

The Volunteer

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

ALBA/Puffin Award Goes to Jews for Racial & Economic Justice

p 5

Jews for Racial and Economic Justice at the Hands Off March in New York, April 19, 2025. Photo Ellen Neipris.



Spain's Antifascist Murals p 12

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The Volunteer

Founded by the Veterans of the Abraham
Lincoln Brigade

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

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Dear Friends,

"The courage and fortitude the Lincoln Brigade exemplified is desperately needed today. They saw the writing on the wall and didn't wait until the powers that be caught up with them to take what J. Edgar Hoover preposterously described as premature anti-fascist action."

Audrey Sasson, the Executive Director of Jews for Racial and Economic Justice Community, paid a lovely tribute to the Lincoln volunteers when she accepted the ALBA/Puffin Award for Human Rights Activism in May. But at the center of her speech, which you can read in full on page 5, was a more urgent message: "the idea of collective liberation is not just a slogan. It's a daily, embodied practice of solidarity, rooted not in charity, but in authentic mutual interest first."

Close to half a year into a dizzying barrage of developments that are quickly pushing this country down the road to autocracy, the proverbial checks and balances of American democracy are slowly, and only partially, kicking into gear. Yet as people everywhere are finding their antifascist footing, the long tradition of internationalist activism reemerges as a source of inspiration. It's heartening to see so many new and familiar faces at our online events—the recordings of which, by the way, are all available on alba-valb.org and ALBA's YouTube channel.

Inspiration is also what we hope the stories in this issue will provide—from the interviews with the brilliant Catalan muralist Roc Blackblock (page 12) and the folks behind a new theater production in New York inspired by the International Brigades (page 11), to a touching report on the memorial Jarama march (page 7), which included the stage-reading of a recently discovered play written by a Lincoln vet (page 9). On page 16, Martin Minchom explains how we might think of "fake news" in the media coverage of the Spanish war. We're also thrilled to introduce a new recurring feature, *Arkivo*, in which we present a noteworthy document from our archives (page 20).

We can't tell you how grateful we are for your continued support, without which this magazine, and everything ALBA does, would not be possible. To quote Audrey Sasson: we are "antifascist always!"

¡Salud!



Sebastiaan Faber,
Co-Editor



James D. Fernández,
Co-Editor

P.S. Did you know that it's easy to set up recurring monthly donations?
Go to alba-valb.org/donate for more information.

To the Editors:

I'm hoping the *Volunteer's* readers can help me with a research project. I recently translated S. L. Shneiderman's compilation of his Spanish Civil War reportage from his original Yiddish book, *Krig in Shpanyen: Hinterlands* into English as *Journey Through the Spanish Civil War*, which was reviewed in your last issue.

Mr. Shneiderman compiled another book focusing on the International Brigade's Jewish Naftali Botwin Company, *Krig in Shpanyen, Vol. II*. The book was published in Warsaw just days before the Nazi invasion. It vanished, destroyed by either the fascist Polish government or by the Nazis. Either way, I have been trying to find a copy so that I may translate it from its original Yiddish into English and use it as a source for *Kaddish for the Fallen*, a book I am writing based on Yiddish language sources that follows Jewish Brigaders through the Spanish war—and if they survived, through the Second World War. I would appreciate hearing from anyone who has knowledge of Shneiderman's book.

Deborah A Green, Esq. | Deborah@deborahagreen.com

More letters to the editors on page 19.

ALBA NEWS

Jews for Racial and Economic Justice Wins ALBA/Puffin Award

On May 3, the nonprofit Jews for Racial & Economic Justice received the 2025 ALBA/Puffin Award for Human Rights Activism at a ceremony in New York City. Jews For Racial & Economic Justice Community (JFREJ) is a 6,000-member grassroots organization, widely considered to be the home of New York's Jewish Left. For over 30 years, JFREJ members have organized alongside their neighbors to transform New York from a playground for the wealthy few into a real democracy, free from all forms of racist violence.

With this year's award, ALBA and The Puffin Foundation intend to acknowledge the danger that current assaults on human and economic rights pose to vulnerable populations—and the need to continue the fight for economic and racial justice that the Abraham Lincoln Brigade committed themselves to when they took up the fight against fascism.

"I am humbled and deeply honored to be accepting the ALBA/Puffin Award for Human Rights on behalf of JFREJ Community," said Audrey Sasson, Executive Director of Jews for Racial & Economic Justice, Community. "We are in a moment of profound reckoning in this country, facing an onslaught of unimaginable attacks against all our communities. At JFREJ Community, we commit every day to safety through solidarity and to building a just and democratic world. Nearly a hundred years ago, the volunteers of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade saw fascism rising clearly, and knew an attack on one was an attack on all and took courageous action across borders. We build on their sacrifice and on the long history and lineage of Jewish anti-fascist organizing and resistance. We know there is no such thing as a 'premature antifascist'—then or now—and will gratefully use this prize to power the critical fights ahead." (See page 5 for Audrey Sasson's acceptance speech; see page 4 for a gallery of photographs by Kat St. Martin.)

"At a time when we are seeing unprecedented attacks on democratic institutions advanced by authoritarian policies with complete disregard for human rights," said Jack Mayerhofer, who chairs ALBA's Human Rights Committee, "organizations like Jews for Racial and Economic Justice Community remind us of the conviction of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, and their work could not be needed more. JFREJ's efforts mobilizing partners to reject all forms of authoritarianism and racial violence will be essential for successfully pushing back against the anti-democratic attacks of the Trump and Musk administration and for protecting human rights, both within the United States and abroad."

"With basic human rights under assault in our own country, the efforts of JFREJ to educate the public and speak out on behalf of populations targeted by unjust actions are more important than ever," said Neal Rosenstein, President of The Puffin Foundation. "JFREJ and its volunteers offer a profound example of an effective force dedicated to shining a light on the actions of those who would attack and demonize immigrants, refugees, and those whose voices are often unheard. We are honored by their actions and their acceptance of this award."

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 honor the nearly 3,000 Americans who volunteered in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) to fight fascism under the banner of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. The late Perry Rosenstein, the philanthropist and visionary founder of The Puffin Foundation, created and established an endowed fund for this award in 2010.

Other recipients of the ALBA/Puffin Award for Human Rights Activism include reproductive justice organization Indigenous Women Rising; public-interest lawyer Bryan Stevenson; No More Deaths, a humanitarian organization dedicated to ending the death and suffering in the Mexico-US borderlands; My Brother's Keeper, an organization whose mission is to reduce health disparities; and Life After Hate, a leader in the violence intervention community helping individuals disengage from violent far-right hate groups.

Film Workshops Continue

After a fascinating workshop on Ken Loach's controversial Spanish Civil War film *Land and Freedom*, led on April 2 by Lisa Berger and Sebastiaan Faber, ALBA's film series continues on June 5 with a discussion of Sam Wood's classic *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, led by Hemingway scholar Alex Vernon. See alba-valb.org/eventcalendar for details and signup information.

Shantha Susman Joins ALBA Board

ALBA is thrilled to welcome Shantha Susman, an accomplished writer, editor, and communications professional, to its Board of Governors. As the granddaughter of Bill Susman, one of ALBA's founders, Shantha is quite familiar with our work. In recent years, she has been a leader in organizing the grandchildren of the vets. Alongside her family, Shantha contributed a moving video paying tribute to her grandfather, which was included in the 18-minute film *A Grand Tribute* (viewable on ALBA's YouTube channel). She also played an active role in the well-attended tribute to the vets' grandchildren, this past December, and has been a member of the Watt Essay Prize committee. Shantha holds a BA from Cornell and an MFA from the University of Minnesota.

Marion Nestle Joins Honorary Board

ALBA's Honorary Board welcomes Marion Nestle, a widely published molecular biologist, nutritionist, and public health advocate, as well as Paulette Goddard Professor of Nutrition, Food Studies, and Public Health Emerita at New York University. Prof. Nestle presented last year's Susman Lecture, titled *Memoir of a Red Diaper Baby*.

Peter Carroll Remembered in New York and the Bay Area

On March 9, one of several memorial gatherings for Peter N. Carroll, ALBA's chair emeritus, was held in New York City, in the presence of his partner Jeannette Ferrary and his children, Natasha and Matthew. The event included fragments of a long biographical interview with Peter by Sebastiaan Faber that was filmed in the summer of 2024. Later in March, Peter was also honored by ALBA's Bay Area post. On April 19, a program at Stanford University, organized by Peter Stansky and dedicated to Peter, included a presentation by Jeannette of Peter's poetry collection *Sketches from Spain*.

Pride Event Features Spanish Senator

One of ALBA's most successful annual events is the Pride celebration. This year, which marks the 50th anniversary of Franco's death, the Spanish Senator Carla Antonelli will discuss the role of the LGBTQ movement in the anti-fascist movement, from the anti-Francoist resistance to the present. A well-known actress and activist, Ms. Antonelli holds the historic distinction of being the first openly transgender person elected to the Cortes Generales, as well as the first to serve in a regional legislature in Spain. In the Spanish high chamber, Senator Antonelli currently represents the Madrid region. The event will be held online, on June 25 at 3pm Eastern or 12pm Pacific time.

ALBA/Open Horizon Fellowship

The newest addition to ALBA's office staff is Jordan Watkins, a lawyer and activist who most recently worked in international transitional justice, specifically focused on arts and memorialization. Jordan holds a juris doctor from New England Law (Boston) with a concentration in International Law. For ALBA, she'll work on development and communications. This one-year position has been generously funded by Open Horizon, a Virginia-based nonprofit that collaborates with nonprofit partners to co-create opportunities to advance racial and social justice through organizational support in the areas of Economic Justice, Education Justice, and Health Justice.

ALBA/Puffin Award Ceremony All photos by Kat St. Martin



Mark Wallem and David Parsard (ALBA).



Morriah Kaplan (IfNotNow)



The audience



Audrey Sasson (JFREJ) and
Ava Mateo (18by Vote)



Dr. Shannon Poe (Life After
Hate)



Eztli Amaya (Indigenous
Women Rising)



Aaron Retish (ALBA)



Dr. June Gipson (My Brother's
Keeper)



Neal Rosenstein (Puffin)



Audrey Sasson (JFREJ) and
Neal Rosenstein



Dennis Meaney, Mark Wallem, Eztli Amaya, and
Peter Miller



ALBA's Mark Wallem, Gina Herrmann, and Aaron
Retish



ALBA board and staff



The JFREJ Community delegation

Anti-Fascist Always

By Audrey Sasson

ON MAY 3, JEWS FOR RACIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE COMMUNITY RECEIVED THE ALBA/PUFFIN AWARD FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISM AT A CEREMONY IN NEW YORK CITY. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AUDREY SASSON DELIVERED THE FOLLOWING ACCEPTANCE SPEECH.

Good afternoon. On behalf of Jews for Racial and Economic Justice Community, I want to start by expressing my sincerest gratitude to both ALBA and the Puffin Foundation for this incredibly generous and distinguished award. When Mark called, I was floored. I was deeply moved to learn about the award itself, never mind that we were being honored with it.

As a lifelong organizer and a student of history, I knew enough about the Abraham Lincoln Brigade to know that JFREJ at least aspires to organize within the tradition that they so distinctly represent. But I've taken the last month—as the nerd that I am—to do a deeper dive into that history. And I have been profoundly inspired by it, incredibly touched, in addition to being overwhelmed with how resonant it all feels. Thank you for all you do to preserve their memory and honor their legacy.

The courage and fortitude the Lincoln Brigade exemplified is desperately needed today. They saw the writing on the wall and didn't wait until the powers that be caught up with them to take what J. Edgar Hoover preposterously described as premature anti-fascist action. They dedicated their lives, their literal lives, to wake the world up. Their clarity and commitment are a beacon for us today as we do everything in our power to push back the forces of fascism in our backyard.



They knew—as we are currently and frighteningly experiencing—that the best antidote to fascism is to be perennially premature in staving it off. As we've already discussed, at least a third of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade members were Jewish and a third hailed from New York City, I believe. The fact is that Jewish New Yorkers have helped power social movements for over a century, from local labor fights to Freedom Riders; from the Abraham Lincoln Brigade to Jews for Racial and Economic Justice. We are honored to be in that legacy.

JFREJ Community is the home of the Jewish left in New York. From day one, our project has been both rooted locally in New York and tied to a vision of global solidarity. Our first public event in 1990—raise your hand if you were there!—was to welcome Nelson Mandela to New York City. When establishment Jewish organizations shamefully refused, citing his solidarity

with Palestine as a threat to our community, JFREJ's founders in this room had the moral clarity to reject that cowardice and to carve out a political home for Jewish New Yorkers who understand that none of us are free until all of us are free.



And so, 35 years later, we continue to do what we see as our part in a much bigger project. We organize Jewish New Yorkers alongside our neighbors and allies for a New York where all communities have the freedom to truly thrive. We aim to transform New York from a playground for the wealthy few to a real democracy for all. We believe it is possible for everyone to have the care we need; a roof over our heads; healthy food on our tables; dignity in our workplaces; and space in our lives, importantly, for art and culture and joy and community.

The world we're building is one in which there is no justice just for Jews, and there's also no justice that would erase us. We're part of a long history of Jews who reject supremacy and nationalism of all kinds. And we refuse to hide, make ourselves small, or apologize for any part of who we are.

We also know that the only way to achieve that vision of Jewish life is to organize for human rights and democracy, shared prosperity, and pluralism—wherever we live. In New York, it means we work on the issues that affect all New Yorkers—housing, healthcare, police, violence, immigrant and worker justice—always in coalition with other organizations across the city. Because for us, the idea of collective liberation is not just a slogan. It's a daily, embodied practice of solidarity, rooted not in charity, but in authentic mutual interest first.

We are also clear that dismantling antisemitism needs to be part of any serious project of the left. It just does. And we understand how it functions, how dangerous it is, and how it interacts with other oppressions to keep us all down. And so we are committed to fighting it. The white Christian nationalist movement that brought Trump to power is itself antisemitic, in addition to being patriarchal, misogynist, racist, and xenophobic. We all know this. That is why this administration's brutal crushing of dissent, under the false flag of Jewish safety, fills me and my fellow JFERJers with shame and rage. It's why we organize to interrupt the bad faith and often patently false

accusations of antisemitism being deployed to dismantle our universities, detain and deport student leaders, and tear apart our movements.

We have organized since October 2023 for a permanent ceasefire in Israel and Palestine. We have also organized in the horrific and unspeakable months since then for an arms embargo and an end to the genocide in Gaza. Rising fascism here and the ongoing genocide there are connected. The forces that pave the way for the cruel wreckage of our conditions did not begin on November 5th or October 7th respectively.

In these times, we are called to make the same choice the Lincolns made. It is up to us to act. We must refuse to comply with forces that seek to dominate and destroy. We must protect the frontline of the struggle against repression with all of our might. Right now, the front lines are trans youth fighting for their right to simply exist. Our immigrant neighbors, including the thousands languishing in ICE detention or being tortured in a concentration camp in El Salvador; professors and students, victims of the new McCarthyism, especially immigrants like Mahmoud Khalil, Rümeysa Öztürk, and Mohsen Mahdawi, who've been targeted for speaking out for Palestine. As their courage has shown us, it is never too early to stand for what's right, and it is also, to all of you, never too late, as we know, to join the fight.

This generous award is both an honor and a call to action to face the time ahead with courage and conviction. To remain in principled struggle together; to learn from the past; and to meet the deadly onslaughts of the authoritarian, billionaire, techno-fascist, racist, fear-mongering front with more democracy, more internationalism, more organizing, more solidarity, more humanity, more art and culture and joy and community, and more commitment to the world we need and deserve. Anti-fascist always! See you in the streets! ▲

"THERE'S A VALLEY IN SPAIN": The 17th Annual Jarama March

The February, AABI's annual Jarama march followed in the footsteps of the Lincoln Battalion. Nancy Wallach was part of the extensive US delegation. "One of the most inspiring aspects of the trip is the opportunity to make connections with our counterparts from other countries."

For many years, the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade would conclude their annual reunion, held every May, by standing up and singing Woody Guthrie's "Jarama Valley": "It was there that we gave of our manhood—and so many of our brave comrades fell..." For the past seventeen years, the Amigos Association of the International Brigades in Spain (AABI) has organized a commemoration of that key battle, which took place in February 1937, with a memorial march to "serve as a symbol and beacon of hope" for others around the world "to achieve the same unity" as the more than 35,000 volunteers from 52 countries who came to Spain to defend the democratically elected government against the onslaught of world fascism.

In 2025, The Jarama March followed in the footsteps of the Lincoln Battalion, which was the national group of volunteers honored in this year's events. I was proud to be among the multigenerational group of 45 American descendants and supporters of the Lincoln Brigade who joined the march—a record number, according to AABI.

Some of us had spoken by Zoom prior to the event, when those interested in going shared our histories and connections to the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. The Jarama March itself provided an opportunity to cement these initial connections, as we shared bus rides and luncheons, as well as, of course, the march itself.



struggle in Spain was a defining event of his life.

On Friday, February 21, our first full day of the tributes in Spain, we boarded the bus to visit another memorial site linked to the Lincolns: the town of Madrigueras near Albacete, where the Lincolns were quartered during their training phase before entering combat. We received an emotional welcome from the mayor himself, Juan Carlos Talavera. Alfredo Alcahut guided us to

the newly inaugurated memorial museum to the International Brigades, which he directs. As I listened to one of the local guides at this facility, I was impressed by his knowledge about Oliver Law and the Lincolns' pioneering efforts to integrate an American military unit. Alfredo also works with young people from the region to help them understand the extraordinary international unity and solidarity of the International Brigades. While AABI rightly called Alfredo's work an example of democratic memory put into practice with rigor and emotion, the same could be said of the entire weekend which was organized so ably by AABI's all-volunteer staff.

Next was a quick visit to Tarancón, which during the war was home to a medical base that suffered a cruel bombing during February 1937, around the same time as the battle of Jarama. At the still standing ruins of the hospital, we saw murals paying tribute to Dr. Edward Barsky and Salaria Kea, the African American nurse.



The four-day tribute to the Lincolns began with a staged reading of a recently discovered play, written by ALB veteran Charles Nusser, performed at the imposing auditorium of the Madrid Ateneo. The skill and artistry of the company, led by Juan Pastor and Jeannine Maestre, brought the bravery and sacrifices of the Lincoln Battalion to dramatic life, leaving the many members of the audience in teary appreciation of both the performance and the Lincolns. In a public conversation after the play, Nusser's granddaughter, Kate Fogarty, told AABI president Almudena Cros that for her grandfather, taking part in the anti-fascist

This exhibit at the Sephardic Cultural Center ran concurrent with the Jarama commemoration.

Before I knew it, I was made an honorary member of the Italian Partisan Anti-Fascist organization!

This year's memorial march included representatives of commemorative groups from England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Germany, France, Poland, Italy, Scandinavia, Mexico, Cuba, South America, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. As I mentioned to my fellow Americans, one of the most inspiring aspects of the trip is the opportunity to make connections with our counterparts from other countries. For example, sitting behind me in the bus was an Italian participant leading the bus in spirited renditions of "Bandiera Rossa, Avanti Popolo" and "Bella Ciao." When I shared with him how my father, Hy Wallach, remembered how even the Italian fascists who captured him expressed admiration for the Garibaldi's, my new friend gave me a detailed account of how the Garibaldi Battalion had routed Mussolini's troops in a key battle. And before I knew it, I was made an honorary member of the Italian Partisan Anti-Fascist organization!

When we returned to our hotels, those of us who weren't too tired out from our long day gathered for a roundtable discussion about why we joined this event, what significance it had for us, and the meaning of our parents' or grandparents' experience in the Lincoln Brigade. The conversation was recorded and aired by Linda Jiménez for Radio Sefarad.

Saturday saw what was for many of us the highlight of the weekend: the march along the battlefields as we followed the route of the Lincolns. The grandson and great nephew of Lincoln Commissar Carl Geiser led our procession, carrying a replica of the historic Lincoln Battalion banner.



Our first stop was the point where the Lincoln Brigade received their orders from the Republican command to halt the advance of the Moroccan soldiers and legionnaires on the fascist side. Historian Miguel Ángel García told us that although the fighting was fierce—and the battalion had little military training and was poorly armed—they managed to annihilate Franco's professional, experienced and better equipped military forces.

Descendants of the volunteers were then asked to share the names of their relatives. Lin Rose Clark of the IBMT spoke about her grandfather, Brigadier Robert Hilliard, who sacrificed his life fighting the fascists. Alex Paunov, the grandson of Bulgarian Volunteer Ivan Paunov, the first commander of the Dimitrov Battalion, spoke about the battalion's attack during the Battle of Jarama, where his grand-

father sustained wounds that would turn out to be lethal. I then delivered a presentation on behalf of ALBA and the members of our delegation. (See the online edition of this magazine at albavolunteer.org for the full text.)

We then reached the area which Miguel Ángel, the historian, described as the place where "the Lincoln trenches were firmly es-

tablished after suffering an enormous number of casualties while attempting to carry out an attack order that was almost suicidal, given the lack of artillery or air preparation that would have been necessary to take a position so well defended by the enemy." Here we placed a replica of the sign made by Lincoln Volunteer Mark Rauschwald: "To our fallen comrades, our victory is your vengeance."

The final event of our four days of remembrance was a visit to the Fuencarral Cemetery on Sunday, which includes a mass grave where the remains of the 451 International Brigade volunteers are believed to be buried. After reciting the names of the nine volunteers from the United States listed by the International Brigades Funeral Service, we observed a moment of silence.

After these unforgettable days of solidarity, camaraderie and the historic example of international unity, we returned home with morale strengthened, and more resolved than ever to continue to resist the threat of fascism today. ▲

Nancy Wallach, a longtime ALBA board member, is the daughter of Lincoln veteran Hy Wallach.



Marching. Photo Len and Nancy Tsou.

How I Found My Grandfather's Play about the Lincoln Brigade

By Kate Fogarty



In the spring of 2024, while cleaning up an old family home, Kate Fogarty came across the typescript of a play about the Lincoln Brigade written by her grandfather, Charlie Nusser, who served in Spain from February to October 1937 and fought in the US Army during the Second World War. Ten months after Kate's find, the play was performed in Spain.

The year 2024 began rough for my aunt Paulette. On a bitterly cold Saturday evening in January, her modest home in Chicago caught fire. She, her husband Anthony, and their dog made it out safely, but the following weeks were spent in a hotel and a rental home in the suburbs. Months later, on Good Friday, Uncle Tony passed away from a heart attack.

At Easter I caught a flight up to Chicago and Paulette and I went to work to get her affairs in order. She and my uncle owned a second home in upstate Illinois, a farmstead that his parents had built. Paulette mentioned that, after the fire, Tony had rescued some items from their Chicago home and moved them upstate. My aunt and I planned to spend a couple of days there to sort through it. We found the living room filled with small pieces of furniture and about eight heavy-duty black trash bags. Undaunted, we set to work. After about three hours, I came upon some DVDs of a recorded conversation between my grandfather, Charlie Nusser, a veteran of the Lincoln Brigade who had passed away in 1993, and his fellow Lincoln vet Steve Nelson. I also found a yellow folder containing a stack of papers

that Paulette recognized as my grandfather's. Some pages were written by hand, while others were typed, and a handful of pages looked to be more recently printed.

I asked my aunt if I could take the entire folder with me. At home, I began by scanning the newest-looking pages—which, miraculously, my aunt had printed from the computer that was later destroyed in the house fire—and converting them into Word. It appeared that the folder contained two separate texts. The first was a memoir called “Give me a Hero's Welcome.” The other was a play titled “The Volunteers.”

My mother, Helen, was aware of her father's memoir, but the existence of the play was news to her. Paulette, however, knew more. She now remembered that, at one point, a group in Chicago had been interested in producing it, but that grandpa and the producer decided it would prove too costly to put on. Looking back, I suspect Charlie was also quite ambivalent about his work. In a transcribed interview with Art Landis that Ray Hoff shared with me, and which likely was recorded in the 1960s, Charlie had said: “Spain is better left in the closet.

I'd just as soon have people forget all about it." I'm wondering now if, with that comment, he was dismissing his own ability to write something meaningful about what he felt to be the most important thing he'd ever done in his life.

That modesty tracks. I remember my grandpa Charlie as a humble soul who loved to laugh, loved children, felt little pain (for my amusement, he'd put a clothespin on his finger while pretending to sleep), and yet passionately hated human cruelty—especially when wealthy and powerful groups subjugated and exploited others for gain. In contrast with his self-effacing nature, the accounts by others of him during the war in Spain are legendary. They remember Charlie running alone through showers of bullets, despite being hit in his shoulder and knee. (Later, he'd describe those gun wounds as "superficial.") In a picture of him with two other Lincoln volunteers, he grins while the others appear sullen.

The Volunteers is a one-act play with four scenes that together take about an hour to perform, including musical interludes. After a brief dialogue among three Lincoln vets that seems to take place in the 1970s ("There have been a thousand Guernicas in Vietnam," one of them remarks), the rest of the story is set in Spain during the Civil War. It features more than twenty characters, about half of whom are Americans. Despite the seriousness of the situation, there is even room for humor. "I've always had my doubts about you, Steve," the character named Charlie remarks, laughing. "Now you've confirmed them. You are not a real Communist. You're one of those deviationists. [...] I'm going to report you to the first Commissar we meet—if we get out of here alive. Yes sir, a dogmatic deviationist, that's what you are. For shame! Karl Marx, to say nothing of Lenin, must be spinning in his grave!" For anyone familiar with the Lincoln Battalion, some characters are easy to recognize: Captain Steve Haines resembles Steve Nelson; Sergeant Charlie is my grandfather; Corporal Sam Levin seems to be partly inspired by Paul Wendorf and a couple of other Jewish volunteers.

Paul would loom large in my grandfather's life. Born and raised in New York City, he had traveled to Spain in the same group as my grandfather Charlie, who was from Pittsburgh. But while Charlie returned to the United States after eight months, Paul, who was three years older, stayed on. He was killed in action in the Sierra Pandols, during the Ebro offensive, in August 1938. Charlie later married Paul's widow, Leona—my grandmother. Their first daughter, my aunt Paulette, is named after him.

While in Spain, Paul wrote Leona about 80 long letters that were recently published in Spanish translation, a project made possible by Paul's cousin, Nancy Phillips, with the help of my

sister Sara, who retrieved Paul's letters from the ALBA collection at the Tamiment Library in New York. It was also Nancy who put me in touch with Patricia Ure and Almudena Cros of the Association of Friends of the International Brigades (AABI) in Spain. I hoped Patricia could possibly help me share grandpa's play. To my delight, she immediately suggested that it could be translated and stage-read by a small group of actors at the 2025 Jarama March—which, as it happened, would be dedicated to the American volunteers.

Fast forward to February 20, 2025, the day of the staged reading at the Ateneo de Madrid. I was nervous, unsure what to expect. Since there was to be a colloquium following the play, I had prepared a short speech to express my gratitude to Almudena and Patricia, as well as the director, actors, translator, and musical director. As a group of us walked from the Hotel Agumar to the Ateneo, we saw a line of 75 or more people outside. My first thought was that there must be another, simultaneous event going on. Perhaps, I figured, *The Volunteers* would be performed in a small upstairs room. I realized I was wrong when I was escorted into a large theatre with balcony seating and assigned a seat in front, from where I could witness a "full house" at the theatre.

I was enchanted from the start. Jeannine Mester gave a wonderful introduction in English and Spanish. The translation of the play, by Andrés Chamorro of AABI, was masterful, as was Nacho Vera's musical production and the vision of the director, Juan Pastor. The characters—Steve, Charlie, Sam—sang satirical and wistful

war songs, performed a comical court-martial scene between Slim, a soldier, and his superior, Big Mike, culminating into their coming to ideological grips with the significance of their service in Spain. The ending had me in tears and on my feet to applaud the four fabulous actors: Jeannine Mester, Javier Madruga, Luis Miguel, and Carlos Manrique. Together they bestowed the greatest honor on my grandfather. Our family will forever be grateful to AABI for making this possible, and we are delighted to make the play available for sharing and viewing through the online edition of this magazine at albavolunteer.org. ▲

Kate Fogarty, Charles Nusser's granddaughter, is an associate professor of Family, Youth, and Community sciences at the University of Florida. She and her sister, Sara, went to Spain in 1994 to commemorate Charles Nusser after his death in 1993 by scattering his ashes throughout his favorite places in Madrid and Barcelona. Their mother, Helen Fogarty, and aunt, Paulette Dubetz, are equally invested in their father's quest to maintain the memory of the Spanish Civil War and to promote education and awareness on fascism.



“NOW FELT LIKE THE RIGHT TIME TO DIVE INTO THIS” New International Brigades Play to Premiere in Brooklyn

By Sebastiaan Faber

From June 12 to 29, Brooklyn’s MITU580 will premiere *At the Barricades*, a new play by James Clements and Sam Hood Adrain set among the international Brigades during the Spanish Civil War. Directed by Federica Borlenghi and supported by script supervisor Skye Pallo Ross, the project was developed through a residency at NYU’s Espacio de Culturas.

James Clements and Sam Hood Adrain are the founding co-artistic directors of “What Will the Neighbors Say?”, an investigative theater company created in 2016 that provokes questions through untold stories. Founded by a collaborative cohort of international artists, *The Neighbors* present overlooked social, cultural and historical narratives that challenge the audience to reflect on the current moment. Through a combination of original plays, arts education workshops, and dynamic community gatherings, the troupe encourages rowdy and rigorous debate at the theatre and throughout the neighborhood. I spoke with James and Sam in early May.



in. James also used text from Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia* in a previous play at La Mama. The themes and era of *At the Barricades* relate directly to other work the Neighbors have done and, with the state of the world at this moment, now felt like the right time to dive into this documentary theater project.

How has the production process been?

We have been so fortunate to be in residence at NYU’s Espacio de Culturas for the last year to develop this piece. It is

deeply rooted in primary source material, and we relied heavily on the resources available in the ALBA collection as well as the wider Tamiment Library & Wagner Labor Archives. The ability to have space to research, write, and develop this piece has been instrumental in putting the play together and preparing for its world premiere in June. Learning about the lives of the volunteers, both in Spain and at home, has been such a joy for us as playwrights and trying to imbue their histories into the characters we have created has been artistically both challenging and deeply rewarding. We have an incredible team of actors and designers working together to really bring the front lines to life and hope that folks will feel transported to 1937 when they walk into the theater.

What does it mean for you to revisit the Spanish Civil War in the United States in 2025?

In a time where free speech, national self-determination and democracy are under fire in the United States and abroad, now more than ever feels like the time to remind folks that the events of ninety years ago are not as distant as they may seem—and that we would be foolish to assume they couldn’t repeat themselves. Indeed, they already are. We hope this piece engenders empathy, encourages solidarity, and acts as a reminder that we are stronger in collective action than our oppressors. ▲

Tell me about *At the Barricades*.

The play follows six different characters from the United States, Spain and Scotland, brought together, despite their varied backgrounds, by a shared desire to fight against Franco’s fascist coup. We join them on the outskirts of Madrid in January 1937 and witness, over the course of a year, how their political loyalties, personal relationships and understanding of themselves are strengthened, challenged and irrevocably changed by the tragedy and the carnage around them. In these scary and trying times this new source-based play, drawn from the letters and primary sources of the volunteers, asks the question: how far would you go to protect the freedoms of others?

Do you have personal connections to the history of the International Brigades?

We both grew up knowing this history from family. Sam is Italian American and James is Scottish, so, from different angles, it was on the radar of our grandparents and great-grandparents. When James’s grandfather passed away, the family scattered his ashes in front of the statue of La Pasionaria in his hometown of Glasgow, where his grandfather loved to spend quiet afternoons reflecting on working class solidarity and the city he grew up

“It Took Me Years to Understand My Work as Part of a Cultural Battle.” Roc Blackblock, Catalan Muralist

By Sebastiaan Faber

The Barcelona-born muralist Roc Blackblock, who started painting walls 25 years ago, takes his inspiration from photography to put the spotlight on historical struggles against fascism, for democracy, and for human rights as a way of intervening in the political present. “Having a good photograph to work from makes a huge difference.”



If you drive an hour and a half west from Barcelona until you reach the foot of the Prades mountains, you'll find a nineteenth-century inn with a large, portico-lined patio that today is home to a youth hostel. It was here, on Tuesday, October 25, 1938, that Spanish Prime Minister Juan Negrín, flanked by Generals Rojo and Lister, gave a legendary farewell speech to the surviving members of the International Brigades, which had been demobilized on September 23. The iconic photographs of the event, by Robert Capa and Henry Buckley, show weary, unshaven, beret-wearing men who, visibly moved,

lift their right fist to their temple in a last salute to the Spanish Republican leader.

For today's visitors to the inn, L'alberg l'Espluga de Francolí Xanascot, the historical connection is hard to miss. For the past three years, the building has featured a small museum dedicated to the International Brigades, sponsored by the Catalan government. And since 2023, one of the terracotta-colored exterior walls of the complex is covered with a large mural inspired by one of Capa's close-up portraits of a *brigadista*.

“When I spend so much time with a single image, something interesting hap-

pens,” the muralist, who signs his work Roc Blackblock, told me in February. “It's not so much that I emotionally connect with the photographer, Robert Capa in this case. But I do end up feeling a strong bond with the person in the photograph. After all, I'm looking them in the eyes, touching their faces, for days on end. I felt something similar in January, when I painted a mural in Madrid inspired by one of Antoni Campaña's iconic photographs from the early days of the war in Barcelona—the image of a *miliciana* on the Ramblas holding up an anarchist flag. She's radiant, so full of joy. By now we know her name, Anita Garbín, and

The mural at the Espluga Inn. Photo Fer Alcalá.

it turns out she was pregnant at the time. While working on the mural I couldn't help wondering what she was going through when the picture was taken."

"Having a good photograph to work from makes a huge difference," Blackblock told me. "Want to hear a funny story? For the International Brigades mural at the Esplugu inn, the initial idea was for me to use one of Henry Buckley's images. That was relatively simple, because his photographs are held by a local Catalan archive and his granddaughter had very generously given us permission to use them. It made financial sense, too. Capa's work is managed by Magnum, which means that the rights are quite expensive, and there was no room for anything like that in the project budget, which was financed by a tiny municipality. The problem was, though, that even though Buckley's photographs are of great historical value, they don't quite work as large reproductions. Capa's images are much more powerful in that sense. So, in the end, I said: 'Screw it, when am I ever going to get a chance to work with an image like this again?' And I paid for the Capa rights with my own honorarium. It was worth it."

The Capa mural is one of several tributes to the International Brigades that Roc Blackblock has been painting throughout Catalonia as part of a broader project titled *Murs de Bitàcola*, which roughly translates as Logbook Walls (mursdebitacola.com). The series, which so far comprises some forty murals, puts the spotlight on historical struggles against fascism, for democracy, and for human rights, always in connection with the political present. They include gripping images from the Civil War (various militiamen and -women; the bombings of Tortosa and Madrid; the massacre of refugees on the road from Málaga to Almería; the Republican exiles who left for Chile) and from the Francoist period (the struggle of the guerrilla or *maquis*; the execution of Salvador Puig Antich). But they also reference other historical episodes, from the pre-war rebellions by miners and peasants in Asturias (1934) and Extremadura (1936) to the international fight for women's suffrage.

Roc Blackblock, who was born in Barcelona in 1975, has been active for about a quarter of a century. "I came up in the 1990s," he told me, "when I joined the squatter movement and the *insumisos* or 'insubordinates' who refused not only



the then-compulsory military service, but also the alternative service that was imposed on conscientious objectors. In high school, I'd studied graphic design, which I followed up with a two-year course in illustration. During that time, I met a *grafitero* who was part of the orthodox graffiti scene in Barcelona. It occurred to me to invite him to paint a wall in the social center where I lived, in a squatted former factory. He not only accepted the invitation and allowed me to help him with the project, but he also let me keep the leftover bottles of spray paint. That's when I started doing political murals—I was an activist, after all. Although my connections came through the graffiti



Roc Blackblock at work. Photo Jordi Borràs.

scene and I've always used spray paint, I never really got into graffiti proper. My inspiration came from the political murals from the 1980s, and '90s: against nuclear energy, in solidarity with Nicaragua, and so forth."

What is your family background?

My mother's parents were working-class migrants from Alicante. But since my father's family belonged to the Catalan bourgeoisie, I grew up in a conservative, Catalan-nationalist, middle-class household. The fact that I could study graphic design at a prestigious private art school was, in a way, a sign of privilege.

How would you describe your own politics?

My politics were shaped by my years in the *insumiso* and squatter movements. At this point in my life, I guess I'm closest to anarcho-communism, or what in Spanish we call *el comunismo libertario*. Historically, I identify with the Barcelona of the 1936 social revolution. But that doesn't mean I don't have friends in the Communist party, or that I don't respect the communists' struggle against the dictatorship. I'm not sectarian.

You're a professional artist and many of your murals are commissions. Do you ever feel tension between your activism and your professional career?

The balance has not always been easy to strike, although I have managed to find a way. You could say I always have one foot in political activism and one foot in the professional sphere. As a professional artist, I could have easily gone in a commercial direction and accepted commissions for mainstream music festivals, multinational corporate sponsorships, and so forth. In recent years, we've witnessed a massive absorption by the neo-liberal market of counterculture, graffiti, and street art. Had I gone that route, then the tension would have quickly become unsustainable. In fact, over the years I've rejected certain projects for that reason. These days, though, my profile is relatively well defined. My commissions most often come from public institutions and city governments who know me as someone who works on topics related to historical memory and antifascism. I just came back from a week in Mallorca, for example, to do a mural on the mass graves of civil war victims there. That project was commissioned by the

At the Kasa de la Muntanya, inspired by A. Campaña. Photo Fer Alcalá.



Inspired by Robert Capa's coverage of the Despedida, Oct. 1938.
Photo Fer Alcalá. Photo Fer Alcalá.



Tortosa bombings.
Photo
Fer Alcalá.



At the Ebro Museum. Photo Fer Alcalá.



The former king.
Photo Fer Alcalá.



city government of Inca and the island's historical memory association. On the other hand, if the Banco Santander were looking for a muralist, I'd not be the one they'd call. (Laughs.)

Are all your murals commissioned these days?

No, I continue to do projects on my own initiative—for example, the mural I did in Gijón last year to commemorate the ninetyeth anniversary of the October Revolution in Asturias, or the one dedicated to Salvador Puig Antich, the young Catalan anarchist who was executed by the Franco regime in 1974. Those are projects I do as an activist, for free or at cost.

Some of the iconic photographs you incorporate into your murals, by Robert Capa, Agustí Centelles or Antoni Campañà, famously inspired poster and mural artists like Josep Renau or Pere Català Pic during the years of the Second Republic and the war. Do you see yourself as part of that artistic tradition?

That's a difficult question. Although I studied graphic design, I never really worked in that field—apart from making a living as a tattoo artist and illustrator for many years. It's true that my education shapes how I see the world and represent it in my work. But if I'm honest, I'm hesitant to see myself as part of any artistic tradition. I much prefer to see myself as a worker, a communicator who uses a particular set of tools and who, over time, has developed a particular set of skills. If you look at the development of my technique, for example, there are changes that simply respond to phases in my life. When my first daughter was born, I started painting less to be able to spend more time at home, and after the birth of my second daughter, I stopped painting altogether for a couple of years, doing other work instead. When I eventually returned to doing murals, I began working with stencils, for the simple reason that it allowed me to do most of the preparation at home and spend less time on site. Even today, when I'm working, I don't think in terms of inspiration or virtuosity. It's much more mechanical: I'm putting in hours to get the job done. Just now, for the Mallorca job, I spent six days in a row working from seven in the morning till seven at night.



One way to see your murals is as bold interventions in public space. They call attention to themselves and interpellate viewers or passersby. Sometimes their message is quite explicit, sometimes not so much.

I go back and forth on that. It also depends on the commission. Some of my work leaves little to the imagination. But when I did the mural for the museum dedicated to the Battle of the Ebro, I used an image of a single soldier, seen from the back, overlooking the river, which is much more open to interpretation.

Spain today continues to be engaged in memory battles, with different groups proposing different ways to tell the story of the twentieth century. Do you see your work as contributing to that battle?

To be perfectly honest, it took me years to understand my own work in that way, as part of a battle for hegemony. I now realize I'd been instinctively engaged in that struggle from the beginning. On the other hand, I don't control how people read my images or what happens to them over time. I once did a mural for a squatted social center depicting protestors running from the police. When the police evicted the squatters, there was a week of intense protests, after which the squatters retook the center. Ten years later, they are still there, and my mural has turned into an icon of resistance. But I had nothing to do with that.

Mallorca, where you just painted a mural, has been the site of one of those battles, as the regional government has been trying to dial back the memory law adopted several years ago, which among other things calls for a recognition of Franco's victims.

Exactly. The regional government of the Balearic Islands is now controlled by the Partido Popular and the far-right party Vox. In June last year, as the parliament was debating repealing the memory law, the speaker of the parliament tore up a picture of Aurora Picornell, known as the Pasionaria of Mallorca. She was a young woman affiliated with the Communist Party who was disappeared and assassinated in January 1937, after Franco's forces had quickly taken over Mallorca and turned it into an Italian military base. In fact, Picornell's remains were only recently recovered from a mass grave. So, this is the context in which the progressive city government of Inca commissioned me to paint a mural to honor the victims of right-wing repression, which I was happy to do, of course.

You also did a mural to denounce the corruption of the former king, which caused a stir.

This was when the rapper Pablo Hásel was indicted for his lyrics, which simply stated the truth: that emeritus King Juan Carlos I is a thief. With a handful of fellow artists, we thought that situation warranted a response in defense of all of us who do creative work—although in practice we didn't officially represent anyone. So, we painted a mural that simply confirmed what Hásel had said—Juan Carlos's face with a label of "thief" on his forehead—in the same way that, when we were in the *insumiso* movement, we'd say: if you imprison folks for refusing to join the military, then I, too, will refuse to join. We did the Juan Carlos mural in a space where, in principle, painting is allowed as long as it doesn't include hate speech or calls to violence. And yet, almost immediately, the police ordered it painted over. What happened, though, was that someone filmed the city crews doing that. And that video went viral, causing a huge scandal and all kinds of conspiracy theories. In other words, it became a textbook example of the Barbara Streisand effect! (Laughs.) The city apologized and asked me to restore the mural, which I did about a week later. A short time after, it was defaced with far-right slogans. In other words, the battle goes on. ▲

Sebastiaan Faber serves on the ALBA Board and teaches at Oberlin College.

The “Lying Press”: (Mis)Reporting on the Spanish Civil War

By Martin Minchom

A dossier on the lies and deceptions surrounding the Spanish Civil War could fill a library, and it's become commonplace to underscore the mendacity of the journalists reporting on events in Spain. Still, a careful analysis of the way that major international news agencies covered the war tells a more complicated story.

Not so long ago, the 1930s—“a low dishonest decade,” in W.H. Auden's words—seemed a remote and unique seedbed of media deception. But today, as the world is entering a post-truth dystopia, the challenges of that time appear not quite as different from our present as they used to.

On 18 November 1936, while Madrid was being relentlessly bombed from the air, France was gripped by a “fake news” controversy. That day, the Communist newspaper *L'Humanité* devoted its front page to the far-right defamations that had driven a French government minister, Roger Salengro, to suicide. In the months that followed, the newspaper's dogged campaign against “the lying press, the murderous press” would also become the leitmotif of its Spanish Civil War coverage. Since then, it's become commonplace to underscore the mendacity of the journalists reporting on Spain. George Orwell famously, in “Looking Back on the Spanish War” (written in 1942), spoke of “newspaper reports which did not bear any relation to the facts, not even the relationship which is implied in an ordinary lie.”

It's true that a dossier on the lies and deceptions surrounding the Spanish Civil War could fill a library. The US historian Herbert Southworth magisterially dismantled the persistent falsehoods about the destruction of Guernica, along with other narratives promoted by Franco's supporters. Journalistic reporting was inevitably shaped by military rationale. Besides exercising censorship on domestic and foreign journalists, the Republican and Francoist authorities both invested heavily in press and propaganda initiatives within Spain and for an international audience. Their incessant flow of information—or disinformation—included dubious official handouts or triumphant radio broadcasts intended to fire up supporters and sap morale in enemy territory. For example, in early August

1936, the rebel-run Radio Seville claimed that General Mola's forces had reached the outskirts of Madrid (they were nowhere near), where, supposedly, white sheets were hanging from buildings. Although the claim was entirely baseless, it still found its way into the international press.

The Spanish authorities were not the only ones engaging in deception. In fact, official deceit was embodied in the

very policy of Non-Intervention. How could news organizations in Britain and France report serenely on German and Italian military involvement when their own governments were so equivocal when it came to Spain? Newspaper reports on the war referred coyly to “enemy planes” instead of identifying them by nationality. In September 1936, when the London-based Reuters news agency checked with the British government about reporting on the Italian military participation in the Nationalist attack on Majorca, it was asked not to stir things up. Still, the Italian presence there turned into a persistent long-term problem with potential diplomatic repercussions.

Despite these efforts at containment, however, rolling press coverage, with its insatiable demand for news of all kinds, had its own dynamic, one that outside agencies struggled to control. Almost everywhere, the reading public was deeply invested in Spanish events. For some, Spain was a battlefield against

fascism, for others, a crusade for Christian civilization. These emotional and political investments stoked intense press interest.

In France and Britain, this was the heyday of the written press, with fifteen Paris newspapers reaching six-figure circulation figures, while two of them—and several London dailies—sold over a million copies a day. Many newspapers championed one side or the other, but the

biggest trod carefully so as not to antagonize potential readers. Thus, mass-circulation French newspapers offered symmetrically balanced columns with contrasting versions: “Madrid claims...”, “Burgos claims...” This ostentatious equidistance was a powerful counterweight to overt political alignment elsewhere. The largest newspapers functioned like modern news aggregators, publishing an amalgam of texts derived from agency wires, radio broadcasts or official communiqués as well as their own



Paris-soir (6 Aug. 1936) presented Republican and Nationalist claims identically (“The taking of...”), showcasing new images (author's collection).



correspondents. These items were often contradictory, while coherence was further sapped by the tardy transmission of images. Thus, the storming of the Montaña Barracks in Madrid took place on 20 July 1936 but the first dramatic photos reached the international press three to four days later, while coverage of the attempted insurrection in Barcelona followed a similar timeline. These were dramatic events, but readers could not follow them in real time.

Unlike much of the British press, the French newspapers offered front-page headline news, allowing us to measure in column inches the extraordinary impact of the Spanish Civil War between late July and early September 1936. Photojournalism had grown in importance in the 1930s, especially in mass-market newspapers whose front-page images and whole-page photographic spreads made this the ideal summer story, a human drama set in spectacular landscapes. Even for uncommitted readers, Spain offered the unhappy but gripping spectacle of the first large-scale conflict in Europe since the early 1920s. But coverage dipped from mid-September 1936, except for major events like Toledo, Madrid or Guernica. As war fatigue set in, the Paris-based Havas news agency reported in October 1937 that it had received complaints about the obscurity of military operations.

Only a select club of organizations had the resources and goodwill to maintain a daily information service in both Republican and Nationalist Spain. The main news providers were agencies like Havas (France), Reuters (Britain), or Associated Press and United Press (North America), along with some up-market and mass-circulation newspapers whose reporting was widely echoed elsewhere. Other newspapers drew on these sources, complementing them with contributions from one-off special correspondents or opinion columnists. Headline writers gave stories their distinctive flavor. In a competitive news environment, newspapers battled to be ahead of the curve, while in the more politicized dailies, they sold optimism by trumpeting “our” victories. In two important cases, the Alcázar of Toledo and Madrid, key calls were made at the head office, far from the battlefield.

Despite earlier press interest, the fate of the besieged rebels in the Alcázar of Toledo only turned into a massive news event in September 1936 because the Republican premier Largo Caballero resolved to achieve a very public, morale-boosting victory. On the 18th, the Alcázar was dynamited using explosives placed in underground tunnels: a spectacular explosion sent the southwest tower crashing down, releasing an immense column of fire and smoke. Fallen rubble provided the defenders with parapets they successfully defended, but this was not immediately apparent: numerous foreign newspapers announced that the Red Flag [*sic*] was flying over the ruins of the Alcázar. Many correspondents had filed broadly accurate dispatches, but the headline writers feared missing out on the big news. In contrast, the Francoist conquest of Toledo on 27–28 September was, from a journalistic viewpoint, a strictly behind-closed-doors affair as the Francoists ensured that correspondents only saw the fighting from a remote hillside. Many journalists could see evidence of large-scale killings after they entered Toledo, but these deaths were part of a non-event: there was no “Battle of Toledo” and no *cause célèbre*. The Francoist decision to turn the tap off

at source can therefore be considered brutally effective. Franco only allowed carefully selected right-wing journalists to visit the Alcázar once the dust had settled.

All eyes turned to Madrid as Franco’s seemingly invincible forces advanced on the city; and on 8 November 1936 many newspapers wrongly announced his triumph. This press debacle owed much to the need to beat deadlines, but in France especially there was a split along ideological lines. For leftists, this was the world’s frontline resistance to international fascism, and it was unthinkable to bury that cause prematurely. None of the four biggest progressive newspapers in France did so. Rightist newspapers carried the headline “Franco’s Forces Have Entered Madrid”, as did the supposedly reliable *Le Petit Parisien*.

Too many journalists were in the wrong place, especially on the Nationalist side, where only a handful got anywhere near the frontline. According to *L’Humanité*, the accounts published by the *grande presse* were cooked up in Salamanca or Hendaye by correspondents like *Le Matin*’s, who wrote from his hotel room while listening to the radio. On the Republican side, many journalists had left for Valencia, and the voices of the well-informed ones in Madrid were drowned out. Thus, Henry Buckley’s accurate writing for the conservative *Daily Telegraph* had to compete for space against myriad unauthenticated texts. The *Daily Express* acknowledged that “the biggest barrage in the Spanish Civil War [was] squirted from fountain pens at headquarters”.



In terms of international impact, no news story matched the aerial bombardment of the Basque town of Guernica on 26 April 1937. But this was a different news event in Britain and France. Britain’s longtime fascination with the Basque Country—driven in part by the region’s economic relationship with England—meant that British-based journalists were already in Bilbao covering Franco’s naval blockade before they hastened to the bombed town. A remarkably “pure” news event then

unfolded as flash cables and the first reports on the afternoon of April 27 were rapidly complemented by exceptionally complete dispatches on the 28th.

In contrast, French coverage was highly confused. Havas pressed its correspondent for the kind of material *The Times* had published. *Ce Soir* received a genuine report about the bombing of a completely different Basque village and then dressed it up as if it referred to Guernica. But there was no wall of silence: the event figured prominently in the biggest dailies. Other newspapers were more politicized in the run-up to the first International Workers' Day to be celebrated under a Popular Front government (May 1, 1937). Left-wing French newspapers did not ignore Guernica, but they sought to create a broader anti-fascist narrative, shifting into campaigning mode on behalf of Bilbao, the next prospective “martyred” city.



Internationally, the combined work of a prestigious establishment newspaper, *The Times* (also the *New York Times*) and leading news agency, Reuters, were decisive in launching “Guernica”. And once a story had taken shape, it became difficult to reverse it. In May 1937, Francoist fabrications that Basque incendiaries had destroyed Guernica were reported only mutedly by the right-wing French press—surprising, considering their exceptionally privileged access to the Nationalist propaganda machine. In France, a comparable combination of a respected newspaper and news agency (*Le Temps* and Havas) had given credibility to reports of the mass killings at Badajoz in August 1936. It is telling that the Communist *L’Humanité* considered the testimony of liberal or conservative correspondents quite unassailable. On the bloody bombardments of Madrid of November 1936, it republished Louis Delaprée, who wrote for the conservative *Paris-soir*; for Guernica, it turned to George Steer of the London *Times*.

The heft of these news organizations created a bedrock of shared news that crossed international and ideological borders. In the Irish Free State, for example, all three major Dublin dailies used Reuters’ reporting of the destruction of Guernica in April 1937, even though their divergent sympathies were reflected in their headlines, presentation, and the inclusion of certain details. More surprisingly, even Moscow and Berlin drew from the same well. Nazi Germany had their own news agency, the Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro, but they kept half an eye on Britain. On 21 November 1936, for example, when the *Daily Herald* published a pathbreaking report on the “famous” International Brigades, the German press denounced the “regiment of Frenchmen” [*sic*] going to the “Bolshevist front in Spain”, specifically referencing the British press. Similarly, just before the fall of Toledo in late September 1936, the *Moscow Daily News* cited mainstream British news organizations like the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Times* for a claim that the government wanted to flood the Tagus Valley.

Essentially, in other words, a group of key news organizations were supplying the accepted “facts,” which could then be embroidered, trumpeted or ignored by other media. But limitations in geographical reach and the contingencies of reporting meant that only the stories they covered rapidly and in depth—the killings at Badajoz (but not elsewhere), the siege of Toledo (but not of Oviedo), the bombardment of Guernica (but not of Durango)—entered the “big narrative” of the Spanish Civil War.

What then of the “lying press”? *L’Humanité* relaunched its campaign against fake news in December 1936 and January 1937, when it denounced *Paris-soir* for eviscerating reporting of its own correspondent, Louis Delaprée, on the aerial bombardments of Madrid. In its campaign, *L’Humanité* went out of its way to contrast the “Big Truth”—the fact that Spanish women and children were dying—with the selective or incomplete coverage of events in Spain by the mainstream press.

For all *L’Humanité*’s partisanship, the paper had a point. In his charged descriptions of the effects of the Nationalist bombing campaign, Delaprée was less interested in factuality than in exploring an emotional truth, as he did when he wrote about a dying woman grasping her dead baby in a strangely illuminated night scene. (It may have been this emotional coverage of the Madrid bombings that sparked the inspiration for Picasso’s *Guernica*, as I have argued in these pages.)

Still, the bread-and-butter of press coverage was of a different order: When and where were the attacks taking place? What were the casualty figures? *L’Humanité* was tacitly admitting that the more banal missteps of French newspapers were not “lies” as such: news coverage is messy and accident-prone by nature. As the former correspondent in Madrid Sir Geoffrey Cox told me in 2005, the news, after all, is “the truth as you’ve established it by eleven o’clock that night.”▲

Martin Minchom, Ph.D, is an independent Madrid-based historian. This piece draws on his book The Spanish Civil War in the British and French Press: The Badajoz, Alcázar of Toledo, Madrid, and Guernica News Stories (Liverpool University Press, 2024).

To the Editors:

I found the online session on Dr. Eddie Barsky (February 11) to be very interesting, even though I knew about some of the people who spoke, and I was familiar with much, but not all, of the information that was presented. I didn't "raise my hand" because much of the material I had jotted down prior to the session was of a personal nature—not necessarily of interest to the group concerned with political history. Still, I am sharing it here, in case it is of use to anyone who is writing about Eddie.

As I explained in a previous letter to the editors, Eddie Barsky was a close friend of my father, Dr. Benjamin Segal, an OB-GYN who delivered many of the "red diaper babies" in New York City and worked with Dr. Barsky on various medical and political projects.

Many people addressed Dr. Barsky as "Eddie" and my father as "Ben" (Segal). But when they'd meet it was always "Edward" and "Benjamin," with a twinkle in their eyes and a smile on their lips. Both Edward (1895-1975) and Benjamin (1898-1973) prepared for their professional lives in the same way, attending Townsend Harris High School and City College, long before it became part of CUNY. (I noticed that Dr. Barsky's attendance at the College was not mentioned in the Barsky issue of the *Volunteer* [Dec. 2024]. This probably should be checked in CCNY archives.) Usually, good students were admitted to "City" after their junior year at Townsend Harris, which was located on the City College campus. (The "City" student cafeteria was known for the space it provided for lively left-wing political discussions.)

Both future doctors attended Columbia University's Medical School or "P&S" (Physicians and Surgeons), as it was known. Many years later, my father told me that he was admitted to that prestigious school because it was wartime (the First World War) and there was a scarcity of young men applying to medical school. Otherwise, as a Jew, he would not have been admitted—no matter the outstanding scholastic record that he had. (Eddie, being three years older, would have applied to P&S before World War I began. How did he get accepted there?)

Edward and Benjamin both did postgraduate training in Europe—though I do not know if their paths crossed during any of the years of their European medical education. (Barsky's was in Berlin, Vienna, and Paris, while my father's was in Vienna, Paris, and Dublin.) I know that my father worked his way up the ranks of Lincoln Hospital in the Bronx, becoming assistant chief of the OB-GYN service. Eventually, both doctors saw their private patients at Beth Israel Hospital in downtown Manhattan. Many years later, my father told me that the women members of the medical staff at BI Hospital all saw him for their OB or GYN care—despite which he always remained a "visiting staff" member. He assumed this was a demonstration of the administration's attitude towards his leftwing politics.

Edward's brother, Arthur Barsky, was a famous plastic surgeon who operated on the Hiroshima maidens. Although he apparently wasn't as politically involved as his brother, his awareness of the horror that American nuclear bombs had caused in Japan moved him to devote his skill as a surgeon to help some of the victims.

Drs. Eddie Barsky and Ben Segal both contributed to and helped to raise funds for the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee, or the "Joint" for short. Edward went to jail as a result of his well-known refusal to cooperate with the House Un-American Activities Committee and then had his license to practice surgery revoked for six months. (See the December 2024 issue of *The Volunteer* for details concerning Dr. Barsky's life just before, during, and after his time in jail.)

I don't know to what extent Dr. Barsky was involved in the creation and on-going activities of Physicians Forum, an organization created by doctors to counter some of the activities of the American Medical Association (AMA). During the years that Roosevelt established the New Deal, the AMA fought against the creation of a government entity that would provide universal healthcare in America. "You can't win them all," said Franklin to Eleanor. Some of the details of who did what in the early days of Physicians Forum are contained in my father's papers, which I donated to the Tamiment Archives of the NYU Library. (The finding aid can be consulted here: findingaids.library.nyu.edu/tamwag/tam_681.)

Truth be told, my parents didn't talk much about those years. My mother, Cheri Appel, who was also a pioneer physician, had gone to the Soviet Union around 1934 with Margaret Sanger to teach birth control methods. She returned a socialist, but anti-communist, based on what she'd seen there.

Mimi S. Daitz

New York City



¿TE ACUERDAS?

SALISTE un día de tu patria, porque en el banquete de la vida no te tocaba ni un hueso. De la riqueza, de las maravillas de España, solo alcanzabas la borona y el gazpacho, tras un trabajo agobiador de sol a sol. Si te hubieses quedado, irías a "Marruecos", a matar y a que te mataran, sin más razón que "servir al rey".

Veías en la carretera los raudos automóviles, y en el tren los departamentos de lujo, con bellas mujeres, ricamente ataviadas, españolas como tú, pero tan lejos de tu mano como las más remotas estrellas.

¿Te acuerdas del Casino de tu pueblo? Tú soportabas la lluvia y la escarcha desde la calle, para escuchar los acordes de la orquesta, el cascabeleo de la cristalería fina y la risa malsana de los señoritos ebrios, españoles como tú, que nunca te concebieron español como ellos.

¿Qué eras tú entonces? ¿Sabían algo tus quince años de los zapatos cómodos, los trajes de paño, el pan blanco, el vino generoso, la vida confortable?...

¿Qué eras tú entonces?... Un diente apenas en la rueda de la producción; un hombro para un fusil; muy poco más que los bueyes de belfo espumoso, que ante tí arrastraban jadeantes el arado.

Saliste de tu patria, lo abandonaste todo, para encontrar en los países democráticos de América lo que allí te negaban el cura y el cacique: condición y oportunidades de hombre libre.

Ahora que puedes escoger libremente, recuerda tu condición de paria y decide desde lo profundo y entrañable de tu conciencia la suerte de España:

¿Quieres la vieja España de los militares fac-



ciosos, podrida de convencionalismos, aniquilada por la carroña de su clero estulto y su nobleza ociosa y viciosa, o quieres la España nueva que deseamos nosotros, vigorosa, libre y soberana, con capacidad e igualdad para todos sus hijos?

¿Quieres ser destructor y victimario, con los que se alzaron frente a la justicia y el derecho, ametrallando mujeres y niños, infiriéndonos el ultraje de hollar nuestras ciudades indefensas con la planta extranjera, o quieres luchar a nuestro lado, con el Pueblo, que se ha encontrado a sí mismo y da su sangre generosa por el porvenir de una patria grande y feliz para sus hijos?

Nada esperes de los que para "salvar a España" empiezan por destruirla. Para ellos siempre serás el emigrante o el "indiano". Solo quieren tu dinero. Cuando no lo tengas serás todavía menos de lo que has sido. Los tuyos, en cambio, menos de lo que has sido. Los tuyos, en cambio, menos de lo que has sido. Los tuyos, en cambio, menos de lo que has sido.

Los tuyos, en cambio, menos de lo que has sido. Los tuyos, en cambio, menos de lo que has sido. Los tuyos, en cambio, menos de lo que has sido. Los tuyos, en cambio, menos de lo que has sido.

Relée las páginas borrosas del triste libro de tu vida de expatriado y ayúdalos.

Corta, llena y envía este cupón al Círculo Republicano Español, Prado No. 70, altos, Habana, y recibirás a vuelta de correo el valor de tu donativo en recibos de nuestra Suscripción Pro-Víctimas de la Guerra y Milicianos Españoles.

CIRCULO REPUBLICANO ESPAÑOL

Por la Comisión,
Angel Vázquez Penal



Este eras tú!

en la aldea natal; pero había que eludir el "Servicio al Rey" y el Riff; huir a la sangría, a la miseria....

Imberbe, casi un niño, emigrabas en la sentina de un barco. Te partía el alma dejar a los tuyos pensando el sacrificio de los que dan su vida.

Y la dan, por ellos y por tí, y por las generaciones venideras. Ellos no miden el sacrificio, ellos no piensan en la muerte. Y así, para que otros vivan, ellos mueren donde hayas nacido, porque España es hoy del mundo, de los pobres del mundo, de los que viven tristes porque son esclavos y en España tienen una esperanza de liberación.

¿AYUDANOS! Y esta noche, ahora mismo, en el minuto en que lees estas líneas, de regreso a tu hogar o al trabajo, dí a tu novia, a tu esposa, a tu compañero, a tu amigo, a tus hijos, y lo puedes decir con orgullo; estas palabras: ¡He dado más de lo que podía y de lo que pensaba!

Y entonces habrás escuchado la voz de tu conciencia que te dirá: ¡No te pese lo que has hecho! Has contribuido a abreviar la lucha, a mitigar el dolor, a salvar, tal vez, una vida....

Y tu novia, tu esposa, tu madre, tus hijos, tus compañeros, premiarán tu acción diciéndote cariñosamente: ¡Has hecho bien....!

AYUDANOS
Todo cuanto tengas y puedas y quieras dar para el Pueblo Español, mándalo sin pérdida de tiempo a

Sociedades Hispánicas Confederadas de Ayuda a España
59 HENRY STREET, BROOKLYN, N. Y.

ARKIVO

By James D. Fernández

In this new occasional feature of *The Volunteer*, whose title is the Esperanto word for “archive,” we will present, translate and contextualize iconic foreign language documents related to the anti-fascist struggle in Spain. If you have a favorite document in a language other than English, let us know!

This issue’s document was put out by the *Círculo Republicano* of Havana during the war, to raise funds for the Spanish Republic, particularly from the large community of Spanish emigrants who were living in Cuba at the time. Because many of these emigrants had achieved a certain level of economic success in Cuba, the strategy of this fundraising campaign is to remind the Spaniards of where they came from, of what their lives had been like in Spain, and what the lives were like of those they had left behind. Winning the war in Spain—so goes the implicit argument of this imaginative fundraising plea—would help eliminate the need to emigrate in the first place.

The document was discovered and analyzed by the scholar Ana Varela Lago in her trailblazing work on Spanish emigration and the Spanish Civil War. A slightly different version was found by James D. Fernández and Luis Argeo in a program booklet of the Centro Asturiano of New York produced by the Sociedades Hispanas Confederadas. The role played in the struggle against fascism by Spanish emigrants in places like Havana, Tampa and New York is not always adequately recognized.

Do You Remember? This Was You

One day you had to abandon your homeland because in the banquet of life you weren’t even given table scraps. Amidst all of Spain’s wealth and marvels, all that was left for you was coarse bread and cold soup after toiling away from sun-up to sun-down day after day. If you had stayed in Spain, you would have gone to Morocco, to kill and to be killed, for no other reason than “to serve the King.”

You saw the speedy automobiles on the highways, and on the trains, the luxurious compartments with beautiful women, with elegant outfits—they were Spaniards like you, though they were as out of your reach as the most remote stars.

Do you remember the Club in your town? How, from the street, you would endure the rain and frost to be able to hear the chords coming from the orchestra, the clinking of fine glassware, and the malignant laughs of the drunk *señoritos*? They were Spaniards, like you, although they would never consider you as Spanish as they were.

What were you back then? At age fifteen, did you know anything about comfortable shoes, corduroy suits, good bread, fine wine, and comfortable life?

What were you back then? Little more than a cog in the wheel of production, a shoulder butted up against a rifle, little more than the oxen foaming at the mouth as they struggled to pull the plow before you.

You left your homeland, leaving everything behind, in order to find in the democratic countries of the Americas what the priests and the bosses had denied you in Spain: the conditions and opportunities of a free man.

Now that you can choose freely, remember that you were once a pariah, and from the most intimate depths of your conscience, help decide the fate of Spain.

Do you want the old Spain of the fascist military men, rotten to the core with conventionalisms, annihilated by the dead weight of its clergy and lazy, depraved aristocracy? Or do you want the new Spain that we want: vigorous, free and sovereign, with opportunity and equality for all of its children?

Do you want to be a perpetrator and a destroyer, standing beside those who rose up against justice and the law, who mowed down women and children, and who subjected us to the outrage of foreign boots stomping around and defiling our defenseless cities? Or do you want to fight on our side, the side of the people, a people that has finally come into its own and that generously sacrifices its blood on behalf of a future in which Spain will be great and happy for its children?

Don’t expect anything from these “Saviors of Spain” who begin by destroying the country. For them, you will always be the emigrant or the *indiano*. They only want your money. If you don’t have money, you will be even less than what you have been. On the other hand, your people, the underdogs, will love you for who you are, because you come from the same flesh as them ... They are truly the loyal ones, the Loyalists.

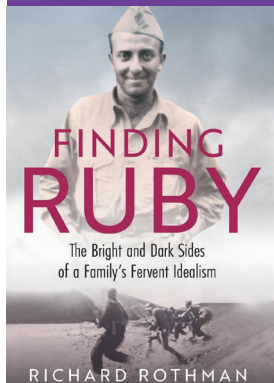
Lend them a hand while you still can. Revisit the blurry pages of the sad book of your life as an exile and help them.

Clip and fill out the coupon and send it in to the Spanish Republican Circle. You will get back in the mail receipts for your contribution to this collection on behalf of the War Victims and Spanish Freedom Fighters. ▲

Book Review

Finding Ruby: The Bright and Dark Sides of a Family's Fervent Idealism, by Richard Rothman London: Whitefox Publishing, 2024, 297 pp.

Reviewed by Daniel Czitrom



One of the author's grandfathers volunteered for Spain and died from wounds suffered at Brunete. The widowed grandmother married her husband's best friend, also a Spanish Civil War veteran, who made it home but never discussed his experiences in Spain. The author's mother struggled all her life to understand why her father had abandoned her to go to Spain. An

uncle he never knew played an important role in the defense of the Scottsboro Boys.

Despite all that, Richard Rothman, who was born in 1952, grew up knowing precious little about his family's involvement with Spain, the Communist Party, and the broader culture of the Popular Front. After a forty-year career as a corporate lawyer, he took a deep dive into his family's past, determined to learn as much of the truth as possible about his long-gone relatives.

His memoir, *Finding Ruby: The Bright and Dark Sides of a Family's Fervent Idealism*, is a deeply felt narrative of family discovery, an example of what I like to call "kitchen table history"—an effort to hold what was learned growing up against more traditional historical sources and narratives. Rothman's book tells two intertwined stories. One focuses on finding out the facts of his grandfather Ruby Schecter's decision to volunteer for Spain, its impact on the family he left behind, and what happened to him there. The second story explores Rothman's own feelings and imagination about what *he* might have done had he lived in the 1930s—and what Ruby might have done had he come home from Spain.

Rothman makes excellent use of some unlikely sources, including a biographical tribute to Ruby written in 1938 by the Lipkaner Bessarabia Progressive Society, one of the roughly 3,000 *landsmanshafts*, or mutual aid societies, formed in the US by Eastern European Jews and dedicated to the hometowns from which they emigrated. Some of his other sources are the pure product of serendipity. After Rothman's mother died, in 2020, his wife Melissa took on the job of going through her mother-in-law's belongings, deciding what to keep and what to throw out. She discovered what in the Rothman family came to be known as "the Briefcase." Stuffed with old notebooks, letters, photographs, poetry, and newspaper clippings, it revealed Ruby, unexpectedly, as a serious student and writer of poetry before joining the Communist Party in 1933. Both he and his wife Rose became active in the Queens, NY branch of the CP, and

both did support work for the Spanish Republic before Ruby sailed for Spain in March 1937 to join the XV Brigade. He was one of the relatively few volunteers who left behind a child (Rothman's mother Taube)—and he did so with the full support of his wife Rose. "I wonder," Rothman writes, "how much thought my grandfather gave to the prospect that he could be killed there and never see his daughter again—that he could be leaving her without a father. My guess is not very much."

Rothman embarked on this project knowing very little about the broader historical context. As a "red diaper grandchild," he learned virtually nothing about it over the kitchen table, where, instead, he encountered mostly silence and deeply repressed memories. Discoveries about his family came first, prompting him to educate himself about the history of the American volunteers in Spain, the American CP, and the Popular Front.

As he takes the reader with him on this journey, Rothman makes good use of the important scholarship produced by ALBA-affiliated authors such as Peter Carroll, Fraser Ottanelli, Sebastiaan Faber, and Adam Hochschild. At several points in his memoir, Rothman speculates on what he might have done had he been in his ancestors' shoes. "Had I lived in the 1930s," he writes, "would I have been a fellow traveler? An independent thinker attracted to the worthy causes championed by the Party but never a member? Or would I have taken the plunge like Ruby, Rose, Harry, and Irving? ... The honest answer is I don't know."

Researching his family history, and writing this book, has clearly given Rothman a deeper understanding of how and why his family members made the choices they did. Yet he sometimes ignores historical contingency—the fact that people never know what their decisions might lead to—in favor of judgments that at times feel reductive. When Ruby, after being wounded in battle, is determined to get back to the Brunete front, Rothman describes his state of mind as a "selfless and courageous, but patently foolhardy, death wish." Of his step-grandfather Harry Nobel, who survived Spain and spent decades as a fur worker, union organizer, and proud autodidact, he writes: "I'd never been able to understand why he continued stitching furs together for virtually his entire adult life."

For Rothman, the revelations of Stalin's crimes in the 1950s taint and somehow negate what people, including his family, did in the 1930s. He sees the story of his grandparents as "a lesson in idealism gone astray—or, perhaps more accurately put, idealism lured astray." While he admires the ideals and sacrifices his forebears made, he finds it unfortunate that "they chose the wrong vehicle, driven by a fraudulent murderer, to rid the world of fascism, racism, and—to use Ruby's words—'Hunger and Cold and Rooflessness.'" He takes solace in the fact that "there weren't a lot of other cars going their way at the time." Today, many of us are still looking for those other cars. ▲

Daniel Czitrom is Chair Emeritus of the ALBA Board of Governors and author of the forthcoming Kitchen Table History: Wrestling with My Family's Radical Past.

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Cecilia London,
daughter of Lincoln
vet Harold London,
at the International
Women's day March
at Union Square in
San Francisco,
March 8, 2025.

Photo Richard Bermack.

