeit in a different way than it did twenty years earlier.

All the projects mentioned here, along with many others, can be found in the online Archive of Photographic Memory of the Civil War, the first website to recover, analyze, catalog, preserve and disseminate photographic practices of memory in Spain. The site includes a map and timeline of the different forms that contemporary Spanish memory photography has taken over the years, tracing relationships, legacies and breaks between the different projects, placed in the broader political and social context, including the Memory Laws of 2007 and 2022. The archive was first presented at the exhibition *Ecos de la memoria*. Fotolibros del presente, which took place at the Museu de Belles Arts de Castelló (València) between May and July 2023. ▲

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# How the Story of Scottish IB Nurse Chrissie Wallace Reached Her Long-Lost Son

By Manuel Montero

Over the many years I spent researching the presence of the International Brigades in the town of Vic and its surroundings, in northern Catalonia, I'd always been curious about the case of Simon Bulka, a medical captain, and his wife, the nurse Chrissie Wallace, both from Scotland, who were assigned to the International Hospital here. It was in Vic, in early 1938, that Chrissie Wallace contracted typhoid fever—both the city and the hospital had been struck by an epidemic—and died on May 12, at eight in the morning.

The historical record tells us that a team of international volunteers carried Chrissie Wallace's open casket from the hospital to the cemetery. The procession, in addition to all the *brigadistas* who were present in Vic at the time, included a music band and the highest civilian and military representatives of the city. The townspeople who witnessed the tribute were overcome with emotion, as one of them, who was a child at the time, later explained in his memoirs. Simon Bulka expressed his gratitude to the town through a note in the local paper.

Not long after, Simon contacted General Walter of the 35th International Division to request permission to return to Scotland, arguing that he'd lost his wife and had to take care of their young son, who they'd left behind in Glasgow. Permission arrived in September, but it seems that Simon never made it back. The only information I could find indicated that, at the outbreak of World War II, he was arrested and imprisoned by the Gestapo and eventually deported to Auschwitz, where he died at an unknown date.

For years, I'd tried to find out more about Simon and Chrissie. Until one night in 2022, during my umpteenth online search attempt, I found a link that took me to the magazine *The Koshier Koala*, a newsletter of the Australian Jewish Genealogical Society dated December 2004. The issue featured an article by Bill Wallace that told a remarkable story.

In 1952, a then fifteen-year-old Bill Wallace, living in Glasgow, volunteered to serve in the Boy Service of the British navy. The application required a copy of his birth certificate. When he asked his father for that document, he was shocked to find out that his real name was Walter Bulka, son of Shmul Bulka and Chrissie Welch Wallace, while the people he had always thought of as his parents were in fact his maternal aunt and uncle. When he asked them what had happened to his birth parents, they told him that his mother had died shortly after his birth and that his father had been a regular army doctor who had died in the Spanish Civil War.

In the late 1950s, Bill emigrated to Australia, where he spent years trying to find out more about his parents, without much



Bill Wallace.





*My first impulse after reading Bill's account was to try to contact him to share everything I knew about his mother.*



luck—until he got his hands on a book about the medical volunteers who had joined the Spanish Republic's defense. The book mentioned a Doctor Bulka who had died at the Belchite front. Not much later, he found information about a Simon Bulka who'd been arrested as a political prisoner in France shortly after the outbreak of World War II. According to this source, Bulka had been deported to a concentration camp in Algiers, served in the British army until the end of the war, married the widow of a French officer, and settled in Nice, where the couple had a son named Daniel.

In his article, Bill explained that, after managing to track Daniel down, years later, his half-brother finally allowed him to fill in the gaps in his parents' biographies. Simon Bulka, it turned out, had been born in Konin, in Central Poland, and died in Roquebillière, in the French Alps, on July 30, 1998, only a few years before his two sons reconnected.

My first impulse after reading Bill's account from 2004 was to try to contact him to share everything I knew about his mother Chrissie, the tribute she'd received, and her final resting place. Less than 24 hours after writing to the Koshers Koala, I received an excited email from Bill, who was then 85 years old and living in New South Wales. I sent him all my documentation on Simon, his work in Spain as IB doctor in various fields hospitals at some of the bloodiest fronts of the Spanish Civil War, and finally, his residence at the Vic hospital with his mother. I also included a translation of the pages in the memoir describing

Chrissie's funeral and a photograph of the plaque—which I helped erect—with the names of all the *brigadistas* who were laid to rest in a corner of the Vic city cemetery, which included his mother's name (albeit with a typo that had slipped in over the years).

Bill in turn sent me a photograph he had of his parents in Paris, shortly before leaving for Spain, a copy of which I immediately placed next to the plaque at the cemetery—now with his mother's full name, Chrissie Welch Wallace, the date of her birth in Glasgow and of her death in Vic, and an inscription: "Your son Walter has always carried you in his heart."

The local journalist who covered Chrissie's funeral in 1938 quoted an international volunteer, who said: "There will come a day when the son of this lady, who was a mother to so many wounded soldiers, will be asked where and how the woman that gave birth to him died. He will be able to reply, with a noble and justified sense of pride, that his mother died in the defense of freedom."

Eighty-four years later, I am honored to have been the person to tell that lady's son how his mother died. ▲

*Manuel Montero, a police officer from Vic, Catalonia, is the author of Looking for Kevin, a novel about the Australian brigadista Kevin Rebbechi, who died in Vic and is buried in the city cemetery.*

# WOMEN OF JEWISH PALESTINE AND SPAIN: THE CASE OF THE MEITES SISTERS

By Raanan Rein

The lives of Ruth and Haya Meites, two sisters who left Jewish Palestine in order to help Republican Spain in its struggle against fascism, illustrate the level of international women's participation in the Spanish Civil War—and its limits.

Around 700 women from around the world volunteered in Spain during the civil war. They constituted a tiny fraction of the 35,000 or more international volunteers who flocked to Spain from over 50 different countries to support the Republican forces. Some of these women came with or after their husbands and partners. Notable examples are the Jewish-Argentine Mika Feldman de Etchebéhère, the British Nan Green, the American Marion Merriman, Jewish-German photographer Gerda Taro, and Italian photographer Tina Modotti. This was also the intention of the Jewish-Palestinian Yael Gerson who followed her boyfriend, Moshe Halevi; of Simona, the partner of Misha Bronstein (Michael Baron); of Sara, wife of Yosef Weisblum; of Bilha, Aron Tenenbaum's wife, or of Hana Frank. All five left Palestine with the intention to go to Spain, but in the end stayed in France and contented themselves with political activity. Many other women, however, did make it to Spain. They were young, educated, idealistic and adventurous, and came with prior political experience.

Not a few of the women who wanted to enlist were rejected for their presumed inability to contribute to the anti-fascist struggle. Mothers were not drafted to the IB, nor were women without relevant training. This policy is illustrated in the stories of the above-mentioned Bronstein, Weisblum, Tenenbaum, and Frank. Whereas men could be drafted to the Brigades without any previous military experience, many of the women of the IB had been trained nurses and doctors, and their professional skills justified their enlistment.

While the historiography of the International Brigades is remarkably rich, the history of women volunteers has not been sufficiently researched. Even less scholarly attention has been paid to the enlistment of Jewish women from different countries, despite their relative prominence, both in the home front and in the frontlines.

With some exceptions, most women served as nurses and translators. It seems that approximately 600 nurses, many of whom were Jewish, volunteered in Spain. Women who sought to take up arms faced greater adversity in the IB. Such was the case of Cypora Gilert and Rosa Blanca, Jewish volunteers from Palestine, who had been restricted to auxiliary roles in the rear-guard, since "our ruthless enemy does not recognize women's equal rights," according to Israel Centner. Centner, also a Jewish volunteer from Palestine, was commissioned in 1937 by the Palestine Communist Party (PCP) to write the epic story of the Palestine volunteers in the IB. Like many other volunteers,



Cypora Gilert was a member of the PCP, and had been repeatedly arrested by the British authorities.

## Jewish Prominence in the IB

The ranks of the IB included a great number of Jewish volunteers. In most cases, the percentage of Jews among the volunteers from each country was significantly larger than their share in the general population of these countries. Jews amounted to 45% of volunteers from Poland, 38% of the American volunteers, and 15% of the French. The same applies to most other countries from which Jews left for Spain. Their share was particularly large among the women, although we do not have enough data on this group.

More than 160 volunteers left Palestine for Spain, most of them members of the PCP. This figure is quite considerable, especially since the entire Jewish population of Palestine did not exceed 400,000 at the time and given the Zionist parties' efforts to discourage their members from volunteering. Most of these volunteers were anti-Zionists and were often alienated by the "conquest of labor," the Zionist policy of hiring Jewish rather than non-Jewish workers. Fighting for social justice implied fighting against the nationalist aspects of Zionism as well. Previous research uncovered the names of 145 volunteers from Palestine who joined the Republican struggle in Spain: 125 Jews and 20 non-Jews; 131 men and 14 women. However, it appears that the numbers might be higher.

## The Meites: From Vilnius to Haifa

Moshe Yakov and Chana Meites had immigrated with their children from Lithuania to Palestine in 1910 and settled in Haifa. Tova, Haya and Zeev were born in Vilnius. Ruth, was



*Many of the women who wanted to enlist were rejected for their presumed inability to contribute to the anti-fascist struggle.*

born on October 23, 1910 and it is not entirely clear whether she was also born in Eastern Europe, as some documents state, and therefore came as an infant to Palestine; or whether she was born in Haifa, as she declared in one of the documents of the IB.

A couple of years after their relocation to Palestine, the family home was accidentally burnt down. Chana perished in the fire; Moshe Yakov was badly wounded. The children (except Tova, who was older) were put in an orphanage in Jerusalem. They stayed there as long as their father was in hospital (1912-1919). After he came out of hospital, Moshe Yakov remarried and the children grew up in kibbutzim from 1920 onward. Haya and Ruth were together in Ein Harod, in a Socialist Zionist environment.

### Haya's Political Engagement

Pierre Laroche described his mother's biography as "long and complicated involved in the political unrest of her times going from Vilnius, Lithuania to Palestine, [being in] prison in Palestine, [travelling] to Russia, [to] France, and the war..." Haya became a political activist in 1925 and joined the PCP. She worked in a clandestine printing press. "We have found a notebook where Haya wrote that they had secret printing works in Bethlehem in 1928," says her daughter in law, Jean Laroche. Haya's ideological commitment impressed the party leadership and she was sent to Moscow for additional doctrinal training. Because of her political activity, Haya was arrested by the British authorities in 1933.



The Spanish Civil War resonated considerably in Jewish Palestine. The Hebrew press devoted much space to the course of events in the Iberian Peninsula all through the Spring of 1939. The war generated a wide range of reactions.

Some, especially right-wing Revisionists, sympathized with the nationalist rebels seeking to rid Spain of the "communist menace." The majority, however, expressed support for the Spanish Republic, raising funds and collecting food and medicines to help the Republic. The Histadrut (Confederation of Jewish Workers) played a key role in this solidarity campaign. Still, Zionist parties of all ideological shades opposed the idea of going to fight in Spain. With the outbreak of violent clashes between the emerging Palestinian national movement and the Yishuv in 1936, young men were needed to defend Jewish settlements from Arab attacks and fighting in the Iberian Peninsula would have risked that.

The PCP, outlawed in 1921, was galvanized into action and through several front organizations mobilized considerable support. The most notable one was Antifa, The Society to Aid Victims of Fascism and Antisemitism in Palestine. The PCP

had only a few hundred affiliates, many of them were detained by British authorities, sentenced by courts to serve time in prisons, and those born outside Palestine were often deported from the country.

Several of Haya's comrades considered going to Spain to fight Fascism. Notable among them was Meir Levi, forced by the British to leave the country in 1937. He arrived in Paris where he was helped by his sister Miryam and her husband Max Amram. France had the largest Communist party outside of the Soviet Union and Paris became the organizational centre of the IB. Haya did not leave Palestine together with Meir. She left a little later, on October 27, 1937, planning on joining Meir in Spain. The information she gave to obtain her visa was that she was a professional nurse. Still, she was not able to convince the Comintern officials that she could join the medical services of the Republic, so she stayed in Paris.

During the civil war, Meir Levi was a political commissar (politruk) of a Hungarian unit. He was captured on June 5, 1938 by the nationalist army and sent to a prison in the monastery of San Pedro de Cardena, where he died of typhus on April 24, 1939. Haya's commitment to the republican cause was firm, long after its defeat. It is unclear whether Haya considered returning to Palestine at the end of the Spanish Civil War. In early May 1939, however, the British authorities decided to ban the return of five communists, including Haya, who had left for Spain.

### Ruth's Iberian Experiences

Ruth left Palestine in June 1937 on her own. In Paris, she contacted Max and Miryam Amram in order to facilitate her joining the IB and crossing into Spain. She entered Spain in November and went straight to Albacete, the Republican training base. Fortunately, she shared her story with David Diamant (Erlich), a Polish-French Jew who wrote the pioneering book on Jewish volunteers in the Spanish Civil War.

In her testimony to Diamant, Ruth emphasized her training in Palestine as a nurse. She made no mention of any political activity in which she was involved, prior to leaving Palestine. I was on the "periphery," she said with no further explanation. Once in Paris, "Max took me to Mathurin Moreau Avenue, where I got in touch with the relevant Comintern authorities. I went through two commissions, one political and one medical. I was asked various questions: do I feel morally strong enough, will I not be afraid of the bombings, etc. I was accepted as fit, but I still had to wait for months."

Ruth's journey to Spain started at the Gare de Lyon. During the trip, she met other nurses. The group also included a German volunteer, a Bulgarian, a couple of nurses, and various others.



A party official from the Mathurin Moreau Avenue Committee accompanied them to Perpignan. They stayed for two days in a hotel, and then moved to a small village. Before sunrise, they were taken to the border, given socks and trainers to start their march through the mountains. The climb took eight hours.

After a brief stay in Albacete, Ruth started her first job in a hospital in a village in Aragon. "You had to be strong, physically and morally, to survive the continuous bombing. Every time the fascist planes came, we had to evacuate all our wounded from the second and third floors, and all this in the greatest calm." She became friends with another Jewish volunteer from Palestine, Cypora Nilar/Gilert. There were seven nurses in the hospital, four of whom were Jewish. They faced shortages of medicine and equipment and were told to treat only fighters of the International Brigades.

From time to time, on the Aragon front, they were entitled to a rest. Interestingly enough, although all volunteers were motivated by internationalist ideas, many of them opted for socializing with comrades from the same national or ethnic groups. This was the case with many Jews. As Ruth recalled, at times of rest, they were looking for the company of "Jewish comrades of the Brigades. Among them, I remember Solomon Joffe, a wonderful comrade from Israel, Jankel Lukia, Siomke, a Russian comrade, Micha Bernstein, Meir Levi, political commissar of an infantry company, also from Israel. He was an admirable man; calm and modest; he fell later in the battle. We had a meal together and, for the first time in our lives, we ate rabbit... We were happy to be with healthy fighters. We spent the day very happily and they told us important battle stories. We, the nurses, related our experience. We sang. This meeting was a great feast for us, in the hard daily life of the hospital."

After three months in Aragon, Ruth was sent to a hospital for soldiers with tuberculosis in Benito. "We had seven wards and about 40 beds. The conditions were extremely difficult. We didn't even have the most essential medicines. We were terribly inadequate as many of the patients felt doomed due to lack of medication. We took out the dead in the silence of the night in order to avoid the pain of the other patients... The situation was so bad, and we were so busy that we lost the notion of time." Ruth worked in this hospital until they were evacuated. They first arrived in Valencia with the sick. Then they were sent to Vic.

## Contrasting Autobiographies

It is interesting to contrast Ruth's testimony to David Diamant with the two versions of the *Biografía de Militante* she had to complete, like other members of the IBs. These *Biografías* can be found in the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (Documents of the Soviet era). She appears in these documents as Rut Meytis, born in Haifa (Palestine) on October 23, 1910. In one version, she completed the Nationality category as "Palestinian" and in the second and more elaborated version, probably aimed at pleasing the political commissars, as "Jewish." In one, her declared profession was nurse, in the other, both farmer (*campesina*) and nurse. In the first biographical sketch, she claimed that she had been a member of the Hapoel Zionist sports organization. In the second, she answered with "no" to the question whether she had been a member of any youth, social, or sports organization. To the question whether she was known to be Communist when she lived in Palestine, she answered "no" and reported that she first joined a Communist party in May 1938 while in Spain, as suggested to her by a comrade in the Vic hospital. By now, according to her statement, she was reading texts by Lenin, Marx, and Engels, as well as Communist organs, such as *Frente Rojo*.

Ruth also made it clear that she had had no contact with Trotskyites. In the information on members of the International Brigades' Servicio Sanitario, we find the following characterization: "Professionally she does not have a degree, but she does her job well, with interest and is disciplined. Politically uninterested and not active."

Ruth Meites' training as a nurse made her a valuable recruit for the International Brigades. Women who joined the International Brigades were often young, educated, idealistic and adventurous, and hoped to create a better world. Haya was 33 years in 1937. Ruth was 27 years old. Despite their youth, many of the female volunteers were experienced political activists, who were subject to persecution and repression in their home countries before leaving for Spain. This is certainly the case of Haya.

As the life stories and trajectories of the Meites sisters demonstrate, the decision to become involved in the Spanish conflict was determined by a complex net of political and interpersonal connections, interactions, and commitments. Some of the volunteers, both male and female, came from broken or single parent families. Pinchas Chefetz, Simona Bronstein, Haya and Ruth Meites, all four grew up in the harsh conditions of the Jerusalem orphanage. At any rate, all women volunteers chose to leave their families and lives in Palestine, in a step that helped them define and consolidate their distinct identities. At the same time, our sources on their lives point to a parallel search for belonging, which they found both in the international struggle against fascism and in their private, interpersonal relationships. ▲

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# PREMATURE ANTIFASCISM AND THE POWER OF SELF-IDENTIFICATION

By David A. Walsh

“Oh, you were a premature antifascist,” the chair of the Yale Classics department replied to Bernard Knox when, during a job interview in 1946, Knox told him about his stint with the International Brigades preceding his US army service during World War II. “I was taken aback,” Knox wrote later. “If you were not premature, what sort of antifascist were you supposed to be?” Other Lincoln vets who served in the US armed forces recalled the term being invoked as a marker of suspicion.

Although “premature antifascism” has been part of the American political lexicon for nearly a century, the origins of the term have long been shrouded in mystery and controversy. When the anticommunist historians Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes, writing in *The New Criterion* in 2002, declared it a “myth,” they did not bother to consider more interesting questions: Were Spanish Civil War veterans discriminated against during World War II? How did the meaning of the phrase evolve over time? And why does it continue to resonate today? Whether the phrase originated in an Army manual or was coined by journalists sympathetic to veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade is beside the point. The important thing is that it became a powerful form of analysis and self-identification for Spanish war veterans—and antifascists in general—to understand their politics and the subsequent discrimination they faced.

There is another reason why the history of the term matters. “Fascism” is a political term stripped of meaning. As Bruce Kuklick argues in *Fascism Comes to America*, everyone is a “fascist” to their political opponents. Cold War liberals—and their neoconservative descendants—constantly invoked the specter of Munich to justify a militant foreign policy; few, if any, invoked the Spanish Civil War. Although by now it’s often used more generally to describe taking an unpopular political stand before it’s considered right to do so, “premature antifascism” has never lost its association with antifascism and the left. Far from being meaningless, “premature antifascism” is an invocation of political meaning—a marker of left-wing political identity.

To be sure, historians have not found a “smoking gun” document that conclusively proves that the Army engaged in systemic discrimination against Spanish Civil War veterans as a matter of policy. Officially, the War Department consistently

12 PM, SUNDAY, MAY 23, 1943

## 'Premature' Anti-Fascists Still in Army Doghouse

War Dept. Bans Discrimination Against Veteran Hitler-Fighters, but It Goes On Anyway

By Leo J. Margolin

PM presents facts that show someone in the Army is ignoring a definite flat denial for the War Dept. which has issued a policy of not discriminating against Americans who served with the Loyalists in the Spanish Civil War.

These same facts also show that the policy of discrimination has been extended to include labor union leaders, socialist liberals and anti-Fascists of various shades.

John W. Marley, administrative assistant to Secretary of War Stimson, has issued a flat denial for the War Dept. which has issued a policy of not discriminating against Americans who served with the Loyalists in the Spanish Civil War.

But here are the facts:

Someone has set experienced, intelligent soldiers to work in clearing brush, counting hospital bills, Spring cleaning, grass-planting, clothing in a warehouse, at female kitchen and guard duty, and just plain thumb-twiddling.

It has caused housewife students in Officers' Candidate Schools to be ranked from their classes a day or two before graduation, and honor men in gentry and signal schools to Army service (later) limitations, and immobilized men with a determination to fight in somewhat costly.

**Effective Last Fall**

Of course, it is quite true that such has not been the lot of all labor organizers and liberals. The policy seems to have taken effect last fall. Those who got into the Army and were shipped overseas before the purge have accepted themselves with cheer. Efforts of officers to find out why those students have been dropped of their rights to fight the enemy show that immediate effect was not retroactive to the policy. Some officers have traveled specially to Washington and were told little except perhaps this: “He was prematurely anti-Fascist.” (Spanish War veterans.)

“He is politically unreliable.” (Ditto.)

“Unsatisfactory by reason of civilian occupation.” (CIO labor organizers.)

The War Dept. officially denies such policies. It says, about this, on May 19, 1943:

“The War Dept. has never been told why he was transferred. Although he commencing office commencing his for the outbreak of the war.”

After three weeks at Camp Upton, L. I., Lightbody was picked as a “golden” by the 2d Service Command to compile a history of that organization. He worked unsupervised at Governors Island until the middle of December.

Then suddenly he found himself cleaning latrines, sitting barracks, and later making out report cards at the Station Hospital in the Pittsburgh barracks. He found an empty camp “unimpressive” as a labor veteran, at his new station, where he had been an active labor union, and a group of German refugees.

Lightbody has never been told why he was transferred. Although he commencing office commencing his for the outbreak of the war.”

Charles W. Lightbody

Yellow students at the man in the class “most likely to succeed.”

From a prominent family in the South, came another man to fight in the Army. He is a bright young man and executive secretary of a political group with New Deal backing.

He was doing fine in the signal school of the Air Corps, but one day without warning he was transferred to a Vermont camp and put to latrine cleaning.

Another who was a leader of the American Youth Congress was dropped from an OCS school as a “dangerous radical.”

Anthony DeMilio, who was a leader in the same work in another station hospital, was killed a lot of.

North came into the Army with two strikes on him. He had also been an organizer in New York for the CIO United Electrical Workers.

Although in the upper 10 per cent of his class in OCS, where he was making high grades, and asked him: “You’re Spanish, aren’t you?”

Ward, born in Flatbush, and reared in Bayside, Brooklyn, and a hot dogger fan, was puzzled.

To a friend he wrote:

“I have heard a great many derogatory remarks about Brownshirts and Flatheads, but I never heard that they are not in the U. S. A. As far as being Spanish: if two lots of olive-brown-skinned men with Spanish blood . . . then I’m Spanish.

“The ideals for which I fought in Spain were not peculiarly Spanish. They were best American. They are the best American for which I would like to fight now.”

**Captain’s Reply**

Being watched in the school didn’t reassure Ward, who asked his commanding officer about his chances of finishing the course.

“This is a democracy,” replied the captain. “A democratic army! Do you think we would send you here and then pull such a new stunt. This is America and after all you fought on the right side as far as I can tell. You will get a fair deal.”

Ward still remembered those words when he picked up at Fort Monmouth and left the day in dramatic received their commissions.

What happened to Ward happened to other colleagues who he fought with him in Spain. They included:

Gerard Cook, who was decorated for bravery in Spain and who is now counting down in a station hospital.

Erving Paine, a lieutenant in Spain, doing the same work in another station hospital.

John Gibbs, a lieutenant in Spain, who is now playing gram in Indiana.

Mike Warren, a lieutenant in Spain, now doing KP duty in Indiana.

(Continued on page 13, second column.)

denied that such practices existed. Still, given the general conservatism of the Army officer corps, its overall anticommunist orientation, and the sheer volume of reports of discrimination in postings and promotions by Spanish war veterans, that unofficial systemic discrimination was almost certainly happening. More importantly, Spanish Civil War veterans *understood* themselves to be victims of systemic discrimination in the US Army.

As Peter N. Carroll noted in the pages of *The Volunteer* back in 2003 and later in his book *From Guernica to Human Rights* (2015), the first time the term “premature antifascist” appeared in print was probably May 1943, when the New York tabloid newspaper *PM* used it to describe the discrimination Spanish war veterans faced. At the beginning of the year, Jack Bjoze, the executive secretary of VALB, had written a letter to President Roosevelt protesting the Army’s discrimination against Spanish Civil War veterans, particularly considering their “military experience in actual combat.” Since both the White House and the Pentagon failed to respond, in the spring Bjoze embarked on a lobbying tour of Washington, D.C. In April, Drew Pearson, the influential author of the syndicated column “Washington Merry-Go-Round,” published two stories about discrimination against Spanish Civil War veterans by the Army. The War Department issued denials, but stories of ill-treatment persisted. On May 23, 1943, *PM* dedicated a full page to the story under the headline “‘Premature’ Anti-Fascists Still in Army Doghouse,” specifically citing the washing out of qualified Spanish war veterans from Officer Candidate School. According to Leo J. Margolin, the author of the story, a group of concerned OCS commanders traveled to Washington in the fall of 1942 to determine why these candidates, who were well-regarded by both their commanding officers and their colleagues, were being denied commissions. “[They] were told little except perhaps this: ‘He was prematurely anti-Fascist.’ (Spanish War veteran).”

By the summer of 1943 the term had become the subject of political humor. Red Kann, a progressive voice in the Hollywood trade newspaper *The Motion Picture Herald*, included in his July 25 column an anecdote about an “actor, interested in liberal causes on his own time,” who was denied permission to shoot a picture on a military base. The alleged reason was that the actor had been labeled a “Premature anti-Fascist” on an Army dossier. Since Kann did not give any other information, the story is probably apocryphal. But it was the first allegation, in print, that the Army used the term “premature antifascist” in its official documents—an important, though possibly incorrect, part of the narrative. Ironically, at no point does Kann claim that the actor was a Communist, socialist, or Spanish Civil War veteran. He was simply “interested in liberal causes.” Three months after the first public use of the phrase, in other words, “premature antifascism” had already expanded its meaning to include broader discrimination against liberals and leftists.

In those first years, premature antifascism was used as a form of identification, as satire, and—importantly—critique. Liberal syndicated columnist Samuel Grafton wrote in March 1944 that “everyone has heard the many FBI investigator jokes, about the intense fear on the part of several of our government bureaus lest they make a slip and hire someone who was too hot an anti-fascist, too soon, a ‘premature anti-fascist.’” Grafton’s column was not about the U.S. government’s discrimination about Spanish war veterans, Communists, socialists, or liberals—it was a scathing critique of U.S. policy towards France. The column was typical in its use of “premature antifascism” towards the end of the war. The phrase *could* refer specifically to veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, but it was also used by liberals, trade unionists, and Communists to refer to antifascism in general as a political orientation in the 1930s. In March 1946, Washington state Democratic congressman Hugh DeLacy gave a speech in New York City in which he related the story of a professor, a veteran of the Spanish Civil War, who “can’t get a job simply because Martin Dies [the chairman of the House Un-American Activities Committee] said that if you were against Hitler and Mussolini before December 7, 1941, you were a premature anti-Fascist.” The broader political sentiment mattered more than service in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade.

The Communist Party USA—an organization that zealously guarded its terminology—used “premature antifascist” broadly in its own literature, to the point that in December 1945 a Party member complained in a letter to *The Daily Worker* of its overuse. Morris U. Schappes, a Party member and the editor of the magazine *Jewish Currents*, was convicted of perjury for refusing to name names of Communist faculty in the City College of New York in 1941; in 1944 the *Daily Worker* called Schappes a “valiant but ‘premature’ anti-fascist.”

Other Communist uses of the term invoked a broader struggle against racism and anti-Semitism. In July 1945, the CP-dominated New York City Teachers Union demanded an investigation into discrimination by the Board of Examiners, which controlled teachers’ licensing in New York, against teachers who had a record of “improving inter-cultural relations by combating anti-Semitism or anti-Negro prejudice, or to what

might be cynically termed ‘premature anti-fascism.’” The union did not link the term to combat service in Spain, but directly tied it to anti-racist organizing in the United States. The union had a long history of this kind of work. The Teachers Union newsletter repeatedly condemned Jim Crow in the South and racial segregation in the North, rhetorically tying anti-Black white New Yorkers to Nazism and fascism. In fact, under the aegis of supporting the war effort, the union supported teachers who actively incorporated anti-racism and anti-fascism into their pedagogy. These commitments only intensified after the war. A report issued by the union in 1950 documented the widespread use of racist textbooks in New York City schools, often written by senior members of the Board of Education and the Board of Examiners. Critics of the Teachers Union have long lambasted the organization as simply a Communist front, but the union’s commitment to anti-racism as a political plank was not simply a cynical party dictate. For the Teachers Union, premature antifascism was indelibly linked to the broader struggle against racism in America.

By the end of the war, “premature antifascism” had two distinct meanings on the left. One was relatively narrow, based on the idea that the term was systemically deployed in the federal government and the Army to deny employment and/or commissions to radicals—particularly Communists and, in the case of the Army, Spanish Civil War veterans. The novelist Howard Fast used this narrower sense of the term in a telegram to President Harry Truman at the end of 1945 protesting the sacking of alleged Communist Robert Carse from the New York Port of Embarkation under pressure from Army intelligence. But the term was also used to denounce anti-radical discrimination more broadly. When, in 1948, Clifford Odets explained why he left New York City for Hollywood, he said: “I was looking for a period of ‘creative repose’: money, rest and simple clarity. A charge of ‘premature anti-fascism’ made it utterly impossible for me to serve the war effort.” Odets was not a Spanish Civil War veteran and, although he had briefly been a Communist Party member had not been formally active in the Party for over a decade.

By the mid-1950s “premature antifascism” had ceased to be a dynamic political phrase. It remained crucial to how the veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and members of the Communist Party USA understood themselves and their history, but it largely dropped out of the political lexicon of the day. But while the phrase seldom appeared in print in the 1950s except as a legitimization of the Communist Party’s antifascism, by the 1960s it reemerged as a metaphor for taking principled, unpopular political stands, only to be vindicated by history later. This was not limited to the left; in fact, some of its earliest users were conservatives. Vermont Royster, the editor of the *Wall Street Journal*, compared the experience being called a “premature anti-fascist” in the 1930s to the position of being a skeptic of American interventionism in Vietnam in a 1965 column—“if perchance you have never been enchanted by the limitless power of your country to support the world with dollars, or police it with soldiers, expect no accolades for prescience.”

Still, “premature antifascism” largely remained a marker of the left, associated through the 1980s with the Spanish Civil War



and Lincoln veterans, while the 1990s saw the term become common enough to merit the investigation and debunking *as an official term* by Haynes and Klehr. The 1990s revival appears to stem from three distinct but intertwined factors: the gradual disappearance of Spanish Civil War veterans and radical activists from the 1930s; the “Greatest Generation” nostalgia industry that developed celebrating aging American veterans of World War II and its sanctification as “the Good War”; and finally attempts by the American left to contest the historical memory of the Communist Party USA around the end of the Cold War.

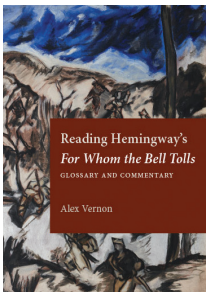
The phrase itself has continued to have political resonance in the twenty-first century. Contemporary use of “premature antifascism” generally mirrors that of Vermont Royster’s—invoking a principled, unpopular stand that eventually becomes vindicated and part of political common wisdom. John MacArthur, a supporter of Ralph Nader in 2000, invoked the term in a February 2004 column to vindicate Nader’s opposition to NAFTA and the Iraq War, noting that in the ongoing Democratic primary Howard Dean “presents himself as [an] anti-war, anti-corporate tribune.” MacArthur’s invocation as a form of praise and prescience became commonplace among leftists over the subsequent two decades. An alternative Jewish weekly invoked premature antifascism to justify its opposition to Israeli policy in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in June 2005. The phrase became a way to invoke an iconoclastic, rebellious, and

left-wing history, and remained a defiant refrain even in the obituaries of Spanish war veterans. A column by John Nichols in the *Wisconsin State Journal* commemorating the death of Lincoln vet Clarence Kailin at the age of 95 in October 2009 marked his life as “Premature Antifascist—And Proudly So,” and noted that his final birthday party—fittingly at Kailin’s synagogue—included “political speeches calling for an end to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, for single-payer health care and for a reordering of the U.S. economy that would tip the balance away from Wall Street and toward Main Street.”

Kailin himself held a remarkably prescient understanding of American politics until the very end of his life. “Quick-witted and passionate to the last, Kailin laughed... at the notion that a centrist Democrat from Chicago named Barack Obama was somehow turning the United States hard to the left” and that such a transformation would have to come through grassroots organizing. Even at the end of their lives, premature antifascists continued to be unafraid of staking out unpopular political positions that ultimately proved not only correct, but within a decade became common wisdom. ▲

*David Austin Walsh is a postdoctoral associate at the Yale Program for the Study of Antisemitism. His book Taking America Back: The Conservative Movement and the Far Right, will be out in 2024.*

## New Glossary and Commentary to Hemingway’s *For Whom the Bell Tolls*



Featured in our online edition is an interview with Alex Vernon, author of a new *Glossary and Commentary* on *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Ernest Hemingway’s sprawling Spanish Civil War novel first published in October 1940. Vernon’s book, published by Kent State University Press, features an extensive introduction and sentence-by-sentence annotations. Here is an excerpt of the interview:

### Have you had a chance to teach the novel?

I decided years ago to include it in a senior seminar on Hemingway that I have since taught regularly. This forced me to study the Spanish Civil War. Over the years, I have felt increasingly drawn into what, as I always remind my students, is essentially a very strange book. Since it’s so securely ensconced in the canon, it’s easy to forget how strange it really is, but in my teaching and through this new *Glossary and Commentary*, I want to inhabit that strangeness and invite others to do the same.

### What’s so strange about it?

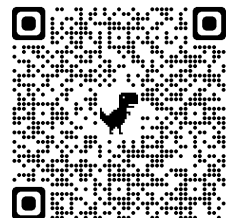
The book has often been read in what we could call the John McCain way, assuming Robert Jordan is a relatively straightforward romantic hero. To be sure, he fights for the Communists, but that’s okay because he fights for what he believes in, plus

he meets this amazing girl, María. To my mind, that straightforward reading doesn’t do justice to the book’s contradictions and complexities. For starters, for all Hemingway’s famous minimalism, this is an extremely maximalist novel. Yet if his minimalist style tends to obscure his characters, the same is true for this maximalist text, which also obscures how complicated Robert Jordan really is. The plot—the bombing of the bridge—tempts us to read fast, but once we slow down and pay attention to each sentence, each allusion, we run into some very weird things. Jordan’s relationship to María, for example, is bizarre. Queer studies scholars have had much to say about that.

***How much of this weirdness was Hemingway’s? I’m not only thinking of the gender dimension and Hemingway’s overperformed machismo, but also about his politics, which was more complicated than people tend to think, but doesn’t neatly map onto the Spanish political landscape, be it anarchists vs. communists, or Republicans vs. Francoists.***

I think both dimensions apply. Although Hemingway’s queerness comes out more clearly in his later work, such as *The Garden of Eden*, it’s all over this book as well. I mean, if Hemingway had the vocabulary that we have now for the spectrum of expressions of gender and sexuality, how would Pilar identify? We can say something similar of Robert Jordan’s politics.

Scan the QR code to access the online interview.



# From the Lincoln Brigade to Mauthausen: How an Anarchist Saved 300 Spaniards

By Guillem Llin Llopis

Despite their name, the famous International Brigades of Spain's Republican Army included thousands of Spanish soldiers who served alongside the foreign volunteers. Among them was César Orquín, an anarchist from Valencia who served as a commissar in the Lincoln Battalion. Details of his extraordinary life, long shrouded in mystery and scandal, have recently come to light in Albert Montón's documentary *El Kapo* (2023), based on research by Guillem Llin.

César Orquín Serra was born in 1914, the illegitimate son of an important Valencian aristocrat who gave him up for adoption to a middle-class couple. In 1935, César broke relations with his real father, who sent him to Africa to do his military service in the Spanish Protectorate in Morocco. While César was there, Franco staged the coup d'état that unleashed the Civil War. Although the rebellion succeeded in the area where Orquín was stationed, he managed to escape, arriving in the Spanish mainland by crossing the Strait of Gibraltar in a barge. He stopped in Valencia to see his adoptive parents and then volunteered to defend the Republic. Although his initial whereabouts are unknown, in 1937 he appeared as a political commissar in the International Brigades, in the Abraham Lincoln Battalion—nothing short of remarkable, given that Orquín was an avowed anarchist.

Toward the end of the war, when the rebel troops finally conquered Catalonia, Orquín followed thousands of Republicans into exile, crossing the French border at Le Perthus on February 7, 1939. In France, he was first interned in the Saint-Cyprien concentration camp and then, in the months following, passed through the camps of Argelès, Agde, and Le Barcarès. In late December 1939, he joined one of the Companies of Foreign Workers (*Compagnies de travailleurs étrangers*, or CTE) that the French government assigned to reinforce the Maginot Line.

After the Nazis invaded and occupied France in May-June 1940, most of the Spanish exiles enrolled in the CTE were taken prisoner. César Orquín found himself interned in Stalag V-D, in Strasbourg. In late 1940, he was deported to the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria, where he arrived by freight train on December 13. Since he spoke Catalan, French, German, English, and Spanish, he was employed as an interpreter. Using his powers of persuasion, he managed some-



thing highly improbable: he convinced the Mauthausen commanders to allow him to leave the camp with a *Kommando* of Spanish inmates to work on the construction projects that the outbreak of the war had left unfinished. At that time, in May 1941, the Mauthausen-Gusen complex had no subcamp. The *Kommando* of Vöcklabruck was the first of 50 or so that the central camp would come to have.

On June 6, 1941, the first convoy left with Orquín as commander or *Kapo*. It would be followed by other convoys up to a total of 336 deportees, all of them Spanish Republicans. They stayed in the Austrian town of Vöcklabruck until May 1942, when they received orders to move to Ternberg to build a power station at the Enns River. In the period that they were in Vöcklabruck not a single deportee died, which contrasts starkly with what was happening in Mauthausen and Gusen, where more than 3,000 Spanish Republicans perished. As *Kapo*, César managed to gain absolute power, to the point where he locked the barracks where the deportees slept so that the Nazis could not disturb his men, allowing them to rest.

While working at Ternberg, Orquín's team built a dam on the river despite non-existent safety measures. Twelve or thirteen of the 408 deportees died, most of them from work-related accidents. How remarkably low this 3% fatality rate was we compared to a larger *Kommando* that worked 19 kilometers further upstream, also building a dam, with 227 deaths on a total of 1,013 workers.

Still, it was in Ternberg where Orquín's relationship with the Communist Party, which had always been tense because of his commitment to Anarchism, gave rise to the distorted version of events that would haunt him ever since. The communists, who led the clandestine resistance movement among the Mauthausen inmates, sought to control Orquín's *Kommando*. He



not only refused but ignored them. The tension increased further when Orquín was ordered to return to the central camp because the needs of the war had changed. His Kommando sat in Mauthausen from September 18 to December 2, 1944, doing nothing, until Orquín was ordered to take about 300 Spanish Republicans to Redl-Zipf, to drill tunnels that could be used to produce ammunition for the German army. Orquín's Kommando became known as the Kommando César.

The event that would tarnish Orquín's postwar reputation most severely happened in March 1945, when the Nazis ordered 221 prisoners—including 96 men from the Kommando César—to be sent to the Gusen camp, where the death rate was astronomical. Later, the Communist Party claimed that Orquín had sent close to 100 of its members to their death. The truth was that all 96 deportees survived and were released when American troops liberated the camp on May 5, 1945. In the end, two out of every three Spanish Republican deportees would perish in Mauthausen. Of the Kommando César, only 3% did. Rather than sending them to their deaths, in other words, Orquín saved the men who worked for him.



After the war, harsh punishments were meted out to camp inmates who'd been employed as Kapos by the Nazis. Orquín's days, too, seemed numbered—until, in a masterstroke, he showed up at the school building in Vöcklabruck that the municipality had left to the members of Kommando César in gratitude for the work done years before. When Orquín asked the deportees to give an account of his time in charge, their testimonies reflected their collective admiration and gratitude. The following year, Orquín and other former deportees founded the Organization of Spanish Republicans in Austria (OREA).

Not long after, in the face of continuing pressure, Orquín—by now married and with a young daughter—decided to emigrate to Argentina, where he lived until his death in 1988. In 1963, the Catalan novelist Joaquim Amat-Piniella, who had served in the Kommando César during the war, would include Orquín in his acclaimed autobiographical novel *K.L. Reich* as a character named August. ▲

*Guillem Llin Llopis (1958) is a self-taught historian whose research has informed El Kapo, a documentary about César Orquín coproduced by the University of Valencia (Spain) and the National University of Cuyo (Argentina).*



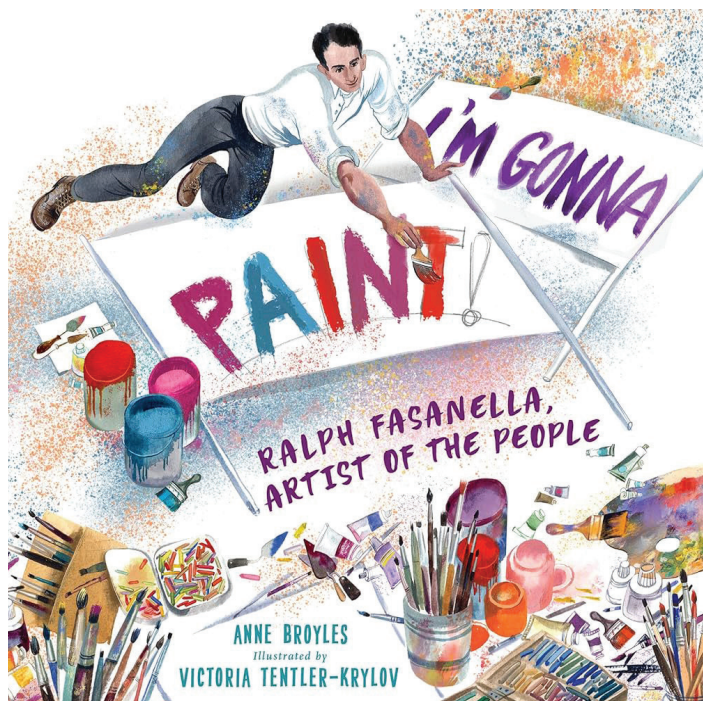
Former deportees in Vöcklabruck, ca. 12 May, 1945. Orquín at the top right.



# Book Reviews

Anne Broyles, *I'm Gonna Paint! Ralph Fasanella, Artist of the People*. Illustrated by Victoria Tentler-Krylov. New York: Holiday House, 2023. 48pp.

Reviewed by Nancy Wallach



This new children's picture book about the life and art of Lincoln Veteran Ralph Fasanella is a timely new work. Given how accessible Fasanella's work is to viewers of all ages, and how popular his paintings were with NYC public school art educators, where they were widely used in Programs such as Learning to Read through the Arts, it is only natural that his work should now be offered to the wider public.

It is encouraging to see the biographies from which young readers can draw inspiration expanded to include someone who connected his own life and art to the struggles for immigrant rights, social justice, labor rights and anti-fascism.

*I'm Gonna Paint* begins with Ralph's tenement life in New York City during the 1920s. It introduces us to a world of shared hallway toilets where the only apartment light came from coin operated gas globes, and one where children engaged in the dangerous past time of jumping across tenement rooftops for recreation. Because picture books use few words, Victoria Krylov's illustrations play an important role. Her paintings fill out the details and texture of Fasanella's life. In a lower-East-Side street scene, Krylov shows the crowded pushcarts and wares and the signs in a cacophony of immigrant languages. Fasanella's father worked as an iceman, a difficult job that is now obsolete, which also happens to be the subject of one of Fasanella's most widely

known paintings. Krylov's illustrations show the hard work and succession of steps involved in the job.

Indeed, one of the virtues of the book is that it allows children, who may live in just as humble circumstances as Fasanella did then, to see that they, too, can express themselves through art. On a page about Ralph's beginnings as an artist, Krylov's drawings demystify his artistic process, showing him priming and stretching the canvas, mixing his palette, and executing the steps that lead him to present his finished work to a prospective dealer.

Another outstanding page shows Ralph heading up the steps of what looks like the Metropolitan Museum of Art holding a large artist's portfolio. In a perfect match of text to illustration, Broyles writes, "As an adult, he taught himself to paint. He visited museums to study works by famous artists." This page honors Fasanella's own vision of himself as an artist learning from the works of others. It also explains why he disliked the term "primitive," with which his work was often labeled.

The book contains more than the narrative of Fasanella's life. Each dynamic page in this book places Fasanella, the artist, in the midst of the turbulent events he is recording through his paintings. The story is peppered throughout with inspirational quotes from Fasanella. "I never did a painting for myself," he said. "I was always trying to uplift other people, to show them who they are and where they came from...my job is not only to record American history, but to record the feelings of American workers as honestly as possible."

Worth noting are the supportive materials that the author and press have included in this volume. The quote above appears in a section of the book called "More About Ralph." The book also includes two-page spreads of his most iconic murals such as "The Bread and Roses Strike" and "Dress Shop: In Memory of the Triangle Shirtwaist Workers," along with reproductions of other works.

A "Timeline of Ralph Fasanella's Life" includes the entry "1937—Ralph Joins the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and travels to Europe to fight fascism in the Spanish Civil War." A section "For Further Reading" sends children, their parents, and teachers to explore the work of other "socially conscious twentieth century artists whose work focused on the lives of working people." Alongside the painters Ben Shahn or Jacob Lawrence, it includes artists who worked in other media like photography and film, such as Dorothea Lange and Gordon Parks.

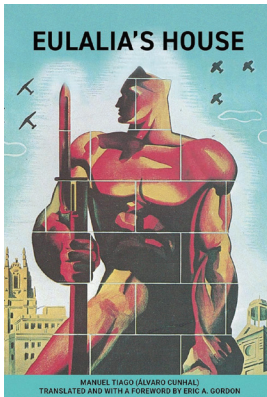
*I'm Gonna Paint* introduces children to an artist with a unique vision and approach to his work. Fasanella expanded the subject matter of visual art to include scenes such as workers in their factories and union halls, immigrant neighborhoods, and people demonstrating for a better life. This book deserves to become a widely used resource in school libraries and classrooms. ▲

*ALBA Board Member Nancy Wallach, a retired art educator, is the daughter of VALB Hy Wallach. She has been awarded many honors in the field including NYCATA/UFT Art Educator of the Year and the NYC Schools and Culture Award.*



Manuel Tiego, *Eulalia's House*. Translated by Eric A. Gordon. New York: International Publishing Company, 2022. 160pp.

Reviewed by Lydia Syson



It's a well-known fact that Hitler's and Mussolini's illegal support to Nationalist rebel forces during the Spanish Civil War was essential to Franco's victory. Yet the more discreet assistance provided by Antonio de Oliveira Salazar, Portugal's reclusive right-wing dictator from 1922 until 1968, is often overlooked. Even less attention has been paid to Portuguese citizens working in Spain to defend the legitimate Republican government.

*Eulalia's House*, a neorealist novel set

among Portuguese anti-fascist activists in Madrid, is an important correction to this oversight. A lightly fictionalized account of the early months of the war, it offers a fascinating insight into the particular dilemmas of this unique group of comrades, illuminating their insider/outsider status with authenticity.

The novel's author Álvaro Cunhal led the Portuguese Communist Party for nearly half a century. He spent most of his adulthood either underground, in exile or incarcerated, using his years in solitary confinement to reflect on his life in struggle through fiction, yet concealing his writing identity well into old age through the pseudonym "Manuel Tiego." Publication was impossible in Portugal until after the 1974 Carnation Revolution which ended the brutally repressive *Estado Novo* regime inaugurated by Salazar. Two years later, Irwin Stern, in an article about suppressed and censored twentieth-century Portuguese fiction, praised the originality of Tiago's themes in the now seminal *Until Tomorrow, Comrades*, but not his literary style, and identified Cunhal as the model for its protagonist but not as the novel's author. That book, published in English for the first time earlier this year, completes Eric Gordon's commendable project to translate every one of Cunhal's eight works of fiction.

Of these, *Eulalia's House* is the only novel set entirely in Spain. It opens immediately before the right-wing coup of July 1936, when the capital is "a boiling volcano." Three young Portuguese political emigrés consider their options in the event of war. António is a part-time car mechanic, but his more important work is for the Party and International Red Aid (*Socorro Rojo Internacional*), conveying comrades clandestinely back and forth across the Spanish-Portuguese border, soon to close. One such comrade is Manuel, a youth movement leader who has recently escaped capture in Lisbon. He is committed to action, no matter what. António has brought him to the eponymous safe house in Madrid run by a beautiful *miliciana* called Eulalia, where her generous, warm-hearted mother, known to all as *Madrecita*, cooks, cleans and takes care of the exiles. António and Manuel's companion Renato, in hiding since taking part in a major strike in Portugal in 1934, has come to Spain with his wife "to stay out of trouble."

The novel's spare, economical narrative moves constantly between the general and the particular, placing these three characters firmly in the context of historical events as they unfold. It alternates between accounts of specific moments of spontaneous and well-organised resistance to the coup—relishing the power of the camaraderie which made such resistance possible—and António's tormenting internal dilemmas about his personal role in this crisis. Should liberation and revolution in his native Portugal be his first priority? Must he simply obey Party orders, no matter what, and content himself with work behind the scenes? Or should he, like Manuel and Renato in their different ways, prove his courage to himself and to the world by committing fully to the Spanish cause and heading for the front line?

Other characters, less clearly delineated, tend to represent political positions or types. António's various motor vehicles are perhaps better characterized than most of the novel's female figures, who rarely escape stereotyping. Eulalia's first introduction as "a mixture of maternal tenderness and the coquette," an iteration of the reductive Madonna/whore dichotomy, says more about the man describing her than the woman described. Eulalia herself, whose only imperfection is apparently an attractively twisted front tooth, is seen only fleetingly. Off-stage, she eventually becomes a political commissar in the People's Army, leaving *Madrecita* sadly longing for news.

Cunhal conveys the charged atmosphere in the capital and beyond with gripping and convincing detail. Yet there is often a sense of action taking place at some remove. Events and ideas tend to be recounted through conversations. A slight syntactical awkwardness and the dependence on the passive voice may reflect the language in which the characters speak, "a mishmash of half Spanish, half Portuguese" which "everyone" could understand. "Everyone" is almost a character in its own right.

These distancing devices underscore a major theme of the novel: the tensions experienced by the Portuguese who sympathized with the Spanish Republic. According to Cunhal, they could blend in with ease (certainly compared with most American *Brigadistas*), but couldn't necessarily enjoy full assimilation. Most Spaniards welcomed them as equals, companions in a collective, international endeavour; others treated them as outsiders with ulterior motives, as objects of suspicion. The Portuguese, who had no national battalion, could serve and mix as easily in the Republican Army as in the International Brigades. In either case, their names were frequently recorded with Spanish spellings. Individual and national identities vanished easily, like stretcher-bearers under battlefield fire.

*Eulalia's House* is a quick and thought-provoking read, valuable particularly for the window it opens onto a complex history that, for English-speaking audiences, has been inaccessible for far too long. ▲

*Dr. Lydia Syson is the author of A World Between Us, a novel set during the Spanish Civil War, which introduces the International Brigades to young adult readers, and Liberty's Fire, a fictional account of the 1871 Paris Commune. She is currently working on a biography of her anarchist great-great-grandmother, N.F. Dryhurst, who was a friend and translator of Kropotkin and a founding member of the Freedom circle.*

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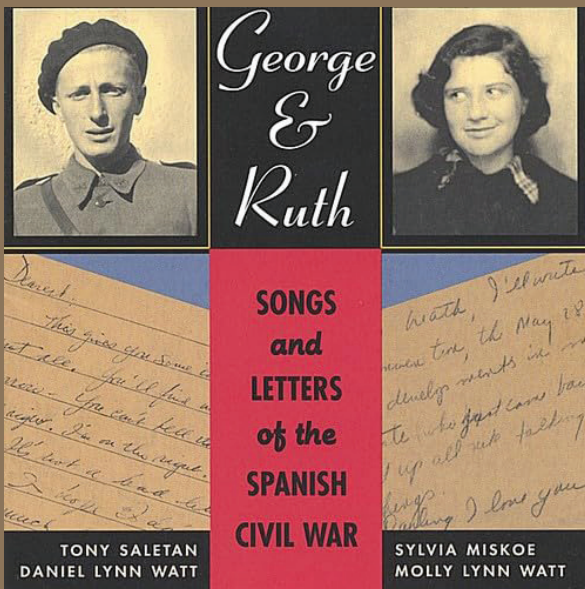
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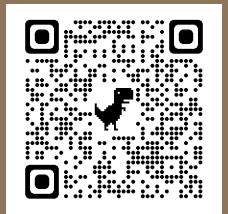
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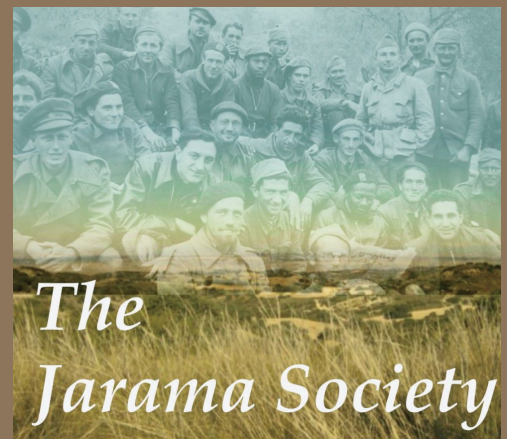
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