

The Volunteer

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

United We Stand

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Barrio & Bay Resistance
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Unión del Barrio march, May 2016.



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Founded by the Veterans of the Abraham
Lincoln Brigade

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

Editor Print Edition
Sebastiaan Faber / James D. Fernández

Online Edition
www.albavolunteer.org

Editor Online Edition
Sebastiaan Faber

Associate Editor
Aaron B. Retish

Book Review Editor
Joshua Goode

Graphic Design
www.eyestormdesignstudio.com

Editorial Assistance
Phil Kavanaugh

Manuscripts, inquiries, and letters to the editor
may be sent by email to info@alba-valb.org
The editors reserve the right to modify texts for
length and style.

Books for review may be sent to Joshua Goode
Claremont Graduate University
Blaisdell House, #5, 143 East 10th Street
Claremont, CA 91711

www.albavolunteer.org

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,

Extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures. For the first time in the 16-year history of the ALBA/Puffin Award, two recipients received the full prize: Bay Resistance and Unión del Barrio, two California-based organizations that have spent many years developing networks, tactics, and strategies to protect vulnerable populations against state and corporate abuse.

At the gathering on May 2 in New York City, the two organizations' leaders, Adriana Jasso and Kimi Lee, painted a stark picture of the scale of the violent repression and persecution immigrants and other communities have been facing over the past year and a half. But they also underscored two other crucial points. First, the recent escalations build on structures and policies that have been many years in the making. And, second, effective resistance and structural change are not only necessary, but possible. We encourage you to listen to Adriana's and Kimi's sobering and inspiring words on ALBA's YouTube channel.

We know the battle against fascism will be long and hard. But we've been fighting for a long time—and we're inspired and encouraged by the example set by those who went before us. That inspiration is, in the end, what ALBA and this magazine hope to provide. As our April roundtable on teaching antifascism at colleges and universities made clear, every new attempt to silence us is also an opportunity to underscore the relevance of our educational work.

In this issue, we're bringing you Judith Adler's touching story of a letter from a Lincoln vet discovered by chance, decades later, between the leaves of her father's copy of *The Lincoln Battalion*, by Eddie Rolfe (p. 14). Aurélie Viallette, at Yale, reports on her students' moving engagement with a Spanish Civil War archive (p. 5).

A feature article by Jonathan Sherry sets the record straight, once and for all, on Juan Negrín, the much-maligned Prime Minister of the Spanish Republic. Miguel Caballero, who spent years studying the way that the Republicans dealt with the destruction of the war, shows us that conservation of art and architecture can be a revolutionary practice. For more art, we point to you page 17, where Richard Haw guides us through the powerful Spanish Civil War paintings of Leon Bibel.

As fascism rises, so does our resolve to resist it. As we're heading into what will no doubt be a challenging summer and fall, ALBA's small but dedicated staff is working hard to offer you inspiring and engaging programs. Keep an eye out for announcements or visit our event calendar at alba-valb.org/eventcalendar.

None of this, of course, is possible without your steady support. We can't tell you how grateful we are. ¡No pasarán!

Salud,



James D. Fernández,
Co-Editor



Sebastiaan Faber,
Co-Editor

Oliwia Karczmarska Joins ALBA Staff



Joining ALBA's New York office through a year-long fellowship made possible by ALBA's partnership with the Open Horizon Foundation is Oliwia Karczmarska, who will be focusing on social media and fundraising initiatives during the fellowship. Oliwia, who was born in South-Eastern Poland and grew up in Queens, holds a B.A. in Communications from Brooklyn College and an A.A. in Liberal Arts from Bard College. With more than four years of experience in nonprofit development operations, she will work with the leadership team to enhance ALBA's fundraising and communications efforts.

ALBA NEWS

ALBA/Puffin Award Doubles Up to Support Fight Against Fascism

At a moving and inspirational ceremony on May 2 in New York City, two ALBA/Puffin Awards for Human Rights Activism were awarded to Bay Resistance and Unión del Barrio, two California-based organizations that have spent many years developing networks, tactics, and strategies to protect vulnerable populations against state and corporate abuse. The two organizations' leaders, Adriana Jasso and Kimi Lee, held an engaging public conversation with Audrey Sasson, Executive Director of Jews for Racial & Economic Justice, Community, which won last year's award.

Bay Resistance, founded a decade ago, is a powerful network of community organizations, unions, and neighborhood groups organizing to defend our communities and defeat fascism in the Bay Area. The mission of Bay Resistance is to advance racial, economic, climate, and gender justice by activating individuals and families to build a just world for all of us.

Unión del Barrio, based in San Diego, is an independent political organization dedicated to the struggle on behalf of "la raza" living within the current borders of the United States. Since 1981, Unión del Barrio has led struggles to resist *migra* and police violence; defend the rights of workers, prisoners, mujeres, and youth. They unconditionally uphold the right of self-determination of indigenous people, and of all poor and oppressed people throughout the world.

"While history is rife with abuses of state power and policies, it is also replete with those who have stood up, collectively, in defiance," said Neal Rosenstein, president of the Puffin Foundation. "We salute this year's awardees, Bay Resistance and Unión del Barrio, who organize and empower their communities to fight for a more just future."

"Bay Resistance and Unión del Barrio are doing indispensable work," said Jack Mayerhofer, Chair, ALBA Human Rights Committee. "They are matching the urgency of this moment with equal parts courage, resistance, and resilience. In doing so, they set an inspiring example for us all to follow, protecting human rights both within and beyond their cities to help build a more just and democratic society."

"Every day for well over a year now, our members have been meeting, patrolling, organizing, sacrificing, and resisting the most terrible repression our communities have experienced in living memory," said Adriana Jasso, Secretary General of Unión del Barrio. "As we continue to face these attacks, your recognition, generosity, and organizational mission help to remind us that ours is a generational struggle rooted in human rights and principled working-class solidarity. We are honored to be a part of the people's legacy of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade."

"We are in a moment of escalating ICE violence, attacks on elections, and a billionaire-backed agenda that is tightening its stranglehold on working people," said Kimi Lee, Executive

Director of Bay Resistance. "Together, we are building the power and strategy to defend our communities and block authoritarian consolidation. As a multi-racial coalition led by communities on the frontlines of both systemic injustice and fascist scapegoating, we carry within us the same spirit of solidarity for each other that inspired the Abraham Lincoln Brigade to cross oceans. We will use this prize to scale up and deepen our organizing for a future where power is held by the people."

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 created and established an endowed fund for this award in 2010. Since then, the annual award has been granted 16 times. This is the first time in the history of the award that two \$100,000 prizes have been granted.

First Antifascist Education Roundtable Takes on Challenges in Higher Ed

The first in a series of online roundtable gatherings about the challenges and opportunities of teaching antifascist history today took place on April 16, focusing on the situation in American higher education. For 90 minutes, Kirsten Weld (Harvard), Bill Mullen (Purdue), and Deborah Cohn (Indiana Bloomington) discussed questions raised by ALBA's moderator, Sebastiaan Faber, and some 80 audience members. A video recording of the entire event is available on ALBA's YouTube channel. The next online roundtable in the series, scheduled for early fall, will address challenges and opportunities in K-12 education. The series is made possible by the Peter N. Carroll's Anti-Fascist Education Fund.

New Book Remembers Women in the Spanish Civil War

On March 23, ALBA celebrated Women's History Month at the International Center of Photography, in New York, with photographer Espe Pons, the author of *Maybe Never Again*, a photobook about foreign women who joined the Republican struggle against fascism. Pons was joined by ALBA's Jo Labanyi, Cynthia Young, and Kathleen Brown, and Helen Oclee-Brown of International Brigade Memorial Trust, ALBA's sister organization in Great Britain. For a review of *Maybe Never Again*, see elsewhere in this issue.

ALBA Film Series Celebrates Pride Month

ALBA's popular online film discussion series continues this summer. On June 12, as part of Pride Month, we'll discuss Alejandro Marín's 2023 feature *Te estoy amando locamente* (Love & Revolution), which discusses LGBTQ repression and resistance activism in southern Spain in the years following Franco's death. Joining us will be Seville-based scholar, activist, and organizer Carmen Hernández-Ojeda, along with ALBA's Sebastiaan Faber. The online event will start at 4pm Eastern time; registrants are encouraged to view an introduction and the film beforehand.

Film Series Continues with Alvah Bessie and Jaime Camino

Join us on July 5 for a discussion of Jaime Camino's 1968 film *España otra vez* (Spain Again), written by Camino with Román Gubern and Lincoln Brigade veteran Alvah Bessie. The film follows an American doctor who served in the Spanish war of 1936 and returns to Spain thirty years later, during the Franco dictatorship, to retrace his steps. Leading the discussion will be scholar Randal Camardo, the translator and editor of Bessie's *Spanish Civil War Notebooks*.

Spanish Government Creates Truth Commission

The first winner of the ALBA/Puffin Award for Human Rights Activism, the former Spanish magistrate Baltasar Garzón, will be presiding a truth commission whose creation the Spanish government announced in March. The commission, comprised of ten recognized experts in law, human rights, history, and related fields, is tasked with investigating human rights abuses during the war of 1936-1939 and the Franco dictatorship (1939-1975). Its final report will serve to develop policies of reparation and non-repetition in accordance with United Nations conventions.

(1) Representatives from ALBA, the Puffin Foundation, and the award winners; **(2)** Aaron Retish, ALBA Chair; **(3)** ALBA Board members Paco de Onís, Jack Mayerhofer, Aaron Retish, Jo Labanyi, Shantha Susman, Dan Czitrom, Sebastiaan Faber, Gina Herrmann, and Peter Miller; **(4)** Adriana Jasso (Unión del Barrio) and Kimi Lee (Bay Resistance); **(5)** Audrey Sasson (JFREJ) and Kimi Lee; **(6)** Ilene Richman (Puffin Foundation); **(7)** Sabine and Neal Rosenstein (Puffin); **(8)** Adriana Jasso and Audrey Sasson; **(9)** Adriana Jasso; **(10)** Gina Herrmann, Patrice Sulton (NYU Law), Lisa Cohen (Open Horizon); Dennis Meaney and Oliwia Karczmarska (ALBA); **(11)** Jo Labanyi and Aaron Retish; **(12)** Marcus Trujillo (Indigenous Women Rising); **(13)** Adriana Jasso; **(14)** Sebastiaan Faber; **(15)** Jack Mayerhofer; **(16)** Paco de Onís.



Archival Thrills

When Undergrads Discover the Stories That Don't Make It Into Textbooks

By Aurélie VIALETTE

Last year, a group of Yale undergraduates got the chance to immerse themselves in two kinds of archives: the university's unique Spanish Civil War collection and the streets of Barcelona.

Yale's Spanish Civil War collection, painstakingly developed by librarian Jana Krentz, is a small treasure containing posters, letters, diaries, eviction notices, dentist bills, budget ledgers, photographs, coloring books, board games, and postcards from Spanish refugees in France. Rather than discussing famous battles or politicians, archives like this one preserve traces of regular people's lives, documents that were not meant for us to see—but that nevertheless end up before our eyes.

Archives can be hard to read for undergraduates. Many of the documents, for example, are written in cursive. Others are difficult to make sense of without proper context. Once the students overcome these barriers, however, they are hooked. They feel they are directly accessing people's private sphere, getting a glimpse of everyday life during the war. An incarcerated man writing to his little sister has drawn a Mickey Mouse soldier on the envelope to make her smile. A young woman's diary describes the fights she has with her boyfriend and the *horchatas* she drinks with her friends but doesn't mention the war at all. A girl writes happily in a notebook how the Francoist troops are winning battle after battle; she can't wait for them to take Barcelona from the Republicans. Incarcerated individuals with the smallest handwriting use every bit of space on the page to document their experience in prison. There is a visible longing for communication, for writing about hardships, resistance, and suffering. But there is also hope and excitement.

Last year, I was able to incorporate Yale's collection in an advanced undergraduate seminar on the practices of political resistance from the nineteenth century to the war of 1936. At the same time, I secured the Joshua G. Dick and Kristin E. Krebs-Dick Fund from the MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies to take my class to Barcelona. Both experiences proved transformative. Most students had never been to



Barcelona, but neither had they ever set foot in an archive. It was their first time experiencing the thrill of trying to understand history by engaging with authentic documents. For their final paper, I asked them to do an in-depth research project on one archival object of their choosing—a challenge that, more often than not, required further archival digging.

When they got to Barcelona, my students experienced another archive altogether: the city itself. Among other activities, we went on a guided tour of the city inspired by the photographic record of the war. Led by photographer and researcher Ricard Martínez, we saw that the city still carries plenty of signs of the conflict, including bullet marks on the walls of the Plaça de Catalunya. Following in the footsteps of Catalan photographer Agustí Centelles, students got a first-hand sense of the way a photojournalist works. Martínez's tour showed how a single image taken on a Barcelona street in the summer of 1936 could become an iconic representation of the conflict that would travel the world.

The artefacts in Yale's Spanish Civil War collection and the streets of Barcelona allowed my students to get a glimpse of lives and stories that don't usually make it into textbooks or travel guides; these two archives convey the simple but compelling truth that the past—no matter how remote or distant—was once somebody's throbbing present. And the students came to understand that the thrill of that discovery is the origin of true historical understanding. ▲

*Aurélie Vialette, associate professor of Spanish at Yale, is a scholar of archive theories and practices. She's the author of *Intellectual Philanthropy: The Seduction of the Masses* (2018) and co-editor of *Cultural Legacies of Slavery in Modern Spain* (2025).*



The Long Shadow of Anti-Communism: The Distorted Legacy of Juan Negrín

By Jonathan Sherry

Few political leaders of modern Spain have been as maligned as Prime Minister Juan Negrín, who died in exile in 1956. But his personal papers, which have been only open to researchers since 2014, challenge long-standing portrayals of Negrín advanced by anti-Communist critics on both the left and right.



On 25 July 1938, Spanish Republican Prime Minister Juan Negrín authorized what would become the greatest military operation ever undertaken on Spanish soil: the Battle of the Ebro. It was the Republic's most daring offensive, but also its most costly. Following General Vicente Rojo's plan, Republican forces successfully took the west bank of the Ebro River. But they proved unable to hold it against the Francoist counteroffensive and over the

following months suffered massive casualties. The operation was designed not only to strike a blow against nationalist forces and reunite the Republican zone that Franco had split in two; it was also a political signal—an attempt to demonstrate the Republic's vitality to the western democracies in hopes of securing material assistance, increased aid, or at least diplomatic mediation.

But as Republican troops and International Brigades desperately defended

the line with their backs to the Ebro, news arrived of Chamberlain's deal with Hitler in Munich. It confirmed what Negrín and others had feared: Rather than confronting the expansionist Nazi regime, the western democracies would accommodate it instead. It was a death sentence for the young Republic. Within just six months, an internal coup toppled Negrín's government, effectively bringing organized resistance to an end. Spain, now under Franco's rule, remained

The Negrín that emerges from the archival record is a shrewd liberal statesman who put his immense energies to the task of sustaining the antifascist resistance.

ostensibly neutral while supplying Hitler with critical materials for the project of Nazi expansion, even as its population endured decades of hunger and repression.

Negrín fled to Paris in March 1939, settling on the Avenue Henri Martin, where he lived with his companion, Feliciano López de Dom Pablo, until heart disease cut his life short in November 1956, less than three months before his 65th birthday. The documents Negrín smuggled out of Spain in 1939 lay for 75 years gathering dust in the basement of the Paris apartment, wrapped in civil war-era newspapers. After the death of Negrín's son, Juan Negrín Jr., custody of the collection passed to Negrín's granddaughter, Carmen Negrín Fetter. Negrín Jr. had long opposed making the papers public, fearing that their release would further compromise his father. Carmen, on the other hand, believed that the documents had their own story to tell and should be available to scholars. Under her direction, the collection was transferred to Spain, organized, and opened to researchers in 2013 at the *Archivo Fundación Juan Negrín* in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. This achievement was only possible through the tireless efforts of Carmen, Sergio Millares, the late historian Gabriel Jackson, and a few other collaborators.

The collection includes effectively all the documents that crossed Negrín's desk after May 1937, when he became prime minister. It offers a far clearer picture of his conduct during the war, particularly in its final decisive months. That evidence challenges long-standing portrayals of Negrín—advanced by anti-Communist critics on both the left and right—that he was a Communist dupe, a committed Stalinist, or a lazy opportunist who betrayed the Republic. Such interpretations gained wide acceptance during the Cold War, as the script for the Spanish war was rewritten to fit an increasingly rigid anti-Communist framework. In light of the documentary record, however, those interpretations are simply no longer tenable.



The Negrín that emerges from the archival record is a shrewd liberal statesman who put his immense energies to the task of sustaining the antifascist resistance while working persistently to overturn the so-called non-intervention of the western democracies—a policy that ultimately proved fatal to the Spanish Republic. His close collaboration with Soviet advisors and the Spanish Communist Party reflected not ideological affinity but rather a recognition of the hard realities of the war and the necessity for discipline, especially given that the Communists were undeniably the Republic's most effective and organized party of war. Resistance grew increasingly unsustainable not because of Negrín's policies, but because a pervasive anti-Communism—within Spain and beyond it—undermined cohesion, legitimacy, and the Republic's capacity to continue the war.



The archive makes clear to what extent Negrín grasped the fascist threat to Europe. In the days leading up to the Munich pact, he repeatedly argued in diplomatic exchanges that Czechoslovakia and the Spanish Republic faced a common fate if fascist expansion went unchecked. The consequences, he warned, would reach far beyond both countries, extending to the rest of Europe. "The outcome of

Spain's war," Negrín wrote to Franklin D. Roosevelt, "will decide what Europe will be and will set the course of future events around the world... Spain cannot struggle indefinitely against the economic and military power of Italy and Germany when it is blockaded by its enemies with the collaboration of neutrals and friends."

While Chamberlain met Hitler in Munich, Negrín addressed the League of Nations in Geneva, where he challenged the claims of Communist domination in Republican Spain that had been used by the western democracies to justify continued inaction. In a dramatic gesture intended to expose the asymmetry of that posture, he announced the surprise unilateral withdrawal of all foreign forces from Republican territory. Dissolving the Comintern-organized International Brigades was a failed attempt to pressure Italy and Germany to withdraw their own forces in turn.

In the final months of 1938, Negrín stayed all death sentences, in accordance with the recommendations of the British Chetwode Commission, which had been dispatched to Spain to organize prisoner exchanges and curb executions. The archive shows that he took particular care to ensure that the politically controversial trial of the POUM (*Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista*) conformed to the constitutional norms of western bourgeois democracy. He maintained restraint despite the thousands of letters—preserved in the archive—that flooded his office from military units demanding exemplary punishment of the POUM leadership.

Despite claims by POUM leaders, there was no "Moscow Trial in Barcelona." This was no accident. The archive shows that Negrín intervened throughout the prosecution to prevent partisan interference in the judicial process, even directing the translation and publication of the trial proceedings abroad in different languages in order to rally support for the Republic. These measures sought to underscore the Republic's independent, non-Communist character, contrasting its

"The outcome of Spain's war," Negrín wrote to FDR, "will decide what Europe will be and will set the course of future events around the world."

constitutional justice with both Franco's ferocious military trials and revolutionary Soviet justice. In fact, in a meeting with the British chargé d'affaires during the trial, Negrín stated that he could and would eliminate the Communist Party within a week if France and Britain agreed to supply the Republic.

But the moment had passed. Negrín's diplomacy failed to change British and French policy. As Nazi troops occupied the Sudetenland, he turned once more to the Soviets for aid—not because he was a Stalinist, but because he had no other choice. The archive preserves this correspondence. On 7 November, he wrote to Soviet Marshal Kliment Voroshilov, and four days later to Stalin himself, requesting additional military aid. By then, funds from the so-called "Moscow gold" that the Republic had transferred to the USSR had been exhausted. The Soviet finance ministry notified Negrín of this only days after he authorized the Ebro operation. We now know that, despite the Republic's deteriorating situation, Stalin approved a \$50 million credit for war matériel. Some aid made it across the Pyrenees into Republican Catalonia, giving the antifascists a fighting chance. Much more of it, however, was blocked by French authorities under British pressure—despite Negrín's clandestine trip to Paris in January 1939 to demand its release.

The archive preserves a letter Negrín wrote to FDR that same week, imploring him to act on behalf of the beleaguered Republic. "Every minute that we delay taking action is a river of blood and pain," he warned, "but also one more trench lost by the cause of justice." A few weeks later, the U.S. Senate postponed debate on lifting the embargo on Republican Spain; FDR declined to intervene. On 22 January, Negrín had no choice but to order the evacuation of Barcelona, then the Republican capital, and Franco's forces took the city within a week.

What emerges most clearly from the archive is the profound and corrosive effect that anti-Communism had on the Republic. It was fanatical anti-Communism

that motivated Franco's failed coup in July 1936, triggering the war. Once the war began, however, anti-Communism also furnished Britain and France with a rationale for denying assistance to the Republic, while also deepening political infighting within Spain, especially as the Communist Party grew in influence. The archive documents how repeated accusations of "bolshhevization" undermined both military effectiveness and governmental legitimacy, a dynamic evident in the correspondence between General Rojo and Negrín. Most consequential is that, in the end, anti-Communism was the shared political language through which anarchists, liberals, and the conservative wing of the PSOE conspired to



overthrow Negrín's government and authorize surrender—ultimately delivering Republican fighters to Franco's firing squads.

The POUM controversy drew international attention after the party's leader, Andreu Nin, was abducted by Soviet operatives while in police custody and never seen again. Although Republican courts ensured due process for the remaining POUM leaders, the episode exposed deep political fault lines within the Republic. The archive shows that in December 1938, Negrín ordered an internal assessment of the positions of key political figures and parties on the outcome of the POUM's trial. The report concluded that elements from the political center to the left were "working intensely to overthrow the government. They all invite the POUM to be the 'binding agent center of anti-Communism' (in reality, the 'shock troops')." It suggested that anti-Communists within the anarchist movement and the PSOE,

Negrín's own party, had coalesced around a project to remove him from office and form "another government of a marked anti-Communist complexion," with the moderate Julián Besteiro as "the counterweight to Negrín." In fact, within three months, Besteiro conspired with anarchists and socialist leaders to do just that, with catastrophic consequences for the Republic.

The central tragedy is that the anti-Communist coup that ousted Negrín effectively ended the Republic's capacity to resist, bringing the war to an end just five months before the Nazi invasion of Poland transformed antifascism into a generalized European war. Although they never acknowledged it, those responsible must have grasped this in retrospect—especially after the Second World War ended with Europe in ruins, Nazism defeated, tens of millions dead, but Franco's regime intact. Yet in the context of the emerging Cold War, those who had betrayed Negrín and the antifascist cause once again invoked anti-Communism to ease their consciences and rationalize the western democracies' failure to aid the Republic. After all, if Negrín was indeed a Stalinist and the Republic a precursor to the Communist people's republics of postwar Eastern Europe, was it not then correct to refuse it aid? Was non-intervention not then a perspicacious act of restraint? Was Spain not better off for having avoided Stalinism in favor of Franco's brutal authoritarian conservatism?

This interpretive framework shaped the U.S. rapprochement with Franco, a shift grounded, once more, in the regime's uncompromising anti-Communism. That rapprochement brought relief to a fragile impoverished state, bolstering the regime's legitimacy and extending its longevity. But this is only part of the story. The *post-hoc* Cold War retelling of the Republic was not the work of the political right alone. Anti-Communism was equally entrenched on the left, where it was institutionalized through the CIA's Congress for Cultural Freedom, whose Spanish-language section was headed by Julián Gorkin, a former POUM

leader. In this context, George Orwell's anti-Communist account of his time in Spain, *Homage to Catalonia*, was reissued in 1952 to enormous success despite having sold barely 1500 copies worldwide when it was first published in 1938.

Riding the success of anti-Communist classics

Animal Farm and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell's account of Communist domination—and its corrosive effects on truth—made the Spanish Republic intelligible to an increasingly anti-Communist political world. Yet, viewed through that Cold War lens, the Republic's actual political culture becomes almost illegible. In place of the contemporaneous view of Negrín as the heroic leader of Spain's antifascist resistance, Cold War narratives recast him as a loyal Stalinist, adopting the highly partisan and misleading framework of the POUM. In part through Gorkin, the CIA funded and oversaw the publication and dissemination of propagandistic anti-Soviet texts such as Jesús Hernández's *Yo Fui Ministro de Stalin*.

By this telling, the USSR exported the politics of Moscow to Spain, eliminating its enemies through "purges," crushing the revolution, and ultimately abandoning the Republic. Even Henry Kissinger, the Cold Warrior strategist par excellence, understood the war through this POUM–CIA nexus. In the wake of Franco's death, he addressed the Spanish Civil War's relevance in a 1976 report. Explicitly citing the writings of POUM leader Joaquim Maurín, Kissinger claimed that the Communists' "meteoric rise" in Spain resulted from "their ruthless effort to try to exterminate or neutralize their rivals on the left... Their aim was

to establish their hegemony, even at the cost of the war effort. In effect their activities were an extension to Spain of Stalin's purges within the USSR and the Communist movement." Indeed, the United States' Cold War establishment found a ready-made explanatory framework in the POUM–Orwell narrative.



The Cold War has long since ended, and historical scholarship is finally beginning to disentangle its distorting effects on our understanding of Spain's war. It is now possible to acknowledge that the USSR did far more to confront fascism in Spain than did the liberal democracies, whose governments cowered and appeased it. From a post-Cold War vantage, Stalin's operation to aid Spain appears as bold, ambitious, and audacious as the Stalinist system that produced it. Despite its operational dysfunction, Soviet intervention in Spain stands as a significant achievement of the global Communist project in the struggle against fascism. It was neither a cynical weapons test nor a calculated bid for control in Western Europe; rather, it constituted the fraught first step toward the eventual triumph of the Soviet system over the Nazi war machine.

The archival materials also compel a reevaluation of Negrín himself—one shaped not by Cold War ideology, but by hard documentary evidence. In

Spanish-language scholarship, the materials have inspired a new historiography, led by the works of Ángel Viñas and Enrique Moradiellos. In English-language work, the archive is beginning to make an impact, with important contributions by Paul Preston, Helen Graham, and

Gabriel Jackson.

Carmen Negrín herself has played a central role in promoting the archive to a Spanish public that has long been hostile to her grandfather.

Considering these shifts in the field, the day may yet come when the statue of Juan Negrín on Calle Triana in the old center of Las Palmas no longer needs to be routinely scrubbed of red paint. If it does, Negrín's appeal to history

as a moral tribunal—articulated in his January 1939 letter to Franklin D. Roosevelt and preserved in the archive—may at last be borne out: "History will be pitiless and unforgiving to those statesmen who close their eyes to the evidence, pitiless and unforgiving to those who, in their indecisiveness, jeopardize the principles of tolerance, coexistence, and freedom."▲

Historian Jonathan Sherry is the author of Stalinism on Trial: Communism and Republican Justice in the Spanish Civil War (Liverpool University Press, 2025). He has held professorial and research posts in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Spain, and currently serves as Senior Editor and Contributing Writer at Eagle Intelligence Reports, a geopolitical and foreign-policy analysis outlet based in Bucharest, Romania.

Edward Robel (1916-1937), an Idahoan Defending the Spanish Republic

By Steven D. Branting

The First World War II casualty from Lewiston, Idaho, did not die at Pearl Harbor, but in Spain.

In the spring of 1934, as the Great Depression deepened, student strikes were breaking out on campuses across the nation. Lewiston State Normal in Idaho was no exception. Students there formed a chapter of the Student League for Industrial Democracy (SLID) and elected Edwin Robel as its president and spokesman. Advocating an anti-war platform, the SLID pronounced as its goal the establishment of “a classless cooperative society in which men will have an equal opportunity to achieve the good things of life.” By the time Robel graduated, the SLID chapter was ready to merge with the National Student League, the Communist-led organization for college and high school students, to form the American Student Union (ASU), whose National Executive Committee would include George Watt and Paul MacEachron, who both volunteered for the International Brigades. So did Ed Robel.

Born in Kansas in March 1916 as the fifth of six children, Charles Edward Robel Jr. had moved to Lewiston with his family in 1923. One of his elementary school teachers, Miss Lillian McSorley, recalled that he was “the sort of a boy who would stand up for what he thought was right—a fine boy.” Entering Lewiston High School in the fall of 1930, he was drawn to debate and declamation as extracurricular activities, quickly networked

with his new classmates, and consistently achieved “highest honors” status for his grades. The junior class selected him as their president for the upcoming 1931-1932 school term. The editors of the 1933 yearbook, *Purple and Gold*, unknowingly chose for him a prophetic senior motto from the writings of Roman orator Cato—“A young man who blushes is better than one who turns pale.”



High school graduation led Robel to Lewiston State Normal, where his notoriety on campus and in the community started, oddly enough, having nothing to do with debate. After playing no sports in high school, Robel turned out for the Pioneers football team. Coach George Greene was surprised by the 170-pounder's performance in the frosh game of October 18. Calling Robel a “find,” Greene told a *Lewiston Morning Tribune* reporter that “I have a lot of faith in him. He'd fight a buzz saw and is plenty fast.”

After taking his degree at Lewiston State in 1935, Robel enrolled at Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington, where he resumed his emphasis on debate for the next school year. The Depression left millions of college graduates without jobs. “I was disgusted with the daily job hunt and its fruitlessness,” he would tell his family. By early 1937, he was living in San Pedro, California, and still active with the ASU, now at the University of California in Los Angeles.

For Robel, the opportunity to fight fascism in Spain was “too good to be true.”

After the Spanish Civil War broke out in July 1936, Robel wrote that the opportunity to fight fascism in Spain was “too good to be true.” On March 10, 1937, he received a passport and sailed for Spain on March 27 aboard the S. S. *Paris*. He misled his parents as to his new circumstances by having a friend in Southern California post his letters home. In one missive, he would explain to his father:

When I recalled that you and mother have actually been in tears over the thought of your boys having to go to war, I thought I would do less harm to both of you by simply keeping silent on the subject for a while.

Robel was one of 68 young men from the Pacific Northwest who would enlist with the XV International Brigade.

Upon finally learning of where his idealism had led her son, Robel's mother began petitioning to have him returned home. She hounded Idaho's U.S. Senator James Pinkney Pope for help. He would file a request for information through the State Department but could do little more, because, as he explained to the family, Ed “had entered the Spanish army of his own initiative and violated the neutrality laws of the United States.”

Though not without self-doubt, Robel had no intention of returning home. In one of his long letters to his family, he wrote:

This is not solely a struggle which concerns Spain. A victory for fascism in Spain would have dire consequences for the whole world. The fight is still not won. The world is still in danger. The whole point is that the job of stopping fascism has to be done here, irrespective of party or person. I consider myself no better than many who have fallen in this cause, for I know I have less talent than the majority here.

In another letter to his parents, he confessed to them: “All the way over, and even yet, I am arguing with my pacifist past and trying to convince myself I am in a war.”



In a war he was, indeed. His last letter to his parents arrived in early July. A month later, while reading the August 13 issue of the Oklahoma City socialist newspaper *The American Guardian*, they would learn that their son had been wounded in action. And on October 9 the feared news would finally arrive: Robel had been wounded in the stomach during an air attack on the road leading to the capital city and had died aboard an ambulance en route to a field hospital. He was buried in an unmarked grave alongside the road. He was 21.

The October 11 issue of the *Lewiston Morning Tribune* carried an editorial without byline:

You may not agree with the advanced economic and social views held by this young man from Lewiston. You may feel that his act was foolhardy, a daring and futile gesture of youth. You may hold these opinions, yet you also must admire and respect his unselfish devotion to an ideal which he was prepared to defend to the death. Edward Robel forgot himself in what he considered the common weal.

Five years after his death, on Armistice Day, 1942, the *Lewiston Morning Tribune* published a tribute to Robel, taking for granted the seamless continuity between the Spanish Civil War and the subsequent world war against fascism, calling young Edwin the “first casualty from Lewiston in World War II.” ▲

Steven Branting, the institutional historian at Lewis-Clark State College in Lewiston, Idaho, is an award-winning author whose research has produced 10 books and more than 125 articles.

Radical Conservation: How the Spanish Republic Saved Cultural Heritage for the Anti-Fascist Cause

By Miguel Caballero

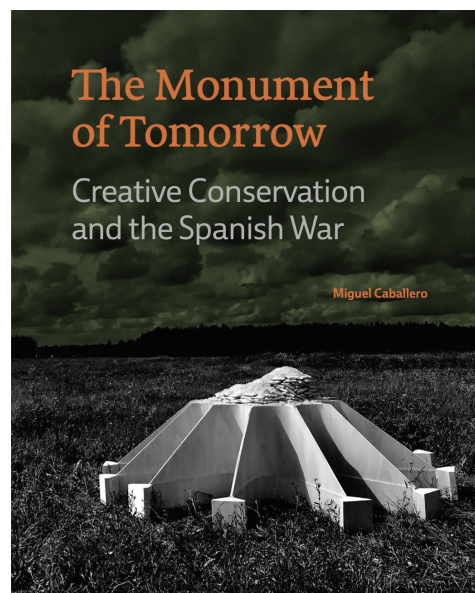
Can conservation be a revolutionary practice? In his new book *The Monument of Tomorrow*, Miguel Caballero shows that it certainly can. The story it tells is also the story of the Madrid that the Abraham Lincoln Brigade encountered—and helped shape—during the war.

In 2012, when I first encountered the art installation *Monumentos ciegos* by Spanish artist Fernando Sánchez Castillo (*Blind Monuments*, 2006–ongoing), it threw me for a loop. The installation showed a collection of scale models of the protective structures that the Republican government commissioned during the war to safeguard Madrid’s monuments—including Catholic and monarchic statues.

“Wait a second,” I thought. “The Republic went out of its way to protect statues of kings and buildings honoring the Catholic Church?” That was certainly not the story I had grown up with in Spain. I knew the Franco regime had legitimized its dictatorship as a form of messianic salvation from an allegedly iconoclastic Second Republic. Even the parliamentary monarchy established in the 1970s and 1980s did not fully embrace the Second Republic as its precursor, in part because of this presumed iconoclasm. How, then, should we understand the wartime conservationism that Sánchez Castillo was documenting and exploring?

Before I knew it, I was hooked, intrigued by the possibility of studying evidence that ran counter to what I had learned in school, in the media, and in broader public discourse. And because I admire Sánchez Castillo’s work, I also wanted to see how academic research might contribute to his inquiry. My research quickly showed me that the Second Republic had, indeed, been iconoclastic. Radically so, in fact, but not in the way that I had imagined.

The 1930s, as we know, were years of intense political radicalization. When the Republic was proclaimed in 1931, people in many cities, including Madrid, took to the streets, defacing statues of kings and setting churches on fire. Liberals, socialists,



anarchists, and communists alike drew on decades of iconoclastic thought and practice of what the anarchist revolutionary Mikhail Bakunin called “creative destruction.” It was impossible, they believed, to build an emancipatory world upon a material order shaped by a logic of oppression. An egalitarian society could not be built without destruction. This helps explain why, in the aftermath of the 1931 attacks on churches and statues, virtually no one was prosecuted.

Paradoxically, also in 1931, leading conservation architects from across Europe met in Athens, where, for the first time, they agreed to think of conservation as a *transnational* duty. Today, this moment is broadly seen as a precursor of what we now call World Heritage. The Athens meeting was a foundational moment for

the global consensus on transnational conservation of monuments and art at large.

Generally, the Second World War is considered the first major testing ground for this ideal. And it is an important story, for sure. Yet it is an incomplete one, told mostly through the genealogy of conservation technicians. Missing from it was a key chapter: the one that shows how, before World War II, conservation became politicized when it was embraced by liberals and leftists.

The first part of this chapter, which runs from 1931 to 1936, is one of rapidly changing strategies. As fascism was consolidated in Italy and Hitler declared himself Führer, calling for mass mobilization and destruction in the name of hyper-nationalism, anti-fascist forces across the world formed Popular Fronts. When Popular-Front representatives gathered to define their strategies at the antifascist conference “In Defense of Culture,” celebrated in Paris in 1935, they faced a theoretical challenge with profound implications: Would the liberal and leftist traditions of

In 1931, leading conservation architects from across Europe agreed for the first time to think of conservation as a transnational duty.

“creative destruction” become indistinguishable from the fascist cult of destruction that was already taking shape in Germany, Italy, and elsewhere? They agreed it probably would. For that reason, they embraced a new strategy: one of *anti-fascist conservation*, an idea embodied in the congress’ slogan about defending culture. In my book *The Monument of Tomorrow*, I explain how conservation came to be understood as an avant-garde weapon, as a revolutionary practice.

The Spanish War was, in fact, the first testing ground for this strategy. (I avoid referring to it as the Spanish Civil War, among other reasons, because it is impossible to understand these and other transnational processes if we reduce this war to a purely civil conflict.) The fascist destruction of Guernica, perpetrated by Hitler’s Condor Legion, is often taken as emblematic of the Spanish War as a laboratory for new techniques of destruction, especially carpet bombing. I focus on the other side of this account: The war should also be read as a laboratory for militant and experimental conservation, a crucial episode in the shift from political iconoclasm to transnational alliances that seek to conserve, not destruct.

When the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and other international volunteers arrived in Spain in the fall of 1936, they witnessed firsthand the evacuation of the Prado Museum. The Madrid they encountered was a capital city in the process of being de-capitalized, so to speak, as everything that constituted it as a capital

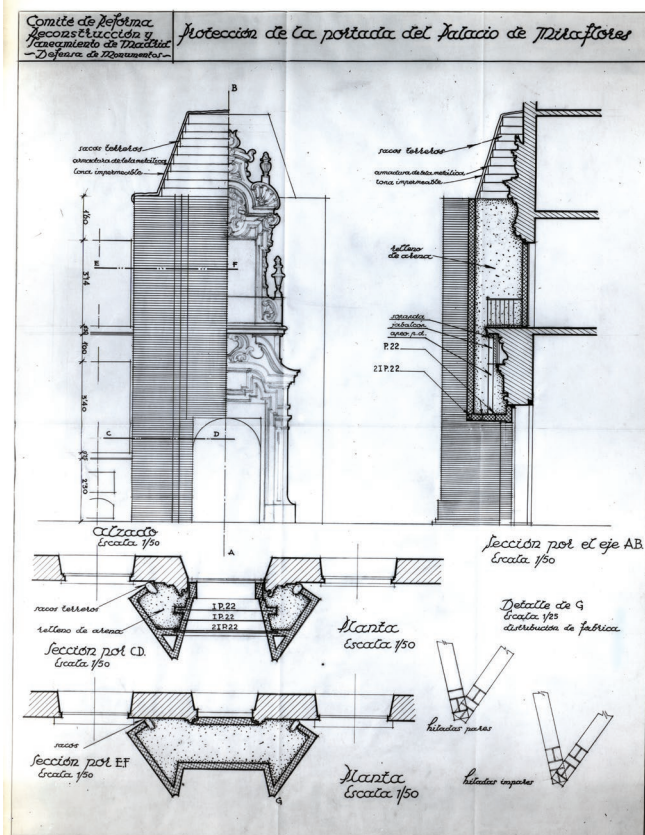
was leaving. The government had fled to Valencia, together with the Prado collection; the gold reserves were being sent abroad to purchase weapons. No government, no crown jewel of the national treasures, no bullion. Just ordinary citizens who overnight had to become *milicianos* and international volunteers struggling to resist overwhelming odds. And resist they did. After the Battle of Madrid, in the fall of 1936, the city entered a period of relative stabilization, transformed into a fortified trench with Francoist forces in near siege. It was in this context, at the beginning of the summer of 1937, that the organized protection of monuments began.

This work of protection was radical in multiple senses. It entailed a process of secularization of art, with campaigns urging people to look at religious images not as expressions of faith but as works of art. Constructions belong to those who build them,

implied another campaign poster, claiming working-class ownership of religious buildings. But if the workers were the proud owners of the buildings they erected, then it also made sense that they would want to conserve them. This, in turn, required training: Madrid’s elitist School of Architecture opened its doors to approximately two hundred workers with no prior university education to instruct them in techniques of wartime protection. This was not only radical in pedagogical terms but also in terms of experimentation—there were no established international protocols for protecting civilian populations or cultural heritage from air raids at the time—and aesthetics. As architects ap-

plied the principles of modernist, rationalist architecture to protective structures, the protections themselves became monumental, imagining what the architecture of a future Republican Madrid might become. That is what the title of my book, *The Monument of Tomorrow*, tries to capture: conservation was avant-garde because it was forward-thinking, oriented toward the future.

During the years it has taken me to finish this book, sensibilities have shifted. When I began the project, the context was shaped by debates over the defacement of Confederate monuments in the United States and other symbols of oppression around the world. When I presented my research, most of the questions I received at the time came from those discussions. Today, I find that audiences are more primed to read the project through the lens of antifascist strategy. At its core, that is indeed what the book is about.



At a moment when the ultranationalist Right is seizing power across the globe, some voices have argued that the primary lesson of the 1930s is to leave as soon as possible. I understand the reasons for that position, but I do not think it is the only lesson. This book explores another one: What does it mean to stay, or even to move toward the epicenter of anti-fascist struggle rather than away from it, as the Abraham Lincoln Brigade did? The book also asks how we might preserve what we have been building, how to protect our achievements under conditions of threat, while at the same time ensuring that this act of conservation can be reconciled with progressive politics. ▲

Miguel Caballero (PhD, Princeton University) is an assistant professor of Spanish and Portuguese at Northwestern University.

HOW A VOLUNTEER'S LETTER FOUND ITS WAY TO HIS DAUGHTERS

By Sebastiaan Faber

In September, the ALBA office received a note from Judith Adler, a retired professor of sociology at Memorial University in Canada. “Recently,” she reported,

I picked up a book that had belonged to my father, Nathan Adler (1911-1994). It was Edwin Rolfe’s *The Lincoln Battalion*, gifted to him by Rolfe in 1941, and inscribed: “To Nathan—for many things we did and thought and talked of together. Ed. New York, June 1941.” As I leafed through the book, a couple of sheets of paper that had been placed between its pages fell to the floor. It turned out to be a letter to my father, handwritten in pencil by Luke Hinman from the Spanish front. The letter is dated April 26, 1938. This means it was written *after* the grueling battles, terrible losses and great retreat of the Spring of 1938 of which Luke Hinman was a survivor. The letter is, for me, a moving testimonial to the qualities of its writer—and of his friendship with my father. Having subsequently come across and read a file the FBI created on Hinman after his return—in which it was reported that though he received the agents courteously he insisted that he had a bad memory for names when asked to name former comrades who, like himself, had left the Communist Party—I felt even more admiration for the manly self-possession of a man whose descendants, I felt, have every reason to be proud of him.

Subsequently, Judith sought to learn more of Hinman, a California labor organizer both before and after the war, chief scout of the Lincoln Battalion and, toward the end of the war, an assistant of Edwin Rolfe. She learned that Hinman himself had been sent out to try to find Fritz, missing in action, whose loss is indicated in the letter. Among the friends—with whom the author of the letter, having survived a hundred deaths, dreamed of once again finding himself—she identified Gertrude as Gertrude Adler, first wife of Nathan Adler; Fritz as Fritz Orton; and Peggy as Fritz’s wife.

As the letter that dropped from the pages of the book was without an envelope, she wondered at the courier system by which it had found its way despite the declared loss of address. At Dr. Adler’s request, the ALBA office tracked down Luke Hinman’s daughters, Priscilla, Agatha, and Clarissa, who were “thrilled” to hear of the letter’s existence and recognized their father’s spirit in its tone.

The letter, which will be sent to the ALBA Collection at NYU’s Tamiment Library as soon as it is re-opened for submissions in the Fall of 2026, reads as follows:

April 26, 1938

Dear Nathan:

Writing to you has been on my mind ever since I arrived in Spain, and now my experiences have piled up to the point where I can’t even start to relate them. Anyway, it’s very difficult to convey them in a letter as everything is tied up with the military, and therefore cannot be related without going out of bounds.

My first action was the now famous battle outside Belchite, which ended five days later at Caspe. I died at least a hundred times in those days, and don’t know yet how I came thru alive.

Two weeks later we went into this last action, and were cut off in the rear and surrounded. We fought our way in the mountains at night thru hordes of fascists. I and Frank fell in the hands of the fascist, but broke away and ran over sleeping fascist troops to get into the mountains. Later we got separated and I worked my way back to our lines along the Ebro River before the bridge was blown up. Frank got through two days later. We are now in the lines, or I should say still in the lines.

After my first action I was made a sargent [sic] and cited. After this last action I was attached to the Wash[ington]-Lincoln Battalion staff. I am C.P. Sect’y of the battalion (why can’t I be just a soldier for a while) and my educational sect’y is a friend of yours. He asked me to send his regards to you. You knew Eddy when you were film editor for the “Masses.”

Peggy is still in Paris, convinced there is a chance Fritz was captured at Belchite.

There is so many interesting things to tell you that I keep dreaming of the day when I can again sit around a bottle with people like Nathan + Gerte, Howard and Adele, Mike and Rose, Dody, Peggy and, there is still a very slim hope, Fritz.

I’ll try to write you later in more detail. As I lost your address I’m not so sure I can find a way to get this to you.

How about writing to me and tell Gerte not to forget me.

Salud,
Luke

April 26, 1938

Dear Nathan:

Writing to you has been on my mind every since I arrived in Spain, and now my experiences have piled up to the point where I can't even start to relate them. Anyway, its very difficult to convey them in a letter as everything is tied up with the military, and therefore cannot be related without going out of bounds.

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Salud,

Luke

Steve and Margaret Nelson with their family during a 1975 VALB dinner in New York celebrating Steve's birthday. Front row (l to r): Tom Nelson, Steve Yurek, Diana Yurek, Josie Yurek, Henry Yurek, Chet Nelson.

STEVE NELSON, AMERICAN RADICAL

By Tom Nelson

On the 70th anniversary of the Supreme Court case *Pennsylvania v. Nelson*, which wiped state sedition laws off the books, Steve Nelson's grandson reminisces about the beloved commissar of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade.

I firmly believe that all grandparents should be considered legends in their grandchildren's minds. As generational touchstones for family history, grandparents help us realize and accept that there is a circle of life. And on a hot summer day, they might also give us that second cone of chocolate-dipped ice cream our dad told us was off-limits.

My grandfather, Steve Nelson, who we knew as "Pa," was the absolute archetype of a grandparent legend. Whenever my brother and I visited him, there was always a second helping of ice cream—chocolate-dipped at that. As I grew older, I also came to learn he was a legend in other senses of the word.

Born in Subocka, in Northern Croatia, in 1903, Pa had emigrated to the United States in 1922. A year later, he had joined the Communist Party, attended the Lenin school in Moscow, and subsequently undertook missions for the Communist International in China and India. In 1937, he volunteered to fight fascism in the Spanish Civil War. In Spain, Pa was shot twice (once in the cheek and once in the leg) and nearly killed on the Belchite front. Later in life, back in the United States, he was indicted, in an obvious violation of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, under the Smith Act of 1940. This year marks the seventieth anniversary of the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision, delivered by Chief Justice Warren, overturning Pa's conviction—and wiping sedition laws off the books.

While he was jailed, he wrote several books, including one about his time in Spain (*The Volunteers*) and one about his trial (*The 13th Juror*). A later book, *American Radical*, deals with his time as an activist, labor rights leader, and member of the Communist Party of the United States. When Nikita Khrushchev revealed the horrors of Joseph Stalin's rule of the USSR, he handed in his party card.



As he grew older, this charming man developed deep, meaningful relationships with each of his four grandchildren: Diana (my eldest cousin), myself, Chet (my brother), and his namesake Stevie (not just my cousin, but one of my best friends).

When I decided to become a writer, I focused on sports journalism. Pa could've told me that sports were trivial, an opium for the masses—something not worth anyone's time. As someone who

had been shot fighting fascism, stood up for labor, and knew he was part of something bigger than himself, he had every right to do so. Instead, he chose to tell me about his time in "The Hole" in that godforsaken prison in Pennsylvania.

"Tommy, when I was in 'The Hole,'" I remember him telling me in my early 20s, "me and the fellas, we talked about sports. It's important. It made us feel better. It allowed us to set aside our worries for a couple of moments and really be passionate about something. So, what you are doing is important."

After Pa died in 1993, I told that story to my brother Chet, who is an actor. His response astounded me. It turned out that Steve had also endorsed Chet's career choice. "The screen, the theater, the stage," he'd said, "it all makes us feel better, Chetty. It's important. People can set aside their worries and just enjoy the show."

For all the love and support Pa provided me, my brother, and my cousins, we are eternally grateful. More importantly, we are forever in debt to every one of the brave men and women who took up arms to fight fascism—as some say, prematurely—ninety years ago.▲

Tom Nelson is an accomplished journalist and journalism educator who lives in Los Angeles.

The Art of War: Leon Bibel and Spain

By Richard Haw

Leon Bibel, a New-York-based painter, printmaker, and teacher who worked with the WPA and was only discovered by the public years after his death in 1995, was primed from birth to identify with the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War.

Born in the Jewish shtetl of Szczecbrzeszyn in 1913 in what is now Poland, Leon Bibel's earliest memories were dominated by the messy and conflict-ridden opening-up of Polish society after the First World War—especially for Jews who could suddenly vote and live for the first time as equals, at least theoretically. In 1927, he emigrated with his family to San Francisco, perhaps the most left-leaning city in the US at the time, “a little Russia, completely isolated and insulated,” as Kenneth Rexroth described it. The Bibels settled in the Western Addition, a multi-ethnic, predominantly working-class community of diasporic Blacks, Jews, Italians, Filipinos, and Japanese. In his early twenties, Leon witnessed “Bloody Thursday,” the violent nexus at the heart of the West Coast waterfront strike of 1934. The following year, he hopped on a train to New York to try and get on the Federal Art Project (FAP), which was part of the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Once there, he joined the radical Artists' Union and eventually got work on the FAP as an art teacher in the Bronx.

Bibel's new friends and neighbors were riveted by the Spanish elections of February 1936 and shocked by the military coup that unleashed the civil war. Like many New Yorkers, Bibel followed events on the Iberian Peninsula closely and agonized over the outcome. His initial artistic response to the war focused on the place of women in the conflict, a rarity for artists at the time. While photographs of women in the war proliferated, few American artists produced graphic artworks that focused on the role of women. Elizabeth Olds—whose *New Women of Spain* was published in *New Masses* in 1936—was a notable exception, as was Bibel. More women fought as combatants in the Spanish Civil War than in any previous conflict. They served on the front lines, played a crucial role as rearguard street fighters, and helped organize and lead local militias. A completely female battalion took part in the defense of Madrid. Bibel depicted this gender revolution in a number of works.

Aerial bombardment was the first awful innovation of the Spanish Civil War that presaged the horrors to come in the Second World War. As described by the American ambulance driver James Neugass, the effects were terrifying: “when [the bombing] comes near, you do not hear it with your ears. The sound reaches your eardrums through the ground and then through your body, as does a dentist's drill or the sound of a surgeons' saw cutting through one of your bones.” In a number of works, Bibel graphically explores the effects of this new form of aerial terrorism.

By 1938, Bibel's focus had shifted from the experience of women and the horrors of aerial bombardment to the plight of those displaced by the conflict. An important body of his work explores the experience of refugees and exiles. These images—like all of his representations of the Spanish Civil War—emphasize how, even though wars might aim at big outcomes, and might come packaged in grandiloquent rhetoric, they happen to regular people. Bibel forces us to gaze upon ordinary women and men in the throes of war and displacement. Such was the fate of so many in Spain. Soon it would be the fate of many across Europe.

GENDER REVOLUTIONS



Women at the Front (1936)—an image based in part on the widely-circulated photograph *Mujeres en el Asedio del Alcázar de Toledo* (Women at the Siege of Toledo's Alcázar)—in which women are defined by their determination and resolve rather than their frailty or domesticity.



In *Flag Bearers* (1936), he continues the theme of strong women marching fearlessly into war. Here, the Republicans raise a fist and a red flag amid a shattered landscape. They are doomed perhaps, but not afraid.



Bibel's *Mother and Child and Bombers* (1936) might seem like a more traditional depiction of Spanish womanhood but once again, Bibel brings defiance to the fore. Despite being tethered to her child, the mother stands high over her male counterparts. She is robust and purposeful, far more so than the men around her, some of whom don't even seem to be able to stay on their feet, despite not having to care for an infant. The object of her anger is high overhead: planes are dropping bombs while buildings burn.

OTHER GUERNICAS



In Bibel's *War Casualty* (1937), a screaming face lies amid a bombarded landscape, a hand broken and twisted out of shape mirrored in the devastation visited upon the surrounding buildings. *Death from the Sky* (1937) depicts a bombing raid, planes trailing off into crosses above while the face of death rains down on those below.

THE PLIGHT OF REFUGEES



Escape over the Pyrenees (1938) depicts the sad plight of thousands forced to scale the mountain range, often the only way out of a country whose Mediterranean coastline was patrolled by Italian Fascists. A man and a woman are so exhausted they are unable to continue. Around the long trail of evacuees, with their belongings hoisted upon their backs, is a barren, forbidding landscape. Behind is the Spanish heartland, seemingly ablaze in fire and destruction. *Exiled* (1939), an oil-painting version of a lithograph from 1938—is cut from similar cloth. A man struggles and slumps forward beneath the weight of his burden. He seems about to keel over, his knees giving way under the effort of his journey. Around him is a wild thicket of branches, hemming him in. In front of him is a blasted tree stump, evidence of lifelessness and destruction.

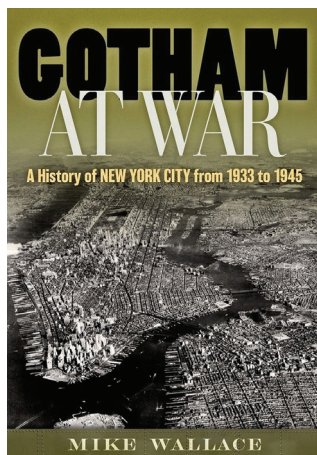
Bibel produced two images specifically named “refugees”. The first was a linocut featuring a family of three shouldering their belongings. The child—apprehensive and frightened—shelters behind her father, his face lined with worry. The mother faces forward as they move off but the father and daughter stare backwards, unable to shift their gaze, as if pursued by a great terror. The family reappears in an oil painting of the same name, only their peril has grown significantly worse. The image seems almost biblical, but the setting is contemporary. Bombers fly overhead ravaging the landscape. The family are sitting ducks, but they are resolute and as yet undefeated. They have nothing but their possessions and their faith. Neither though seem like it will help. Even the road sign is blank, their direction unknown and unknowable. ▲

Richard Haw is a professor of Interdisciplinary Studies at John Jay College of Criminal Justice (CUNY). He is the author of Leon Bibel: Forgotten Artist of the New Deal (2025), along with The Brooklyn Bridge: A Cultural History (2005), Art of the Brooklyn Bridge: A Visual History (2008), and Engineering America: The Life and Times of John A. Roebling (2020).

Book Reviews

Gotham at War: A History of New York City from 1933 to 1945, by Mike Wallace. Oxford, 2025, 976 pp.

Reviewed by **Cristina Pérez Jiménez**



In the third and final volume of his awe-inspiring Gotham trilogy, Mike Wallace once more displays his extraordinary ability to synthesize political, cultural, labor, economic, and intellectual history. Many books in one, *Gotham at War* tells the story of Roosevelt-era New York City politics; New York ethnic communities; New Deal coalitions; labor movements and wartime economies; race

relations and the rise of civil rights movements; the ascendancy of liberalism and multiculturalism; the emergence of modern culture industries and new forms of popular culture; colossal midcentury gender role shifts; Wall Street slump and recovery; radicalism and the Left; a transforming urban infrastructure; the consolidation of American cultural authority and academic prestige; the rise of U.S. global dominance; and the new world order. Despite this vast range, Wallace's brisk, vignette-like chapters unfold like an engrossing saga of the metropolis. While the story expands outwards—including to Rockefeller's incursions into Latin America, Pearl Harbor, India, and Puerto Rico—it always remains anchored in New York and the people who make the city.

Beginning in 1933 with Jewish New Yorkers' responses to the rise of fascism, Wallace also examines how fascism reshaped the identities and loyalties of the city's many other racial and ethnic communities. The war between Ethiopia and Italy found its way into Bronx boxing rings as African American and Italian boxers traded blows. Japanese aggression in China sparked public demonstrations across Chinatown and instigated boycotts of Japanese silk stockings. The Catholic Church, a major political and social force with a vast network of social services, influenced Irish, Italian, Polish, Spanish, and Latin American communities, who collectively made up a quarter of the city's population. Christian fears of godless Soviet Communism muted responses to German Nazism. The horrors of Jim Crow at home and of Jewish genocide abroad created new possibilities for U.S. Black and Jewish solidarity. The Spanish Civil War, the proverbial canary in the coal mine, became a rallying cause that cut across ethnic and religious divisions. As the conflicts in Europe intensified, new coalitions were forged. While antifascist left-wingers found common ground with elite Anglophiles and capitalists concerned about fascist threats to their finances, right-wing

populists joined principled pacifists to advocate against U.S. intervention. No city group was left untouched.

Underlying these developments of ethnic relations and new-found coalitions was a profound shift in the understanding of race and racism. Wallace shows how biological notions of racial hierarchy, central to eugenics, nativism, and Nazi ideology, gave way to a new framework emphasizing cultural differences and relativism, largely driven by the anthropological work of Franz Boas at Columbia University. In the 1930s, New York City became the cradle of a distinctively American liberalism, wedded to a pluralist vision of democracy that stood in stark opposition to Nazi ideologies of racial supremacy. The Statue of Liberty, once primarily associated with republicanism, became a symbol of America's multiethnic heritage.

At the same time, Wallace underscores the contradictions of this era. While the democratic rhetoric and aspirations of the war years, and the overlapping struggles against racism and fascism, helped lay the groundwork for the modern civil rights movement, for example, racial inequality remained deeply entrenched. Paul Robeson, celebrated nationwide for his performance of "Ballad for Americans," was still barred from eating in a Midtown hotel dining room. Housing complexes like Stuyvesant Town were publicly subsidized even as they explicitly barred Black tenants. Japanese Americans were interned with minimal opposition, and non-citizens had to register as "aliens," subject to deportation for "radical" beliefs. As early as 1940, hundreds of public college faculty and staff were subpoenaed and questioned about ties with the legal U.S. Communist Party, leading to "the largest political purge of college faculty in the history of the United States." Among those fired was the first Black faculty member ever hired in a New York City college. The celebration of liberal cultural pluralism and the reality of discrimination and curtailed civil rights co-existed side by side.

Under these wartime pressures, New York's economy was transformed, and the city emerged as a newly ascendant global cultural capital. As a major port city, New York faced the very real threat of attack, a story Wallace tells with the suspense of a thriller. Maritime defenses expanded dramatically, and the city, as the largest manufacturing center in the nation, went into high gear for wartime production and maritime transportation. Wall Street rallied. Women entered industrial labor in the mold of "Rosie the Riveter" and radically altered gender dynamics and household economies. The economic development unfolded alongside seismic cultural changes. New York City became the primary beneficiary of an unprecedented transfer of intellectual and cultural capital as Jewish refugee scholars, artists, and intellectuals arrived in large numbers, fleeing persecution and the devastation of the war. Universities collaborated more closely with industry and government research. Technological industries expanded. Radio and broadcasting transformed political communication and popular culture, and new forms of entertainment—from comic books to Latin jazz and bebop—flourished. Frank Sinatra, Dr. Seuss, Captain America, and the musical "Oklahoma!" all find their way into Wallace's eclectic tale of New York's emergence as a cultural center of the world.

His account also reminds us of alternate futures that were not to come. Debates raged over the continuation of New Deal gov-

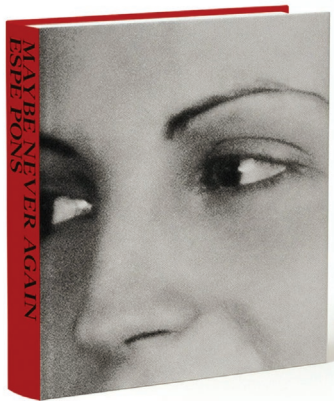
ernmental policies versus free market-driven economics. The repression of radicalism revealed the limits of U.S. liberalism. The horrors of the Holocaust, as they became known, precipitated a drastic political shift as U.S. Jews who had long and largely been opposed or indifferent to Zionism turned, within a few years, toward near-universal support, merging Jewish identity and Zionism in ways that make it now politically fraught to parse.

Although Wallace's account ends in 1945, the book feels urgent and timely, and not only because New York has just elected a Democratic Socialist mayor who models himself after Fiorello LaGuardia. Social inequities and racial segregation continue to shape the city; its most prestigious college campuses are now gated and accessible only through policed checkpoints; academic freedom is under attack; antisemitism is on the rise; the question of Palestine looms large; and a New-York-born president with unchecked dictatorial tendencies embraces an America First rhetoric even as he embroils the nation in overseas wars that threaten the postwar global liberal order. Will effective coalitions emerge once again in Gotham and elsewhere to keep lit the lamp of liberty? Readers may well feel that the coda to *Gotham at War* is being written in our midst.

Cristina Pérez Jiménez is an associate professor in the English, World Languages and Literatures Department at Manhattan University. Her newest book Here to Stay: The Making of Latinx New York is forthcoming with Duke University Press.

Maybe Never Again, by Espe Pons, 2025. 221 pp. \$109. Available at espepons.com.

Reviewed by Peter Stansky



This extraordinary and powerful book by the Catalan photographer Espe Pons tells the story of 21 brave women who went to Spain to support the Republic. While a few of them fought, most of them went as nurses; most were Jewish, and the majority are American. Their vividly told stories appear both Spanish and English, with

one exception. Fifteen of the biographical texts are written by descendants of the individuals.

The three best known of the twenty-one are the French philosopher Simone Weil, the Italian photographer Tina Modotti, and Gerda Taro, the German photojournalist who was tragically killed in a freak accident during the battle of Brunete. Other, lesser-known figures have their voices heard as well, including doctors, nurses, photographers, journalists, militiamen and thinkers who arrived as volunteers from abroad: Elzbieta Bekier, Anni Brunner, May Levine, Dora Lorska, Betty Rosenfeld, Jeanne Roussant, Rachel Schwartzman, Esther Silverstein Blanc, Thora Silverthorne, Clara Thalmann, and Lillian Urmston. The stories provide vivid portraits of life in the hospitals, on the front, and in the rearguard—a vast array of perspectives all

linked together as experiences read through the perspectives of women who shared a commitment of fighting for the Republic, despite the often trying conditions in the hospitals where they worked. Their stories also address the difficulties many faced after the war, particularly in the French camps.

What makes this large-format book special and different are the many photographs. There are images from the war, but the most significant contributions are the striking photographs taken by Espe Pons herself of places associated with the women in the book. Accompanying each of the women's biographies, moreover, are portraits of their descendants. There are also depictions of objects and sites associated with the particular individuals, and several all-seeing eyes, one suspects of Espe Pons herself, on the front binding of the book as well as the opening and concluding images.

Maybe Never Again brings vividly to life what 21 brave women did ninety years ago as they tried to stop fascism and preserve democracy. The book illuminates the past and, as its hesitant title suggests, alerts us to our present parlous state.

Militarized Masculinity in Spain and Chile: Remembering Violence through Film and Literature, by Lisa DiGiovanni, Toronto, 2025, 301 + xiii pp.

Reviewed by Sebastiaan Faber



If there were any lingering doubts about the strong link between militarism and a particular idea of masculinity, a single press conference from the current US Secretary of Defense—who has been less hesitant to declare war on DEI and “gender ideology” than on Iran—will be enough to dispel them. These days, it seems, even adhering to international law and the Geneva Conventions makes one a sissy.

But the mutually reinforcing feedback loops between militarized violence and rigid conceptions of gender go much farther back than the Right's current obsession with “wokism.” As Lisa DiGiovanni shows in her engrossing study of the Franco and Pinochet dictatorships, both regimes were obsessed with affirming a narrow conception of what it means to be a man (and what it means to be a woman). More importantly, that obsession directly shaped their language, their policies, their ideology, their portrayal of the “enemy,” and their repressive tactics, from the criminal code to torture techniques. It's no coincidence, DiGiovanni writes, that in repressive, militarized regimes, the “infliction of severe physical and psychological suffering,” used as a form of social control, is often “intentionally tied to gender identity, sexual humiliation, and the destruction of reproductive organs.”

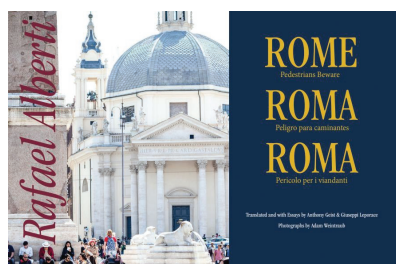
Although Francoism and Pinochetism only overlapped by two years (1973–75), DiGiovanni reminds us there were deep ideological links between them, especially when it came to notions of gender. To make this point, DiGiovanni resorts to a rich

trove of novels, comics, feature films, and documentaries from both countries, ranging from the 1980s to 2022. Indeed, one of DiGiovanni's central contentions is that film and literature, as complex, multivoiced representations of the world, allow us to "connect the dots between masculinity, militarism, and violence" and, with it, "comprehend the causes and consequences of dictatorial brutality." Among the novelists studied are Nora Fernández, Antonio Muñoz Molina, and Roberto Bolaño; the filmmakers include Patricio Guzmán, Pilar Miró, Agustí Villaronga, and Lisette Orozco.

The value of DiGiovanni's comparative approach not only lies in the ways that it illuminates dimensions of the most recent Spanish and Chilean experiences with military dictatorship. Her book also allows and encourages us to see the centrality of ideas about gender in other repressive regimes. This also means that overcoming the painful legacies of those regimes requires attention to gender. "To achieve meaningful social reconstruction and coexistence," DiGiovanni writes about the current situation in Colombia, for example, it is not enough to teach former combatants about human rights. It's just as important to "prioritize gender-sensitive re-education": "Learning new forms of communication, rethinking stereotypes, and gaining depth of self-awareness are part of the equation"—in society at large, but also, especially, in the military itself. The aggressive resistance to precisely those kinds of programs in the current US administration and other far-right governments around the world, and their active attempts to censor books and films that lay bare the links between militarized violence and rigid conceptions of gender identity, are a testimony to the transformative power of those programs, books, and films.

Rome: Pedestrians Beware, by Rafael Alberti, translated by Anthony Geist, with essays by Geist & Giuseppe Leporace and photographs by Adam Weintraub, Swan Isle Press, 2024, 200 pp., 101 color plates.

Reviewed by Sebastiaan Faber



In 1968, as students were revolting in Berkeley, Paris, and Mexico, a 66-year-old Rafael Alberti wandered through the streets of Rome. Along with many of his poet peers, Alberti had gone into exile following the 1939 defeat of the Spanish Republic. While Jorge Guillén, Pedro Salinas, and Luis Cernuda ended up in North America, Alberti made his home in Argentina for close to 25 years. In 1963, when the political situation became increasingly difficult for an active member of the Spanish Communist Party, as Alberti was, he moved to Italy, where he lived until returning to Spain in 1977, two years after Franco's death. He died at 96 in October 1999.

His *Roma, peligro para caminantes* is a lovely collection of poetic impressions of the city, in which feral cats share the stage with notable figures from Italian history and Roman mythology. Alberti's work, like Picasso's, went through several distinct stylistic

phases. Just between the 1920s and the 1930s, for example, he transitioned from the surrealist-inflected avant-garde compositions to epic, combative war ballads. *Roma*, a remarkably diverse collection, puts the poet's formal virtuosity on full display, from free verse to tightly composed sonnets in the style of—and dedicated to—Giuseppe Gioachino Belli.

Swan Isle's stunningly beautiful edition includes Alberti's original Spanish alongside translations into English and Italian by Anthony Geist and Giuseppe Leporace—who both contribute short, insightful essays, as well—along with some 100 thought-provoking images of Rome today by the Seattle-based photographer Adam L. Weintraub, who assumed the daunting challenge of translating Alberti's poems into photographs five and a half decades later.

Sebastiaan Faber is a member of the ALBA board.

Manuel Perriñez-Ginestà (1940–2026)

Manuel Perriñez, who died in Paris on February 9, was the proud son of Spanish Republicans. His father, Manuel Perriñez Martín, served as a major in the Republican army; his mother, Marina Ginestà i Coloma, grew up in Toulouse,

where her family had fled for political reasons. During the war, she served as an interpreter for Mikhail Koltsov, the well-known Soviet correspondent. Her wartime portrait by Juan Guzmán would become one of the most iconic images of the war. Eighty years later, it was on display across Barcelona, much to Manuel's delight.

Growing up, Manuel knew little about his parents' revolutionary past. During his student years in the Netherlands in the early 1960s, he became a Trotskyist. He lived for a time in Italy and eventually settled in Paris, where he worked as a

sociologist and psychotherapist. Over the past fifteen years, he became increasingly fascinated with his parents' lives. He ensured that the largely autobiographical books his mother had written in the 1970s were republished. In 2022, he published *La Bande Mauve, Part 1*, devoted to the complex history of his Spanish family. It was meant to be the first in a series that, unfortunately, he was unable to complete.

—Yvonne Scholten

For Manuel's full obituary, visit the online Volunteer at albavolunteer.org.



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



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At the No Kings Rally in San Francisco, March 28, 2026.

Photo Richard Bermack.

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