

The Volunteer

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

Exhuming IBs in Catalonia

p 18

Exhumation near La Bisbal de Montsant. Photo Steve Dimmen.

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Modotti & Vidali: Antifascist Pioneers p 8

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Founded by the Veterans of the Abraham
Lincoln Brigade

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

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Dear Friends,

“Community” is a word that comes up a lot in our work. ALBA’s mission as an educational nonprofit is to keep alive the memory of the close to 3,000 volunteers from the United States who joined the defense of the Spanish Republic when it was attacked by world fascism. An important part of that mission is to remind ourselves that those men and women were part of a much larger antifascist community—diverse, transnational, and internationalist—that was held together by the shared conviction that fascism, in all its guises, was an existential threat to humanity. Over the past ninety years, that community has evolved, as is only natural. Yet it continues to be alive and well—and it’s still held together by the same core commitment to the antifascist struggle.

Ours is a community of memory, to be sure. But it is also one of action. Much of ALBA’s work, in fact, is dedicated to defending and practicing what we could call *an activist vision of memory*. We don’t believe in remembering just for its own sake. We resist nostalgia, when it is tinged with resignation and melancholy. And we know that our way of connecting the past with the present is up for dispute. Keeping the memory of the past alive, for us, means taking it seriously in all its complexity and contradictions. It’s the only way it can serve to guide us in our own complex and contradictory present.

Although none of the stories in this issue are simple, we hope you’ll find them all touching and compelling, from Ana María Díaz-Marcos’ portrait of the two Spaniards who, as members of the Joint Antifascist Refugee Committee, stood up to the US Congress during the Second Red Scare, to David Jorge’s take on Tina Modotti and Vittorio Vidali, or Steve Dinnen’s cover story on International Brigade exhumations in Catalonia. We’re particularly proud to feature two student authors: Max Hiznay, who writes about ALB vets at Arlington, and Jade Doerksen, who reminds us that the Pacific Northwest was a hotbed of antifascist activism. As our centerfold poster we feature a new, high-res print of what’s probably the best-known group shot of Lincoln volunteers. The story of that picture, which is much less well-known, is told on page 14.

We are a community of memory, yes, but what really binds us together is the ongoing pursuit of that still unrealized future which the Lincolns dreamt of and fought for—a future of peace, equality and justice. We appreciate you and we thank you for your unflagging support of our common work.

¡Salud!



James D. Fernández,
Co-Editor



Sebastiaan Faber,
Co-Editor



Salaria Kea and Helen Freeman at
Madison Square Garden, July 19, 1938.

This photograph is part of the newly digitized collection of the *Daily Worker* archive (PHOTOS 223), now available online at findingaids.library.nyu.edu/tamwag/photos_223_001

ALBA NEWS

Berkeley Robert Merriman Plaque to be Unveiled in November



On November 6, the UC Berkeley campus will welcome dignitaries and ALBA community members to officially inaugurate the plaque dedicated to Robert Hale Merriman, commander of the Lincoln Battalion. Donated to the university by DIDPATRI, a research group at the University of Barcelona, the plaque is an exact replica of the one installed in Corbera d'Ebre, where

Merriman is thought to have died during the retreats in the spring of 1938. A couple of months ago, the president of Catalonia, Salvador Illa took advantage of a visit to the Bay Area to pay a brief visit to the site where the plaque was being installed. If you're interested in attending the ceremony on November 6, watch our channels for updates.

Catalan president Salvador Illa by the Berkeley Merriman plaque. Photo Richard Bermack.

Berkeley Hosts Teacher Workshop

On the morning of Thursday, November 5, the day before the Merriman plaque unveiling, UC Berkeley will host a three-hour, in-person ALBA teacher workshop titled "The United States and World Fascism: Human Rights from the Spanish Civil War to Nuremberg and Beyond." Co-sponsored by the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, the session will be taught by Sebastian Faber. Local educators who are interested in joining may write to ALBA at info@alba-valb.org.

ALBA Roundtables and Screening in Berkeley

On the afternoon and evening of Saturday, November 7, the day after the Merriman plaque ceremonies, ALBA will host two roundtable discussions at the David Brower Center, off the UC Berkeley campus, on the rise of fascism and antifascist activism from a historical perspective. Joining the discussions will be representatives of this year's recipients of the ALBA/Puffin Award. That same evening, ALBA will present a movie screening on the same theme. For details, keep an eye out for ALBA's newsletter or consult our event calendar at alba-valb.org/eventcalendar.

Teaching Antifascism in K-12 Education: An Online Round Table

On September 15, starting at 7:30 PM Eastern Time, ALBA will host the second in its series of online roundtables on teaching the history of US antifascism. While the first event, held in April, discussed challenges in higher education, this time the focus will be on kindergarten through 12th grade.

Natasha Carroll-Ferrary Leads Legacy Giving Workshop

Are you considering your legacy and wondering how you may support ALBA's work for decades to come? Join ALBA's online workshop on legacy giving on October 21 at 6 PM Eastern Time. Leading the event will be Natasha Carroll-Ferrary, an LA-based estate attorney and daughter of the late Peter Carroll.

Jo Labanyi Gives Susman Lecture in November

Join us on November 19 for the annual Susman Lecture. Established in memory of ALBA co-founder Bill Susman, this year's lecture will be delivered online by renowned author and ALBA Executive Committee member Jo Labanyi, who this fall will be publishing her major new book "What Have You Done for Victory?" *A Cultural History of the Spanish Civil War*. (Time to be determined; watch our channels for updates.)

Grandchildren Invite Community to Join Musical Event in December

This year's annual December gathering in New York City of Lincoln Brigade "Grands"—roughly the third generation of descendants—will have a musical theme. Titled "Music of the Movement", the December 12 gathering hopes to highlight the importance of music to our shared history. As part of this initiative, the organizers are inviting everyone to share a brief video of themselves singing sections of the *Internationale*. These recordings will be edited into a video montage showcasing multiple generations of the ALBA community standing together to honor the legacy of the volunteers and the important work needed today. For more information and to get involved, write to info@alba-valb.org.

New Spanish Civil War Board Game

Fort Circle Gamers, a DC-based company founded in 2017 to develop and publish beautiful board games that are grounded in historical events, is preparing to launch *Land and Freedom: The Spanish Revolution and Civil War*, a new 1-3 player war game created by Alex Knight. Each set will be sold with an insert that highlights ALBA's educational programs, along with a 3,000-word essay on the war provided by ALBA.

ALBA Film Series Features Love & Revolution and Alvah Bessie's Spain Again

In our ongoing online film discussion series, dozens of ALBA community members gathered on June 12 for our Pride Month feature, Alejandro Marín's film *Te estoy amando locamente* (Love & Revolution, 2023), which tells the story of LGBTQ repression and resistance in southern Spain in the years following Franco's death. Expertly facilitating the discussion was Seville-based scholar, activist, and organizer Carmen Hernández-Ojeda. On July 5, scholar Randal Scamardo led a lively discussion of Jaime Camino's 1968 film *España otra vez* (Spain Again), written by Camino with Román Gubern and Lincoln Brigade veteran Alvah Bessie, who appears in a supporting role. Scamardo is the translator and editor of Bessie's *Spanish Civil War Notebooks*. Both film events were moderated by Sebastian Faber.

BRIGADISTAS AT ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY

by Maxwell Hiznay

There is one war whose close to 800 American victims are not formally recognized at Arlington: the fight against international fascism in Spain.

Most Americans are familiar with Arlington National Cemetery and its endless rows of white marble headstones extending through the rolling hills of northern Virginia overlooking Washington DC. Situated on land expropriated from the slavocrat Lee family after the Civil War, it is the largest burial ground for American veterans of all wars fought since independence.

There is one war, however, whose close to 800 American victims are not formally recognized at Arlington: The Spanish fight against international fascism. If some of them lie in Arlington's hallowed grounds, it is only because they served in the US armed forces during World War II. Among them are Charles Alfred Barr, Theodore Cogswell, Gerald Cook, Edythe M. Dyer, Irving Goff, Louis Gordon, Burt E. Jackson, Vincent Lossowski, Harry Schoenberg, Kenneth Shaker, Robert G. Thompson, Vincent Usera, Harry Haywood, and Edward A. Carter Jr.

These men represent a diverse crop of Brigadistas. They include three of the eighty-one Black volunteers: Jackson, Haywood, and Carter. Haywood, who served in the Merchant Marine during World War II, was a prominent leader in the CPUSA and the author of the "Black Belt Thesis," which articulated Black Liberation with a Marxist-Leninist focus. Carter, who served in the US Army in the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion of the 12th Armored Division, won a DCS and posthumous Medal of Honor for his service. Other prominent veterans buried at Arlington served in intelligence roles with G2 or OSS. Goff and Lossowski, for example, fought with the OSS in North Africa and then helped coordinate with the Italian resistance.



The first Lincoln volunteer to be buried in Arlington Cemetery was Robert G. Thompson, a war hero of both Spain and the Pacific who earned the rank of 2nd Lt. and a DCS for his service in the New Guinea Campaign. After Thompson's death in 1965, Congress and the US military tried to prevent Thompson's internment in Arlington. "The Arlington Case" made national headlines as Thompson's wife, Sylvia, won her appeal at the US Court of Appeals in DC. Notably, no such controversy occurred in the case of Larry Thorne, a Finnish reactionary who served as a Captain in the Nazi SS and then with special forces in the Vietnam War. In other words, a Nazi mercenary was given a free pass to Arlington—but an American hero of two wars against fascism, not so much.

The fact that only fourteen Brigadistas lie buried in Arlington underscores the intentional repression and erasure of the legacy of these American heroes. All US members of the International Brigades should be officially recognized as veterans of an American conflict. The Spanish War, after all, was also an American War. ▲

Maxwell Hiznay is a historian and educator specializing in the Lincoln Brigade in World War II, the Spanish Transition, and American Communist History. He is a graduate of the University of Mary Washington and a recipient of the 2026 Joseph Carroll Vance Award for Excellence in Historical Research for his work on the Brigade Veterans and their service in OSS during WWII. He is also the current director of the ALB National Cemetery Memorial Group, an organization dedicated to the caretaking, education, and preservation of the historical memory of members of the Lincoln Brigade buried in Arlington Cemetery. <https://sites.google.com/view/albnationalcemmemorialgroup/home>

When the US Congress and the military tried to prevent Robert G. Thompson's internment, the "Arlington Case" made national headlines.

Robert Thomson in 1946. Tamiment Library, PHOTOS.223.001. Public domain.

ONLINE FEATURES

Lene Schneider-Kainer Sheltered German Refugees in Republican Spain—Until She Had to Flee Herself

By Sol Izquierdo



Ca-Vostra, a bar-hotel in the historic center of Ibiza Town that the Austrian painter Lene Schneider-Kainer opened in 1933, served for years as a refuge for artists and intellectuals fleeing Nazism—until she herself was forced into exile. Sol Izquierdo reconstructs a remarkable life.

Born into a Jewish bourgeois family in Vienna in 1885, the painter Lene Schneider-Kainer was educated in Munich and Paris. Around 1910 she settled in Berlin, where she frequented the radical Expressionist circles associated with the magazine *Der Sturm*; her portrait of the famous Jewish poet Else Lasker-Schüler, now on display at the Jewish Museum in Berlin, dates from that period. In 1926 she divorced and embarked on a two-year expedition through Asia to travel the legendary Marco Polo route alongside the journalist Bernhard Kellermann. She returned with paintings, drawings, photographs, and even a film shot in Persia. She also acquired a vast collection of sculptures and handicrafts. Back in Germany, she published her paintings from the trip in newspapers and magazines and held numerous exhibitions. But when Hitler's rise to power led to a decline in her commissions and a growing threat to her life, she decided to move to the Balearic Islands and buy a house in Dalt Vila, in the walled upper part of the city of Ibiza, which she turned into the Ca-Vostra hotel.

In the spring of 2023, I traveled to Mallorca to meet the sculptor Anne Berthelot, Schneider-Kainer's grandniece, to learn more about the period the artist spent in the Balearic Islands.

Read the rest of this article in our online edition at albvollunteer.org.



Fighting Fascism Through a Children's Book Club: A Practical Guide

By Anita Caref



After attending the AABI event honoring the Abraham Lincoln Battalion in Madrid, in February 2025, Anita Caref, a retired adult literacy educator, started an antifascist children's book club.

My mother's cousin, Morris Tobman, a man of great integrity and courage, was a veteran of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. Over the past few years, as my son and his family moved to Spain, and as the United States moved ever closer to fascism, my interest in ALBA grew. Every time I read *The Volunteer* or the online newsletter, I feel less hopeless and more grounded. I appreciate that ALBA doesn't romanticize the past but is committed to preserving the history, teaching present and future generations the truth about what happened in Spain and why it's still important, as well as encouraging people, no matter their age, to think about how they can advance the struggle. After a decades-long career in education, I had been thinking about what I could do to strategically resist the coming onslaught.

It was with these ideas and questions in mind that my husband and I decided to attend the Asociación de Amigos de las Brigadas Internacionales (AABI) event honoring the Abraham Lincoln Battalion in Madrid in February 2025. During those three days, we met people from many places: Spain, Italy, Australia, Ireland, England, Canada, and from every part of the U.S. It was an extraordinary experience. Among the most memorable was our visit to Madrigueras in Albacete, where we heard the townspeople describe how much the contributions of the Lincolns meant to them and their families. When we visited the museum there, I was struck by a mural that included a girl in purple on the crescent moon reading a book. It illustrated the importance of literacy, of reading as a way to build knowledge and foster critical thinking and empathy.

As an adult literacy educator, I've read dozens of young adult and children's books over the past several decades, as these books are often written at a level that's accessible for adults who are not proficient readers. After my retirement, I started volunteering as an after-school homework helper in a neighborhood organization. I had been wondering if there was a way to more systematically engage the nine-to-twelve-year-olds I'd been working with in literacy activities. The purple girl clinched it—could I start a children's book club?

Read the rest of this article in our online edition at albvollunteer.org.



The Cost of Fighting Franco: Two Spaniards Before HUAC

By Ana María Díaz Marcos

In 1946, the leadership of Edward Barsky's Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee stood up to the House Un-American Activities Committee. For Ernestina González and Manuel Magaña, the brave gesture of defiance was only one chapter in their activist lives.

Eighty years ago, the executive board of the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee (JAFRC), founded in 1942 in New York to aid Republican refugees, was summoned to Washington by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). Among the seven women and ten men who testified along with the JAFRC's chair, the surgeon Edward Barsky, were two Spaniards: Manuel Magaña, a merchant from Aragon, and Ernestina González, a librarian from Burgos.

After founding the American Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy in 1936, Barsky had traveled to Spain during the Civil War with a group of American nurses, medical supplies, and ambulances donated by New York organizations that supported the Spanish Republic. In 1942, Barsky and a group of collaborators—including Ernestina—founded the JAFRC with two clear objectives: “As long as there remains a single Spanish refugee or member of the International Brigades in a concentration camp who is in danger or in need of aid, wherever they may be, we will provide it”; and “we will continue to expose to the people of the United States of America the dangers of the policy of appeasement toward Franco.” [For more on Barsky and the JAFRC, see the December 2024 issue of *The Volunteer*—eds.]

Accompanied by numerous friends and supporters, the group, known as “the Eighteen,” traveled by train from New York to the capital on April 4, 1946.



HUAC claimed that the “Joint,” as it was known, was not engaged in humanitarian aid but subversive propaganda. Facing the congressional committee, all eighteen witnesses stood their ground, reading an identical statement in which they refused to hand over the organization's books because they believed that doing so would endanger their donors, the refugees, and their families. “Individually,” they declared, “I do not have possession, custody, or control over any of the material requested in the subpoena that was served upon me ... Thus, I am unable to comply with your order to produce them.” As a matter of principle, they

asserted that they would submit their records to the government or any civic organization—but not to HUAC.

Eighty years later, it is clear that the Eighteen were among the first victims of a witch hunt that had only just begun. During McCarthyism, which screenwriter Dalton Trumbo dubbed “the era of the toad,” thousands of Americans found themselves accused of being “subversives” and “anti-Americans.” Some leftists would cover the spines of their books so no one would know what they were reading, cross out their friends' names from their address books to protect them, or move with their families to Mexico.

The JAFRC's executive board included doctors, professors, film directors, and lawyers. Barsky, González, and Magaña, worked side by side with novelist Howard Fast, labor organizer Charlotte Todes Stern, NYU professor Lyman Bradley, and attorney Ruth Leider, among others. When they stood up to HUAC, they were well aware of what awaited them. In addition to being tried for contempt of Congress, many lost their licenses and their jobs.

The two Spaniards among them, Manuel Magaña and Ernestina González, are interesting in their own right. Born in Aranda del Moncayo, in Aragon, in 1892, Magaña ran a hardware store in Harlem with his brother-in-law. His story illustrates the vicissitudes of emigration: After traveling to Argentina at the age of sixteen, he made it to the United States as a steward on a ship; he

If it is a crime to help and defend the victims of the fascist Franco, ...then I am guilty

then worked for two years in Havana before finally settling in New York. By 1939, in his mid-forties, he had obtained U.S. citizenship, chaired the Spanish Workers' Club, and was a member of the Committee for Spanish Democracy. In 1943, he traveled to Mexico with Ernestina and Barsky to participate in the Convention of Solidarity with the Spanish People. In the face of a grueling interrogation from HUAC, his anti-Franco commitment was unwavering. From his statements it is clear that his command of English was not excellent. When he tried to read his statement, the interrogators suggested sarcastically that he check his pockets for the documents they were asking for. "You're rubbing your nose right up against the gates of the penitentiary here," one committee member threatened.

Ernestina González Fleischman, who was born in 1896 in Medina de Pomar, near Burgos, became a U.S. citizen after marrying Leo Fleischman, a mining engineer from New York. In 1926, she arrived in Nebraska to work as a Spanish lecturer at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. After marrying in Queens, she and Fleischman moved to Madrid. Her husband's tragic death while volunteering at an arms factory in the beginning of the 1936 war [a story covered in our March 2025 issue—eds.] changed the course of her life. After settling in New York with her mother-in-law, Ernestina would spend the next two decades fighting for the Republican cause. In addition to creating the United Women's Committees in 1937, she was a founding member of the JAFRC, contributed to the press, and hosted a radio program titled "The Voice of Fighting Spain." During that long day of interrogations in DC, her impeccable English allowed her to respond with irony to HUAC's questions, which at times appeared surreal. "I think the question is not pertinent," she said at



one point, "but if you say it is pertinent, then I should like to consult my lawyer." Her unflappable demeanor drove some committee members to exasperation.

Eventually, all eighteen witnesses were convicted of contempt. The eight men and five women who stood firm until the end included Magaña and González, who were both sentenced to three months in prison. Barsky, as chair, received a sentence double that length. On the day of Magaña's incarceration, in June 1950, some veterans of the Lincoln

Brigade demonstrated in front of the White House with signs reading, "Franco was Hitler's pal, no U.S. deals with Franco."

Coinciding with the group's imprisonment, Howard Fast published a statement explaining the principles behind their refusal to hand over their books: "We held that American citizens could not be forced to become hangmen and informers." Ernestina and the association's secretary, Helen Bryan, were the last to be admitted to Alderson Prison in Virginia. The press published the archivist's statements after the verdict was announced:

"If it is a crime to help and defend the victims of the fascist Franco, who, with the aid of Hitler and Mussolini, wiped out half of Spain and destroyed its democratic institutions, then I am guilty. My associates and I are victims of Franco's friends in the United States."

In 1955, the JAFRC was dissolved. Ernestina González went into exile in Mexico. She eventually returned to Spain, where, after a legal battle, she managed to be reinstated as a librarian. She died in Madrid in 1976, a few months after Franco. Manuel Magaña continued to run his business, living in the Bronx, and died in Illinois in 1970. Some documents in his family archive show that in the 1960s he continued to send aid and boxes of clothing to political prisoners and relatives in Spain. His Aragonese family recalls that he would send his sister anti-Franco newspapers published in New York. Both remained steadfast in their beliefs and their commitment to democracy. The House Un-American Activities Committee was abolished in 1975. ▲

Ana María Díaz Marcos is a professor of Spanish at the University of Connecticut. Her biography Ernestina González, un pulso antifranquista has just come out with Renacimiento (Seville). Translated by Sebastiaan Faber.



Ernestina González (left) at a protest in DC, 1937. (Spanish Refugee Relief Records, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Columbia Univ.)

David Jorge: “Tina Modotti and Vittorio Vidali Embodied the Spirit of Anti-Fascist Internationalism Like No One Else”

By Sebastiaan Faber

Tina Modotti and Vittorio Vidali, who dedicated a major part of their lives to the Communist International, have long been surrounded by myth. New research by the historian David Jorge suggests that they consistently strove for broad leftist fronts—even when the leadership of the Comintern favored other tactics.

It's hard to believe that one of the world's greatest photographers lived through the so-called Spanish Civil War from start to finish without taking, as far as we know, a single photograph. But the truth is that when Tina Modotti arrived in Republican Spain in late 1935, she had just decided to give up for good the camera that had accompanied her since the early 1920s, when her then-partner, Edward Weston, taught her how to use it. At age 39, Modotti considered her political work on behalf of the Communist International to be far more important than making pictures. In Spain, she carried out counterintelligence work; was in charge of the nursing staff at the Maudes Hospital; and assisted children, women, the elderly, and the wounded during evacuations—including several missions under bombardment in the Sierra de Madrid and during the retreat under Italian shelling along the road from Málaga to Almería.

By the time she had to leave the country in February 1939, her partner Vittorio Vidali—better known as Carlos Contreras—did the same. Vidali had worked for the Comintern since the 1920s, first in the U.S. and then in Mexico, where he had been an organizer at the helm of the International Red Aid (SRI) and worked with Latin American anti-imperialist leaders in exile. In Spain, he was the architect of such key Republican initiatives as the Milicias de la Cultura and, above all, the Fifth Regiment—the backbone of the nascent Republican Army, without which Madrid would not have withstood Franco's attacks. It earned him a legendary status as “Comandante Carlos.”

Although Modotti and Vidali were both born in northern Italy—she in Udine in 1896; he in Muggia in 1900—they spent much of their lives in the Americas. Modotti, who had grown up as an immigrant in San Francisco, died young, in 1942. Vidali, on the other hand, lived until 1983. After World War II, he had a distinguished political career, first as secretary-general



of the Communist Party of the Free Territory of Trieste and later as a deputy and senator (1958–68).

“If there were a prototype of the ideal agent of the international communist movement, Vidali and Modotti would have fit it perfectly,” writes Spanish historian David Jorge in a recent article in the journal *Historia Mexicana*. He argues that the Italian couple—thanks in large part to their early experiences in the United States, Mexico, and Central America, where they allied themselves with activists such as Julio Antonio Mella, Farabundo Martí, and Augusto Sandino—were pioneers in their commitment to

the kind of internationalist solidarity that would reach its peak during the years of the Spanish Civil War and the Anti-Fascist Popular Front (1935–39). Throughout their activist lives, both consistently strove for a broad leftist front, even during periods when the leadership of the Communist International favored other tactics.

David Jorge, born in Lugo, Galicia, in 1987, is a professor and researcher at the Center for Historical Studies at El Colegio de México (COLMEX) who has spent nearly twenty years studying the international context of the Spanish war. He has combined extensive archival research with oral history, conducting lengthy conversations over the years with Santiago Carrillo and other central figures in the political history of the twentieth century. His article on Vidali and Modotti is part of an ambitious project that will result in at least three books, the first of which, *De la revolución al antifascismo: La Komintern y el desarrollo de una causa transnacional* (From Revolution to Antifascism: The Comintern and the Development of a Transnational Cause) came out in 2023. We spoke in mid-June.

When Modotti and Vidali were working from Mexico with the Anti-Imperialist League of the Americas (LADLA) and with figures such as Mella and Sandino, the Communist International did not precisely favor that kind of alliance.

In the US, Mexico, and Central America, Modotti and Vidali allied themselves with activists such as Julio Antonio Mella, Farabundo Martí, and Augusto Sandino.

Exactly. The split between the Soviets and the Chinese nationalists in 1927 marked a turning point. Following Soviet policy, the Comintern shifted between 1928 and 1934 to the policy of “class-against-class,” which ruled out the possibility of alliances with non-communist forces. But Vidali and Modotti came from a very particular background, a multicultural crossroads. As immigrants in the United States and Mexico, they had to operate within networks that were not only transnational but also ideologically quite diverse. This gave them a wealth of experience, a kind of flexibility, know-how, and sensibility that most of the international communist movement lacked prior to 1934. In the United States, where Vidali took charge of the protest campaign against the convictions of Sacco and Vanzetti, he paved the way for a new kind of mass communist internationalism, led by the International Red Aid. But the growth of the International Red Aid, which was quite spectacular, was curtailed almost immediately by the shift toward a class-against-class policy. Later, in Mexico, the LADLA would also serve as a sort of training ground for Modotti and Vidali in dealing with non-communist actors. In some cases, this took the shape of a collaboration; in others, they managed to co-opt them. Farabundo Martí, the Salvadoran, fully joined the communist movement, for example, while the Nicaraguan Augusto Sandino was always a unique kind of fellow traveler. The Cuban Julio Antonio Mella, the Peruvian José Carlos Mariátegui, and the Brazilian Luís Carlos Prestes each presented their own complications. The same was true of the Mexican agrarianists. Anti-imperialism encompassed many things—too many, in the eyes of the communists of the time.

Despite charting their own course, Modotti and Vidali never became dissidents.

Quite the contrary: as dedicated activists, they were always loyal to the Comintern. This is also how they experienced the less pleasant aspects of activism very early on. But even though they never strayed far from the party line, they exercised a level of autonomy that is rarely seen in the international communist movement—let alone before the Popular Front shift of 1935, which in reality began to loom as early as 1933, in the wake of Hitler’s rise to power.

In other words, what constituted a major shift for the Comintern in the mid-1930s was not such a significant one for Modotti and Vidali.

Today we’re quick to slap the *transnational* label on historical figures and phenomena. But Modotti and Vidali truly were transnational, thanks to their involvement in national and regional struggles in the Americas. That is why it was Vidali who, in 1934, went to Spain to organize aid for those persecuted for the October Revolution. He and Modotti represented a primal form of anti-fascism—an Italian variety, if you will—which they conceived as fundamentally compatible and in harmony



with the anti-imperialist struggles in which they had been involved in the United States and Mexico. They helped establish a politically and ideologically cross-cutting front whose mobilizing force relied on a combination of well-designed propaganda and acts of solidarity. While the social-democratic Second International was still criticizing the October 1934 revolt, it was the communist Third International that came to the aid of imprisoned Spanish socialists and the families of victims. At the same time,

the International Red Aid sought to unify political actors for the anti-fascist cause. By prioritizing the containment of fascism over revolutionary goals, the communists pushed for moderation, while it was the Socialists who pushed for radicalization.

Despite their loyalty, Modotti’s and Vidali’s relationship with Moscow proved quite complicated over the years.

It was. If they managed to survive it, it was because they always had the support of Elena Stasova, the top leader of the International Red Aid, who never stopped looking out for them. She worked to get them out of the USSR in 1934, for example, when—even before the great Soviet repression began—Vidali was already arousing suspicion and hostility because he said what he thought and operated quite independently, clashing with Communist orthodoxy. In 1939, after the Spanish Civil War, Stasova realized he and Modotti would be in too much danger in the Soviet Union, so she sent them back to the Americas. In Moscow, Vidali’s autonomy was read as insubordination, defiance, or potential treason. In fact, in Mexico, he would eventually fall from grace just ten days before the failed assassination attempt against Trotsky led by David Alfaro Siqueiros. Victorio Codovilla, the Comintern’s leading official in Latin America, who had also operated in Spain, then sent a report to Moscow harshly criticizing Vidali, who was subsequently placed under quarantine. This is why Vidali did not participate in the Trotsky affair, contrary to what was later claimed. Moscow in fact requested reports on Vidali’s character and reliability from various Spanish communists, including Enrique Lister and Enrique Castro Delgado. Influenced by Codovilla’s report, the Soviets came to suspect that he might have somehow sabotaged the assassination attempt led by Siqueiros through his influence over former Mexican combatants in the Spanish Civil War.

The years following were nightmarish. Vidali was treated like a pariah, without ever understanding why, as he survived by working as a journalist for Vicente Lombardo Toledano’s newspaper. He died without ever finding out what had happened. In my research, however, I discovered the root of the conflict. In 1939–40, discussions were taking place between New York and Mexico City about what to do with Hernán Laborde and Valentín Campa, leaders of the Mexican Communist Party who had been expelled for their opposition to Trotsky’s assassination. Codovilla wanted to impose harsher punishment on Campa and Laborde. But Vidali was opposed. That was what led to his ouster and ostracism: the Vidali-Modotti couple was shunned



Tina y Vittorio in Moscow, 1930s.

by both the Mexican and Spanish communists. Thus, the party lost two people who could have been highly beneficial for the initial integration of the communist exiles in Mexico—a group that, truth be told, behaved like a bull in a china shop. For Vidali and Modotti, personally, it was a moment of total breakdown. In the end, Codovilla—a political boss if ever there was one, a manipulator, and a Stalinist in the truest sense of the word—proved to be a disastrous figure for Latin American communism, just as he had been in Spain during the war.

Modotti's and Vidali's methods were actually more effective.

Yes, for several reasons. As longtime transnational actors, they had their own circles and networks wherever they went. Their only homeland, in the end, was the Communist cause. The international communist movement was their anchor to the world. Their ties to the world of art and culture were particularly powerful. As a photographer, Modotti had an artistic sensibility that predated her militant political commitment. When Vidali arrived in Mexico, Modotti connected him with filmmakers, painters, writers, and poets—contacts that would serve him well when he arrived in Spain and had to garner support from the global cultural community for the Republican cause. In Mexico, Modotti and Vidali had learned to work together with a broad range of people, whom they nevertheless saw as comrades in the struggle. Once in Spain, how could they not also view socialists like Negrín, or bourgeois republicans like Azaña, as essential fellow travelers? Vidali's success with the *Milicias de la Cultura*—working with poets like Antonio Machado, Pablo Neruda, and Rafael Alberti—also stemmed in large part from his Mexican experience. Later in life, he revealed

himself to be a wonderful writer. His memoirs are extraordinary, and he left behind a couple of unpublished manuscripts of great historical value. I had access to those thanks to his son, Carlos Vidali, and the Italian-Mexican writer Claudia Marcucetti—two people of immense solidarity and with a deep awareness of the value of delving into the past, without any fear of exploring some of its darker aspects. The oral history interviews that Concepción Ruiz Funes did with Vidali in 1979 show an exceptional clarity of perspective and sensitivity. All of which refutes the slanderous myth of Vidali as a sinister agent of international communism, an alleged accomplice in the deaths of Trotsky, Modotti, and many others. In 1981, in Trieste, the Mexican writer Elena Poniatowska—who at the time was writing her novel about Modotti, *Tinísima*—interviewed Vidali over the course of several days. What emerges from the transcripts, which she generously shared with me, is once again Vidali's clear-eyed, self-critical vision. He clearly explains the failure of the Soviet model and the disintegration of the international communist movement, almost a decade before the fall of the Berlin Wall!

In your article, you distinguish two phases of the international anti-fascist front: the period from 1935 to 1939, which was interrupted by Stalin's pact with Hitler; and the period following the German invasion of the USSR in June 1941. You suggest that the second phase had little to do with the first.

Yes, indeed, what emerged in 1941 was something else entirely: a form of anti-fascist unity based on pragmatism, emerging from the necessities of the war, but also drenched in mutual

Vittorio and Tina, seated in the middle, with friends in Mexico, 1940.

As a photographer, Modotti had an artistic sensibility that predated her militant political commitment.

mistrust. The German-Soviet pact of August 1939 is often described as a massive betrayal of the anti-fascist struggle. And of course it was disturbing. But it must be seen in connection with the democracies' capitulation to Nazism a year earlier, in Munich, and with the democracies' betrayal of the Spanish Republic in 1936. Both London and Moscow sought to divert Hitler's appetite. I mean, what were the Munich Agreements if not a non-aggression pact between the Western democracies and Nazi Germany? It was the equivalent of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact—which, conversely, can be seen as the Soviet version of Munich. Both sets of agreements followed the same logic and sought to achieve the same goal: to avoid isolation in the interwar ideological triangle by shifting the confrontation toward the other two points.

In any case, it was a logic that destroyed the spirit of the anti-fascist front.

Of course. That's why, for me, the alliance that emerged in 1941 stands in stark contrast to the proactive, mass-mobilizing, cross-cutting kind of anti-fascist unity that we saw in the 1930s. We must bear in mind that, in reality, the international communist movement never truly became *internationalist* again after 1939. What I mean is that it regained the truly global perspective it had in the 1930s. In that sense, the Spanish Civil War was indeed "the last great cause," as it has since come to be widely known. Following the Munich Agreement and the fall of the Spanish Republic, the shift by Stalin and the international communist movement was drastic and irreversible. It is no coincidence that, at the time of the victory at Stalingrad in 1943, Stalin dissolved the Comintern, which in any case had become an empty shell over the previous five years. This shift marked the nationalization of the Communist cause—the "Sovietization" of an international communist move-



ment that, at bottom, had always been at odds with the purely national interests of the USSR.

In addition to archival research, over the past 20 years you've also spent long hours interviewing figures such as Santiago Carrillo, his wife Carmen Menéndez, Vidalí's son, and half a dozen people who could have been your grandparents or great-grandparents. I imagine that, inevitably, those personal exchanges give rise to an emotional connection of sorts. How

do you manage that dynamic, especially now that almost all of them have passed away?

You're right that there is an undeniable emotional dimension to this type of work. But precisely for that reason, it's important to rein in the subjective aspects of the relationship between the researcher and his subjects. What has driven me all this time is an obsession: to know and understand as much as possible about a set of distant historical episodes. For me, the direct, human contact with survivors from that time has served to satisfy that

curiosity. But that also meant that I could never allow oral sources to take precedence over primary sources or documentary verification, no matter how gratifying the conversations may have been. Of course, it has been fascinating to speak face-to-face with the protagonists of the history—or prehistory—that I am in the process of reconstructing so obsessively. The opportunity of direct, human contact with some of the last witnesses to that history is nothing short of a privilege. ▲

Sebastiaan Faber teaches at Oberlin College. A Spanish version of this interview appeared in CTXT: Contexto y Acción (www.ctxt.es) in July.



Tina Modotti, 1921. Photo Edward Weston.





WRY SMILES IN RETREAT

The Story Behind an Iconic Lincoln Brigade Photograph

By Sebastiaan Faber

The iconic group portrait of raggedy Lincoln Brigade volunteers that's become ALBA's calling card over the years is now finally available in an uncropped, high-res print. When and where was it taken? And who exactly are these 29 men?

Sometimes the images we see most often are the ones we know least about. Iconic photographs appear to say so much that it seems unnecessary to ask questions. Still, I'm a bit embarrassed to confess that I never seriously researched the precise circumstances that led to the powerful image that ALBA has used most frequently over the past couple of decades: the iconic group portrait of 29 Lincoln Brigade volunteers in Spain that we feature as the "hero image" on ALBA's website. I'm sure you've seen it: All men but four are wearing hats; almost all of them are smiling—though some, arguably, wryly. And all are looking into the camera, except for the Black soldier near the bottom row who seems engrossed in reading a copy of *The Forverts*, New York's leading progressive paper in Yiddish.

Although I have been strangely incurious about this picture, I did try several times to locate its original—if only to produce a better copy than the version we've been using, which I made some years ago by scanning it directly from *Edwin Rolfe: A Biographical Essay and Guide to the Rolfe Archive at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*, a small book published by Cary Nelson and Jefferson Hendricks in 1990. As the title indicates, most of Eddie Rolfe's archive, which includes manuscripts, letters, and photographs, is at UIUC. I promised myself I'd drive down there sometime to see if I could locate an original of the group portrait. But I never got around to it.

Last fall, it occurred to me I could also ask the librarians to check for me. To my surprise, they said they could not find it. Only then did I remember that the ALBA Collection at NYU's Tamiment Library also holds a set of Rolfe Photographs. When I finally managed to make a research appointment, it didn't take me more than 15 minutes to find not just a small, contact-sized print of the image but the original negative.

Thanks to the Tamiment staff, we're now pleased to present a new, uncropped, high-res scan from that negative as this issue's centerfold. The print in the 1990 book on Rolfe includes a legend in which 20 of the 29 men are identified, an updated version of which we include here. Some ten years ago, the indefatigable Ray Hoff worked, with help from Chris Brooks, Alan Warren, and others, on ID-ing several others. Can you help us identify the handful of volunteers who are left?

In addition to the names of the people portrayed, there are other questions. When and where, for example, was this photograph taken? We can begin narrowing down the dates thanks to the three people in it who weren't part of

the battalion: Edwin Rolfe, Joe North, and John Little. Rolfe belonged to the International Brigade staff—he edited *The Volunteer*—but wasn't normally at the front. In mid-April, however, he wrote to his wife Mary that he'd be "spending some time with the Lincoln Battalion." Nelson and Hendrickson explain he was responding to a "call for all able-bodied men behind the lines to join the Lincolns for front-line duty." Joe North was the correspondent in Spain for the *Daily Worker* and the Canadian *Daily Clarion*. John Little, finally, was the executive secretary of the Young Communist League, who visited Spain around that same time. The June 1938 issue of the *Young Communist Review* included a story on Little's "six weeks' tour of the Spanish battle front," stating Little entered Spain on April 2. And indeed, the April 13, 1938, issue of *The Volunteer for Liberty* reports on Little's arrival, noting that he carried "1,000,000 American cigarettes and ten large crates of personal packages for the Americans in the Brigade." "You will probably have already seen and spoken with Comrade Little by the time this number of *The Volunteer* reaches the brigade," the article adds.

In a dispatch datelined in Barcelona on May 7 and published on May 8, Joe North reported in the *Sunday Worker*, the DW's weekend edition, that when Little "came with news from home, they flocked around him almost within earshot of the enemy, across the river. They were the large contingent of Y.C.L.'ers among the volunteers here. Others not in the Y.C.L. crowded about to talk with the American youth leader." North added that he "accompanied Little on most of his trips to the brigade out in the lines" and describes a conversation with him "in the lines held by the Fifteenth Brigade—deep entrenchments, a complicated network with numerous machine-gun emplacements." (The same piece came out in the *Clarion* on May 10.)

Combined with North's report and Rolfe's letters, this information allows us to date the photograph between roughly April 10 and May 8. To narrow down the date further, we consulted the notebooks that Alvah Bessie—clearly recognizable in the picture, crouching to the far right—kept during these days. And, yes, his entry for April 11 reads: "John Litel, secretary Y.C.L. here, spoke to men, change in American sentiment." (Bessie's misspelling of the Y.C.L. secretary's name makes sense; having worked in Hollywood, he must have thought of the well-known Warner Brothers actor John Litel.)

Could the photograph have been taken that same day? It doesn't seem likely, because Rolfe hadn't joined the group

yet. After a hospital stay to take care of an infected tooth, Bessie returns to the battalion on April 21. On April 22, he notes that "Edwin Rolfe ... turned up." On April 28, as the group moved to the small town of Darmós, Bessie reports a visit by Joe North, "Daily Worker correspondent." On May 4, he once again notes that the day before, there were visits from "Bob Minor, Joe North, Hans (division commander) and other notables." Although it seems possible the photograph was taken on May 3, 1938, it could have just as easily been April 28. Ray Hoff tells me he leans toward April. "Some of the officers whom we know were on the May 1-10 payroll are not in the photo," he points out. "George Watt and Howard Goddard, who were assigned to the 35th Estado Mayor at the time, appear; but Jim Bourne isn't in the picture, and neither are Milt Wolff and Fred Keller. I would have thought Milt would have posed with a New York Y.C.L.'er if he had the chance."

In any case, it was a difficult time for the Spanish Republic and for the US volunteers. In a chaotic retreat in which Robert Merriman and Dave Doran, among others, were lost, the Lincolns had been forced to cross the Ebro River. On April 15, the rebel army broke through the Republican lines and reached the Mediterranean coast, isolating Catalonia from the bulk of the remaining territory held by the Republic. Here are more of Bessie's notes from early April:

Reached Mora de Ebro about 4:30 p.m. after 25 hours flight—sore feet, exhaustion. Fascists arrived in Mora soon; we blew bridge, retreated to other shore. Hundreds of men from all IB units, complete disorganization, men wandering around looking for their units. No command; demoralization. [April 2]

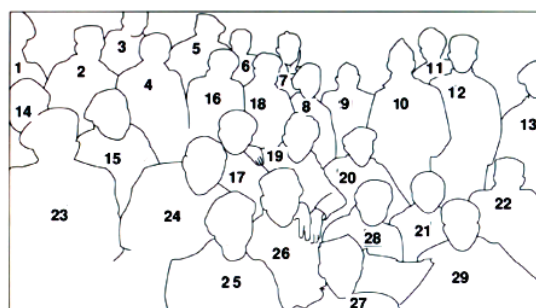
No question that IB is now badly broken up; most of Lincoln-Washington Battalion still missing, also Mac-Paps, Franco-Belge, Thaelmann, etc. ... Obvious that the fascists will reach sea and cut Spain in half. ... Unless France comes in here Spain is sunk. [April 3]

Innumerable stories of narrow squeaks—some men had to swim the Ebro and wander around naked till found and clothed again. (George Watt, Joe Hecht, etc.) [April 4]

Behind the lines at Mora la Nueva (on the Ebro). A week now since we were surrounded above Batea (March 31-April 1) and the battalion was split up. 70 men (about 35 Spanish) only have been rounded up—none of the *Estado Mayor* (Merriman, Doran, Wolff, Ofsink—captured or killed). Apparent now that almost 70% of the [Lincoln-Washington] is missing—either dead, captured or still wandering in the hills, trying to get across the Ebro. ... Situation extremely difficult, demoralization great. [April 6]

Behind Mora la Nueva. Resting in gullies in the hills. About 120 of the [Lincoln-Washington] have turned up. Some swam the Ebro. Capt. Wolff, [Battalion Commander] has got back—only one of *Estado Mayor*. Doran and Merriman, Ofsink, etc still missing. A good 3/4 of the battalion killed, captured, missing or fucked off. Men's nerves on end with uncertainty and inactivity. [April 8]

At the end of April, the remaining US volunteers dug in on the east side of the Ebro, between García and Darmós, as their battalion and the rest of the XV Brigade were reconstituted with mostly Spanish recruits. The volunteers smiling in the photograph, in other words, were survivors who had lost their commander, Merriman, only days earlier, along with other friends and comrades. The picture represents a short period of relative quiet. Less than two months later, the 27 volunteers—not counting Little and North—returned to action to fight the Battle of the Ebro, in which at least two of them, Aaron Lopoff and Thomas O'Flaherty, would die.▲



- | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1- Howard Goddard | 16- Unknown |
| 2- Thomas O'Flaherty | 17- Ivan (John Gerlach) |
| 3- Elman Service | 18- Marcus Ransom |
| 4- David Drummond | 19- Rico Rusciano |
| 5- Unknown | 20- Edwin Rolfe |
| 6- Unknown | 21- Gabby Klein |
| 7- Unknown | 22- Alvah Bessie |
| 8- Roy Sheehan | 23- George Watt |
| 9- Unknown | 24- John Little (YCL) |
| 10- Corporal Robert Nelson | 25- Sidney Bassin (tentative) |
| 11- Bill Maher (tentative) | 26- Herman Tabb |
| 12- Paul Merkel | 27- Valentine Koppel |
| 13- Lenny Lamb | 28- Joe Taylor |
| 14- Unknown | 29- Joe North (Daily Worker) |
| 15- Aaron Lopoff | |



THE SOVIET OF WASHINGTON

The Washington State Left and the Spanish Civil War

By Jade Doerksen

Few Americans know how integral Seattle has been to radical movements of the 20th century. In fact, it was Seattle-based Lincoln vets who played an important role in the installation of the first US monument to the International Brigades.

The very first public monument to the International Brigades that was dedicated in the United States is not in New York, or Chicago, or San Francisco, but Seattle. What might seem unlikely to some makes perfect sense to a Washingtonian like me. (And no, I don't mean Washington D.C.)

Outside of Washington State, few Americans know how integral Seattle has been to radical movements of the 20th century. From the Seattle General Strike of 1919 to the first Black Panther Party chapter outside of California to the internationally renowned protests against the World Trade Organization, Seattle has been a hotbed of political action.

Naturally, Seattle would not be Seattle if it did not produce some of its own Spanish Civil War volunteers (or *brigadistas*). In the 1980s and 1990s, Seattle-based Lincoln vets played an important role in the installation of the monument to the Brigades. Erected in 1998, it stands near the University of Washington's student union building, which happens to be about eight miles from my childhood home.

Even though I was born and raised in Washington, it wasn't until I moved east to attend Wellesley College that I first heard about my state's deep ties to the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and the American labor movement. Determined to learn more, I embarked on a thesis project as a part of my BA in history.

Straddling both coasts, I was able to review archival material at the University of Washington, Brandeis University, and New York University. Especially meaningful to my research were the papers of brigadista Robert (Bob) Reed, which include a project on "Northwest Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War." Born in Texas and a Washington resident since the 1950s, Reed worked through the 1980s and into the mid-1990s to collect the stories of brigadistas with connections to the Pacific Northwest.

In several places, the collection refers to a man named Jeremy Egolf, who I hadn't ever heard of, but who, working as a student assistant to UW historian Joan Ullman, turned out to have



conducted a large number of oral history interviews. As I skimmed through some other University of Washington Labor Archives materials, I came across a list of his interviewees. To my astonishment, they not only included brigadistas but also important local Communists, some of whom had been "dispersed" underground in the McCarthy era. I decided to track Egolf down.

In our digital age, you can find people surprisingly quickly—perhaps to a worrying degree. But in this particular moment I wasn't complaining. After some time googling, I found what I thought might be Egolf's contact information. I mulled it over for several days until, late one night, I emailed him. I'm so glad I did. For the past year, we've corresponded back and forth, sharing ideas and findings. Egolf gave me access to notes and

transcripts of many of his interviews, making my project much more complete.

With the help of Reed's collection and Egolf's correspondence, I was able to ascertain that there were approximately 70 brigadistas with ties to Washington prior to their enlistment. They made up the vast majority of all volunteers from the Pacific Northwest. Most of them were members of unions, and if not, they had been inspired by and contributed to the labor movement in one way or another.

Early union popularity in the Pacific Northwest partially stemmed from the fact that Washington industry, especially in the 19th and 20th centuries, was based on extractive industries such as logging, mining, and fishing. In the interwar period, it was commonplace for 100 or more workers to die in Washington logging accidents each year, and many more were injured. Logging camps were often dirty and infested with bed bugs and other pests. Sailing was not much better with horrible food, subpar outfitting, and unfair labor practices. The isolated and harsh working conditions in these industries often helped radicalize workers and bring them together in the face of adversity.

By the 1930s, Washington was one of the most unionized states—a statement that has remained true almost a hundred

The roughly 70 brigadistas with ties to Washington made up most of all Lincoln volunteers from the Pacific Northwest.

years later: with 18% of employed Washingtonians holding union cards, we are the fourth most unionized state in the nation. Still, following World War I and under massive government repression, worker militance had declined markedly in the first decades of the century. Few major strikes took place in the Northwest in the 1920s—until the onset of the Great Depression. The first wave of activism in the 1930s was primarily organized by the Unemployed Citizens' League (UCL), founded in 1931 to distribute food and organize workers. Seattleite and future brigadista Max Farrar was an active member, and so, most likely, was James Kenneth "Jim" Bourne, another future brigadista.

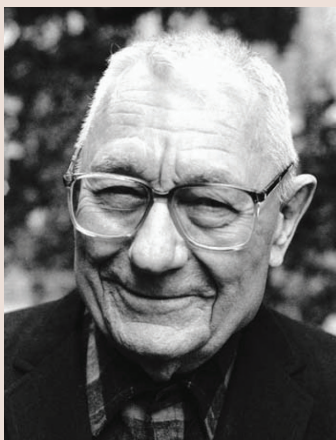
As the government's inability to address the Great Depression became clear and the country's economic turmoil worsened, workers turned to the streets in marches, protests, and strikes. As various industries across the state organized, labor unions were born, split, and restructured. The first industries to organize large-scale strikes were those with preexisting union inclinations—particularly IWW-heavy maritime and timber industries, which organized the 1934 Longshoremen's Strike and the 1935 Timber Strikes (or "the Great Lumber Strike").

This Depression-era cascade of left-wing organizing promoted class consciousness and solidarity among workers across the globe. Once the war broke out in Spain, it contributed to a sense of duty that workers worldwide felt toward their comrades in Spain. Unions and left-wing political organizations, especially the Communist Party, helped create a social milieu in which enlistment in the International Brigades felt not only important but, to some, like a moral obligation.

So many of the brigadistas from Washington were unionists that in 1937, the King County Workers' Alliance, which organized workers of Works Progress Administration projects, asserted that about twenty of its members alone were joining the Brigades. Other Washington State brigadistas were involved in unions such as the International Woodworkers of America, the Marine Workers Industrial Union, the Sailors' Union of the Pacific, the Industrial Workers of the World, or the Seattle Cooks and Assistants Union.

The CPUSA was also essential. Most Washingtonians who enlisted were card-carrying party members, while the few who weren't were often fellow travelers. The popularity of the CP in 1930s Washington led United States Postmaster General James Farley to allegedly joke in 1936 that there were "forty-seven

Bob Reed in the late 1990s. Photo Richard Bermack.



states and the Soviet of Washington." (In fact, the quote inspired me to title my thesis *The Soviet of Washington: The Washington State Left in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939*.) During the 1935 Timber Strikes, on July 4, at least 5,000 loggers marched through the streets of Aberdeen and Hoquiam in Grays Harbor on Washington's Olympic Peninsula, known for its dense old-growth forests. According to sometime Washington CP District Organizer Heinie Huff, of those thousands, only two belonged to the CPUSA: Lloyd "Red" Johnson and Ernest "Ernie" Kozlowski. Both later

went to Spain, where Johnson died. Kozlowski was killed in action during World War II. Their story illustrates it was not just union members but especially party members who made the journey to Spain.

Eventually, the union-fueled radicalism in Washington's major industries spread to other parts of the state. Support for left-wing organizations became quite common. This was particularly true for Seattle, where the Washington Commonwealth Federation (WCF), a popular-front organization created in 1935, ran progressive democratic candidates for all levels of elected office.

By 1937, almost all left-wing organizations in Washington supported the Republic ideologically, and many also did so financially. Early that same year, the WCF's official newspaper declared, "We are for the Republic of Spain. We are the defense of democracy and popular government. We declare THE GREATEST TASK AMERICANS CAN HELP ACCOMPLISH IN 1937 IS THE DEFEAT OF THE FASCIST INVASION OF SPAIN." Unfortunately, Franco's forces were not defeated, and much of the radical organizing the WCF pushed for would eventually be subjugated. Still, for a specific and powerful moment in time and space, it felt possible. Even the revolution felt possible.

To me, it is no mistake or coincidence that Washington was home to these thoughtful, radical workers and that many brigadistas moved here later in life, continuing to promote antifascism and anti-imperialism until their final days. ▲

Jade Doerksen is a recent graduate of Wellesley College. After obtaining her BA in History and Spanish in May 2026, she returned to the Northwest for work. Hear more about her project at the Pacific Northwest History Conference in Spokane, WA, in October 2026. She'd love to hear from anyone who'd like to read her thesis or knew any of the brigadistas from Washington.

Catalan Government Recovers Lincoln Brigade Remains

By Steve Dinnen

The Catalan government has recently disinterred the remains of 45 international combatants from a mass grave, hoping to match them with descendants. They include two Americans.

No war goes gently. For the 2,700 Americans who went to Spain from 1936 onward, it was especially brutal. Nearly 800 men, close to one out of three, died on the battlefield or in field hospitals. Moreover, their burial spots are largely unknown. Soldiers killed in battle typically were buried where they fell, with no marking or headstone so as to not tip off fascists who might later prowl through the area. Even the graves of the volunteers who died from wounds or ailments away from the battlefield are often not documented. Recently, however, the government of Catalunya has disinterred 45 combatants from a mass grave near the Battle of the Ebro, hoping to match them with descendants who might accept them for individualized reburials. We know that two Lincoln Brigade fighters are among them.

Until well after the war, we only knew the burial site of three members of the Lincoln Brigade. Abraham Schwartz, who died of Typhoid in 1937 in a hospital, was buried in the village cemetery in Saelices. Bernard Singer, who was killed in action during the Ebro offensive in September 1938, lies in a mass grave near the railway tunnel at Argentera. John Cookson, finally, who was killed in action on September 12, 1938, was buried alongside a stream just outside of Marca, Catalunya. Cookson's is the only known tombstone of a Lincoln: It was hidden under weeds off the road and authorities during the Franco regime and never discovered.

Since then, two more graves have been discovered, though they lack tombstones. They can be found just a few kilometers from Marca, in the small Catalan town of La Bisbal de Montsant, which was known in 1938 as Bisbal de Falset. On the western edge of the town there is a large cave—rather, a gaping hole in the side of a mountain—that during the Battle of the Ebro, beginning in July 1938, was used as a field hospital. Known as Cova de Santa Lucia, it was staffed mostly by medical personnel from England. Aside from sheltering patients and medical personnel, the cave also had a small fresh-water spring. (The British histo-

rian Angela Jackson wrote about the cave and the people who worked there in her 2005 book *Beyond the Battlefield*).

The cave hospital is just west of the village. The town cemetery, just to the south, received bodies of soldiers who perished. Someone—a graveyard attendant, perhaps—kept a list of

bodies that shows the date the bodies arrived, the name of the deceased, and a military unit. In 1954, the Justice of the Peace of La Bisbal de Falset used this information to compile a list that identified 70 soldiers who were buried in the town cemetery.

All were members of the XV International Brigade. The government of Catalunya later determined that 14 were international volunteers from Poland, Romania, Germany, and other countries. Two are Americans: number 35 on the list is Milton Gale, identified as *comisario* (commissar); no. 40 is identified as “Graunille Payme,” *soldado*. This is Granville Paine; the list contains spelling errors.

Milton Meyer Gale was born Milton Galitzka in 1914. According to his biography in the ALBA online database, he spent two years at the College of Miami (more probably Miami University in Oxford, Ohio). He was single and a writer and joined the Communist Party in 1934. He also belonged to the YCL and Spanish CP. Gale sailed to France on February 20, 1937, aboard the *Ile de France*, and arrived in Spain on March 15, 1937. Gale served with the XV BDE and as commissar attained the rank of *teniente* (lieutenant). There is no mention in the database about the wound he sustained at the Battle of Ebro. It is not known exactly when he was wounded or died, but the cemetery list indicated that his body was brought there on July 29.

The body of Granville Walker Paine arrived the next day. The nature of his injuries and death date also are unknown. But his service record account as compiled by ALBA show he had an active and troubled time in Spain. Born in 1915 in Everett, Washington, Paine had a high school education, was single, and worked as an assistant manager at an air transport com-



Until well after the war, we only knew the burial site of three members of the Lincoln Brigade.

pany. (Could that have been Boeing Co.? It was founded in Seattle in 1916 and assembles its aircraft today in Everett at Paine Field, coincidentally named in honor of Paine's uncle, aviator Lt. Topliff Paine). Paine, who belonged to the YCL, received a passport on July 16, 1937, and quickly set sail for Europe, arriving in Spain on Aug. 6. He served with the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, from whom he and three companions stole an ambulance and headed for the French border. They were arrested there. After contracting jaundice, Paine was hospitalized in Figueras. Afterwards he was jailed for 30 days; then he was sent back to Brigade. He was reported in a hospital in Híjar on April 5, with an unrecorded ailment, but rejoined the battalion in time for the Ebro offensive—and his death.

The list compiled by the local Justice of the Peace was not a secret. Indeed, Jackson included a copy of it in her book. She also wrote extensively about post-war visits to the cave hospital and cemetery by medical aid workers and families. The Catalan government took the list into account as exhumations began across the autonomous community and nationwide.

Exhumations of mass graves from the war have been frequent in Spain over the past 25 years. More than 100,000 mostly civilian victims of right-wing violence remain unaccounted for. After Franco's death in 1975, family members undertook efforts to recover their remains, but those efforts were cut short in the early 1980s, following the failed military coup of 1981. That coup failed in the sense that it did not bring about a regime change, but some would argue that the coup succeeded in that it revived the fear that had allowed Franco to reign for almost forty years; spontaneous exhumations were abandoned. It was not until the year 2000 that a new wave of volunteer-led exhumations began, now with professional assistance from forensic anthropologists. A first Historical Memory Law, passed by the Spanish parliament in 2007, established limited government support for searches for the disappeared, which increased somewhat with the Democratic Memory Law of 2022. At the regional level, however, memory policies vary widely.

In Catalonia, the regional Department of Justice and Democratic Quality, through the General Directorate of Democratic Memory, has been especially active in identifying gravesites. It has identified hundreds of places where dead are buried and has carried out dozens of excavations (also called interventions or exhumations). The intervention at La Bisbal de Montsant was included in its 2023-2025 Graves Plan, and on June 25, 2025, work began.

A 20-person-strong team of archaeologists, anthropologists, and geneticists set about with shovels and picks, then hand tools. "It was a complex and meticulous eight-month excava-



tion," said Anna Santamaría López, who works at the General Directorate of Democratic Memory.

The fieldwork took so long due to rainy weather in Catalonia. It was extraordinarily wet and cold, so work periodically stopped. "On the other hand," she said, "considering that the mass grave was located in a regular cemetery, we needed to be extra careful with the area and do the major part of the work manually."

Most of the buried, skeletons by now, were in a supine position and well aligned with space between bodies. That suggested they were buried with care and respect. The remains show clear evidence of their connection to the battle and activity at the cave hospital. Traumatic injuries compatible with projectile impacts from firearms and other wounds typical of a war context were detected in several skeletons.

In all, 50 bodies were recovered. They are currently in the laboratory of Iltirta Arqueologia, a private company of archaeological experts that was contracted for this project. At the time of the exhumation a specialized anthropologist selected the most relevant bones of each individual to later extract the DNA sample in the laboratory. Usually, the sample is extracted from the jaw. Further details on their findings and technical reports can be accessed via the Generalitat de Catalunya Justice Department repository.

The end goal of the project is to identify the victims and return them to their families through the Missing Persons Census and the Genetic Identification Program. The fate of the bodies of Gale and Paine is unknown at this time. There are no records of descendants of Gale. A niece of Paine's visited La Bisbal de Montsant in 2008 and saw both the cave hospital and cemetery. She also met with town officials. Another niece, reached in July by *The Volunteer*, said the family was not interested in participating in a DNA match.

Not all families can be identified, and not all will participate in a DNA match. Still, F. Xavier Menéndez, director general of Memoria Democrática, has emphasized that this intervention "allows us to continue making progress in the recovery of the victims of the Civil War and in the restitution of their dignity.

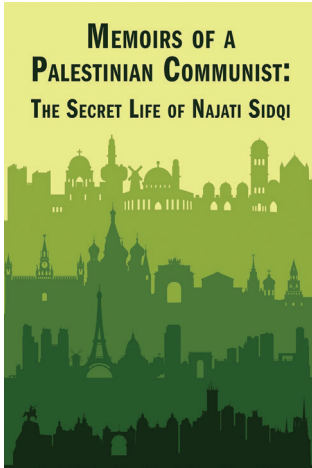
"Every pit that is opened," he said, "is an opportunity not only to return the identity to people who disappeared in the context of the war and to respond to the families who still claim them today, but also to fulfill a democratic, political, and social duty with the collective memory of the country." ▲

Steve Dinnen lives and works in Des Moines, Iowa. He travels to Spain frequently and has long held an interest in the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade.

Book Reviews

Memoirs of a Palestinian Communist, by Najati Sidqi.
University of Texas Press, 2025. 164 pp. \$21.95

Reviewed by Sune Haugbolle



The early Palestinian Communist Najati Sidqi became well known as a writer between 1920 and 1940. He died in Greece in 1979 after a long life of activism, exile, and travels across Asia and Europe. His memoirs, now finally available in English, were originally published in Arabic in the 1970s.

Born in Jerusalem in 1905, Sidqi was pulled into the struggle from the moment he first encountered com-

munist ideas as a teenager. Not long after, when he was only 20, he was sent to Moscow, where he spent five years. The political and intellectual training he received in Russia served him later in life when he made a career as a struggling editor and writer in Cyprus and Beirut.

The book touches on important moments in European and Middle Eastern politics that include the early formation of the Palestine Communist Party, the international milieu at the Comintern in Moscow, the revolts and Jewish-Arab political formations of the interwar period, the Spanish Civil War, and the rise of Nazism. As a committed Communist, Sidqi was privy to all these events, which he describes with humor and in lively detail. Although he observes political history through his own life story, the fact that he leaves out important elements of his personal life renders his account somewhat distant. His life partner Lotka Lorberbaum Sidqi, for example, enters *in medias res* halfway through the book, and we hear surprisingly little about his daughter Dawlieh (“Internationale”), who was raised by strangers at the Interdom International Children’s Home outside of Moscow while her parents were on the run from the British Mandate authorities. In 1940, Sidqi was expelled from the party for publishing a book on Nazism that was partly based on travels in Germany in the early 1930s. Coming face-to-face with fascism convinced Sidqi of the need to repudiate any claims to cultural affinity between Hitler’s project and Arab-Islamic culture.

For historians of Arab communism, there is much to gain from these colorful memoirs. In addition to a detailed account of the formation of the Palestinian Communist Party (which largely squares with authoritative versions of historians like Musa Buediri and Ran Greenstein), there is a long description of the five years Sidqi spent with other Arab communists in Stalin’s Comintern school for “Toilers of the East.” The book also describes Arab-Jewish relations in Communist circles, which soured after the 1929 unrest. The reader is left with the impression of a very small but unusually committed group of Com-

munists who were from the beginning in close contact with the central leadership in Moscow. They reproduced a centralized hierarchy where ideological differences of opinion could lead to people disappearing from the party—or altogether. Yet those who stayed the course and committed to the cause were granted an adventurous life full of travels, missions, important decisions, and face-to-face encounters with historical figures like Bukharin, Nehru, Mao, and Dolores Ibárruri, *La Pasionaria*.

The writing veers between anecdotal and analytical passages. Sidqi’s voice is sometimes wry, rarely sentimental, but always full of humor and intellectual curiosity. He embraces the adventure of internationalism, where dangerous missions, long travels, and personal sacrifices are never questioned but accepted as what it means to be a devoted Communist. So are friendships with comrades, the necessity of the struggle against imperialism, and political projects as they developed through the formation of nationalist movements and trade unions alongside the communist movement in Palestine. Although Sidqi is committed to the cause, he does not shy away from exposing the absurd misperceptions that Communists had of each other, and the absurdity wrought by certain ideological strictures.

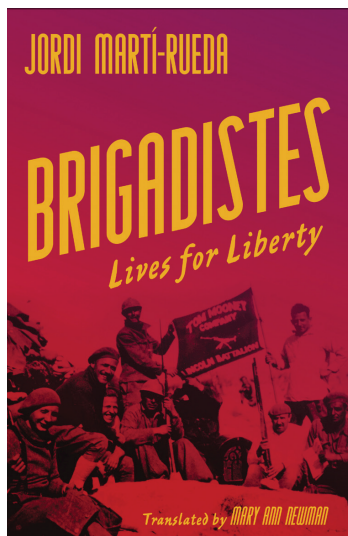
Sidqi’s devotion to the Comintern made him privy to key debates inside the Bolshevik leadership in the 1930s. Having just returned to Moscow from a reconnaissance visit to Tashkent with the Syrian communist leader Khaled Bakdash in 1936 to study the Soviet’s dealing with minorities, he was sent on an important mission. The Spanish Civil War had broken out, and the Comintern wanted Sidqi to influence Moroccans to turn against Franco. This would strengthen the anti-fascist struggle, which the Soviet Union at this stage still supported. By way of Paris and secret liaisons in Perpignan, Sidqi made his way to Barcelona and Madrid. We follow him in his entanglements with the international brigade and the Spanish communist leadership, as the battle with Franco rages. Sidqi’s assignment is to persuade Moroccans to change allegiance, working undercover as a journalist at the front. He helped establish a Spanish-Moroccan association and set up propaganda media to reach the population in north Africa. The efforts may not have succeeded, but Sidqi’s description of his eight months in Spain provides rich insights into the war.

Historians of Arab communism and international political movements in the interwar period will find a lot of interest in Sidqi’s book, whether it’s his time in Palestine and Moscow; his work to unite communist groups in the Arab countries and particularly between Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine; his time in Spain and Paris in 1936-37; or his engagement in Beirut’s leftist intellectual life, which would become such a crucial arena after the Nakba. As the memoir of a quintessential “roaming revolutionary” of the 20th century, his story illuminates the Palestinian liberation struggle, communist internationalism, Arab leftism, and Arab political and intellectual history all at once. Even newcomers to these topics will find Sidqi’s style entertaining, and we should be very thankful that the book’s translators, Anas Farha, Margeret Litvin, and Gideon Gordon, have made this available to English readers. ▲

Sune Haugbolle, Professor in Global Middle East Studies at Roskilde University in Denmark, works on social memory, the history of radical movements, and transnational solidarity, with a focus on Middle Eastern Studies. He is author of War and Memory in Lebanon (Cambridge, 2010).

Brigadistes: Lives for Liberty, by Jordi Martí Rueda. Translated from the Catalan by Mary Ann Newman. Pluto Press, 2022. \$18.95 (paperback with free ebook); \$12.95 (ebook).

Reviewed by Sebastiaan Faber



When the Catalan writer Jordi Martí Rueda first met some of the members of the Lincoln Brigade, he was smitten. It was back in 1996, when hundreds of *brigadistas* gathered for a commemorative event at the Autonomous University of Barcelona—an event that Martí, then a history student who was barely twenty years old, had helped organize with a couple of friends. His eyes still light up when he remembers those days.

From that moment on, Martí has been part of the small but powerful community of writers, researchers, activists, and educators in Spain who won't let their fellow citizens forget about the volunteers who flocked to the country from all over the world to support the Second Spanish Republic when it was attacked by international fascism. Over the past couple of decades, Martí has dedicated a good part of his life to researching the brigadistas' biographies and writing about them. In 2015, he published *Cinc històries humanes de les Brigades Internacionals i la Guerra Civil* (Five Human Stories of the IB and the Civil War); five years later, he added *Brigadistes. Vides per la llibertat* (*Brigadistas: Lives for Liberty*). His most recent book is *Passarem* (We Shall Pass, 2026). As a professional historian working for the Catalan government, moreover, Martí has been closely involved in the Alvah Bessie Program, which aims to locate and exhume the international antifascist volunteers who died during the war and were buried in Catalan soil. The goal of the program, which includes a DNA database, is to identify the remains, inform the descendants, and, if the family wishes, return the remains to them.

The second of Martí's three books on the Brigades, *Brigadistes*, was published in 2022 by Pluto Press in Mary Ann Newman's excellent English translation. In a short 142 pages, Martí shares touching vignettes, each accompanied by a photo, featuring some sixty of the more than 35,000 international volunteers. They include a good number of Americans: Jimmy Yates, Evelyn Hutchins, Milton Wolff, Salaria Kea, Oliver Law, Anne Taft, and Esther Silverstein, among others. Martí's sampling does not seek to be representative of the IB population; if anything, English-speaking volunteers are overrepresented.

Because Martí has set himself the challenge of portraying each volunteer in fewer than 400 words, his texts cannot be complete biographies. Yet we can't call them snapshots, either; they are more poignant and powerful than that. The description that perhaps best fits them is the way Martí himself describes the

sketches of fellow fighters that the British artist and antifascist volunteer Felicia Browne left behind when she was killed while trying to help a wounded Italian comrade: "figures with the vitality of the swift line of an ephemeral draft." Here, for example, is the final paragraph of the vignette dedicated to Esther Silverstein:

[At] Brunete, one of the most deadly battles of the war, ... she assisted the Catalan surgeon Moisès Broggi in the operating room. She didn't speak Catalan or Spanish, and he didn't speak English, but this was no obstacle to their doing thirty operations in twenty hours without a break. What she would never forget, though, were the mothers in Lleida. She was there one afternoon when the children had been dismissed from school and had run to the market to buy candy. No one noticed the bombers until they were right over their heads and opening their hatches. When they flew away the only thing left were the broken bodies of the children scattered through the Dantesque geography of what had been the market, the shrieks of the mothers crying out for their children, and Esther there in the midst of it all, compelled by an unseen force to remain in place right where she was. "I will never forget Lleida as long as I live," she would later say in a speech in California. "Children must be able to buy candy in the market on the square without bombs raining down upon their heads."

Written as tributes, Martí's books have helped introduce to a Catalan reading public some of the most remarkable individuals among the thousands who joined the war. For American readers, this extremely readable translation is a great opportunity to experience an outsider's view of the Lincolns—but also to learn about some of the many volunteers from other countries. Helpfully, the book comes with many pages of notes and suggestions for further reading. ▲



ALBA is excited to offer a new T-shirt as a gift with your donation of \$100. The T-shirt was designed by Hudson Valley-based multimedia artist Admiral Grey. We're grateful for their work and are happy to offer it as a gift to our supporters.



Show off your commitment to ALBA with this limited-time shirt. *ALBA Fighting Fascism since 1936.*



Ellyn Polshek (1930-2026)

Longtime ALBA board member Ellyn Polshek, who passed away peacefully at her home in Greenwich Village on May 12, was born Ellyn Margolis in Boston in 1930. After graduating from Western Reserve in Cleveland, Ohio, she embarked

on a successful career in publishing—first as Managing Editor at Grossman Publishers, a Division of the Viking Press, then as a Senior Editor at Holt, Rinehart and Winston, and later at William Morrow. She then enrolled at Columbia Law, where she received her JD in 1985. In this second phase of her professional life, she practiced law as an Assistant District Attorney in the Appeals Bureau at the Manhattan District Attorney's Office, arguing her cases before the Appellate Division in New York County and, when necessary, at the Court of Appeals in Albany.

Ellyn had a keen and curious mind, a sharp sense of humor, and a passion for social justice—and for Paris. She was brought onto the ALBA board by the late Peter Carroll, whom she had met through Victor Navasky, then editor of *The Nation*. At the time, Ellyn served as executor of the Alger and Isabel Hiss estate. “Through conversations with this interesting man with a New York accent,” she wrote a couple of years ago in a tribute to Peter, “I discovered the sad truth that without the help of the United States, France and England, Franco could not be defeated.” On the ALBA board, Ellyn was a vocal advocate for social outreach, an outstanding fundraiser, and a generous supporter of our educational programs.

Preceded in death by her husband of 70 years, the Akron-born architect James Stewart Polshek (1930-2022), Ellyn is survived by her children, Peter and Jenny Polshek, and her grandchildren, Lucien and Solomon.

To Be or Not to Be, Now or Ever: A Dialogue Between Shakespeare and McCarthy

By Alan Entin

To be, or not to be, that is the question
Are you now, or have you ever been, that is the question
Whether tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune
Under a Fascist regime
Or take up arms against a sea of troubles
End them, fight for justice, freedom and democracy,

Are you now, or have you ever been, that is the question
McCarthy and the House Un-American Committee want to know
Are you a member of the Communist Party now?
Have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?
That is the question, The House wants to know

But the Hollywood 10 (took up) arms against a sea of trouble and opposed them
And by opposing them end(ed) them
'Tis a consummation devoutly to be wish'd
To die, to sleep; To sleep, perchance to dream...
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
A Spain of equality, justice and liberty for all

The war in Spain ended, Democracy died
Franco and Fascism, the law of the land
A decade has passed, McCarthy still wants to know
Are you now, or have you ever been, that is the question
Hollywood actors, directors, producers were asked
Are you now, or have you ever been, that is the question
McCarthy's inquisitions recklessly ruined, shattered
Careers and lives of Hollywood's finest
Are you now, or have you ever been, a member of the Communist Party?
With this regard their actions turn awry and lose the name of action.
In violation of the Five Core Freedoms of the Constitution

To be, or not to be
are you now
have you ever been
eighty years on
the question unanswered
La lucha continúa

Alan D. Entin, PhD, ABPP, is a photographer and family psychologist specializing in generational trauma who writes about photographs and family secrets and has pioneered the use of photographs in therapy. His uncle, Bernard Entin, served in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and died in the Battle of Brunete.

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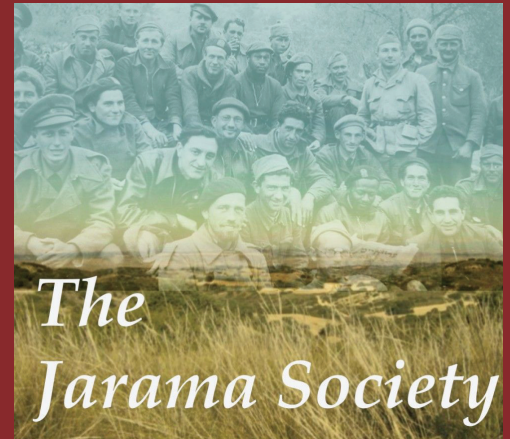
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