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The Volunteer

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



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Growing Up Communist p 8
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Original Centerfold by Seisdedos (page 12)

The Volunteer
Founded by the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade

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

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Dear Friends:

Exactly 90 years ago—on Dec 26, 1936, to be precise—the SS *Normandie* left New York harbor bound for Le Havre, France, with an unusual group of passengers on board. The first 96 American volunteers who were taking the extraordinary step of risking their lives to come to the aid of the besieged Spanish Republic, under attack since July by the combined forces of Franco, Mussolini, and Hitler. These third-class passengers tried to remain inconspicuous during the crossing; on the third day, a shipboard news bulletin warned that Americans enlisting in a foreign war could face fines and/or imprisonment.

Three years before the "official" start of World War II and five years before Pearl Harbor, these volunteers saw the threat of world fascism and chose to risk everything to try to put it down. (More than a quarter of them would be killed in action). And over the course of the next two years, another 2,700 others would follow their example, traveling from the US to join the ranks of the International Brigades in Spain. Less than six months after the departure of that first contingent, on May 24, 1937, the English-speaking battalions of the XV International Brigade published the first issue of *The Volunteer for Liberty*—the forerunner of the publication that you now have in your hands or on your screen.

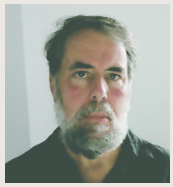
As Robert Coale has explained, *The Volunteer for Liberty* originally aimed to help volunteers understand the country they were defending and to maintain their ties with their countries of origin. As an official International Brigade publication, it also sought to strengthen morale, solidarity, and commitment to the antifascist cause, combining news from Spain and abroad with political and military guidance, poetry, humor, and photographs. Nowadays, we might come up short on political and military guidance, but otherwise, our purposes and features remain remarkably similar to those of the original publication.

To that end, in this issue we report on ALBA's busy fall calendar, including the multi-day commemorative events held in Berkeley in November centered on the unveiling of a monument to Robert Merriman on the UC Berkeley campus. Several contributions explore how political commitments and memories travel across generations. Elke Weesjes chats with us on growing up Communist; Dan Czitrom shares an excerpt from his new memoir; Jennifer Duprey writes about a novel by Leonardo Padura centered around the Spanish war. Fully immersing us in the world of those first volunteers 90 years ago, finally, we feature the great Cuban intellectual and activist Pablo de la Torriente Brau, whose chronicles describe the antifascist atmosphere in New York in the last months of 1936; a snapshot of Christmas 1936 based on the *New York Times* and the *Daily Worker*; and, as pièce de resistance, an original, collectible centerfold piece of graphic art by the great Spanish illustrator Seisdedos.

Ninety years on, *mutatis mutandis*, we still work, with your invaluable support, "to strengthen morale, solidarity, and commitment to the antifascist cause." We're all in the same boat, even if it's not the SS *Normandie*.

Mil gracias for making it possible for ALBA to do its part in the fight against fascism—and for doing yours.

¡Salud!



James D. Fernández,
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ALBA NEWS

Dave Smith's daughter, Linda Lustig, and Marion Wachtel Merriman's nephew, Chris Stone, unveil the plaque. Photo Len Tsou.

Berkeley Plaque Unveiling



The much-anticipated unveiling of a plaque commemorating Lincoln veteran Robert Merriman, which took place on the UC Berkeley campus this November 6, was accompanied by three days of educational and other programs under the banner "Making Memory Visible: Anti-fascism, UC Berkeley, and the Spanish Civil War." The events were organized by ALBA's Bay Area group, led by Richard Bermack and Peter Glazer, in collaboration with UC Berkeley's Spanish faculty and library staff (Donna Southard, Claude Potts, Alex Saum-Pascual, and Paulina León), with extensive support from ALBA's New York office, including Mark Wallem. Dennis Meaney, and Oliwia Karczmarska, who traveled to Berkeley to help coordinate.

On November 5, Sebastiaan Faber led a workshop for 25 teachers and students that included staff from Cal and Berkeley High. The next day, the festive unveiling of the plaque to the music of Musicians Action Group was followed by a slate of speakers in the Morrison Room, including UC Berkeley dignitaries, ALBA representatives, and ALB family members. 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. It has been installed to the immediate north of the library entrance, facing Memorial Glade.

On November 7, an afternoon and evening of additional events followed, starting with a panel featuring author Adam Hochschild along with Adriana Jasso and Kimi Lee, representing Unión del Barrio and Bay Resistance, the two California-based organizations that were awarded the 2026 ALBA/Puffin Award for Human Rights Activism earlier this year. After an interlude of music, with Randy Craig and Michael Sullivan, and poetry by the late Peter N. Carroll and Ray Durem read by Jeannette Ferrary and ALB family members, a second panel followed, moderated by UC Berkeley's Luis Madrigal and featuring the Catalan photographer Espe Pons alongside Rafel Sospedra and Isabel Boj Cullell of DIDPATRI. The day closed with a screening of Julia Newman's documentary *Into the Fire,* about the women of the American Medical Bureau, and a discussion led by Margo Feinberg and Espe Pons. See our online edition at albavolunteer.org for a slide show.

Music of the Movement

Join us on December 12 for the annual gathering in New York City of Lincoln Brigade "Grands"—roughly the third generation of descendants. This year's event, organized by Shantha Susman and Max Parker, highlights the importance of music to our shared history.

McCarthyism Exhibit at NYU

A new exhibition, The Red and the Violet: McCarthyism at NYU, tells the stories of three NYU faculty members who were persecuted for their political activism at the height of the McCarthy era. One of them, Lyman Bradley, is of particular interest to our community, as he was persecuted for his involvement with the Joint Antifascist Refugee Committee. Bradley was stripped of his tenure and fired by NYU. Curated by Zach Samalin, the exhibition is on view at NYU's Espacio de Culturas (53 Washington Square South) until March 2027.

Peter Carroll Papers Catalogued; *Volunteer* Digitized

The Tamiment Library is proud to announce that the Peter N. Carroll papers have been fully catalogued. (The finding aid is online at findingaids.library.nyu.edu/tamwag/alba_281.) See page 18 for a conversation with Shannon O'Neill, the curator for the Tamiment-Wagner collections, and processing archivist Rae Mahre. In addition, the library has begun making available digital scans of all the historical issues of *The Volunteer* included across the ALBA Collection, at dlib.nyu.edu/volunteer.

New on ALBA's YouTube Channel

Did you know that almost all of ALBA's online events, and many of its in-person events, can be viewed in their entirety? Visit ALBA's YouTube channel or scan the QR code.

Jo Labanyi's Susman Lecture On November 19, ALBA's longtime board member Jo Labanyi delivered the Susman lecture based on her new book, *What Have You Done for Victory? A Cultural History of the Spanish Civil War.* The annual lecture is named in honor of ALBA co-founder Bill Susman.

Planned Giving Workshop On October 21, Natasha Carroll-Ferrary, an LA-based estate attorney, gave an online workshop on legacy giving.

K-12 Antifascist Teaching Roundtable On September 15, ALBA's Sebastiaan Faber hosted the second in its series of online roundtables on teaching the history of US antifascism in K-12 education. The event featured two staff members of the American Historical Association, a representative of the Zinn Educational Project, and three teachers.

LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

To the Editors:

Sebastiaan Faber (*The Volunteer*, September 2026) has done a stunning job of placing in time what he rightly calls the "iconic" group photo of 29 volunteers that ALBA uses on its website and which I chose for the cover of my recent book, *Salud y Shalom: Conversations with Jewish Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade* (University of Illinois Press, 2026). The presence in the picture of three people, not strictly speaking members of the battalion, and the notes of Alvah Bessie, guide Sebastiaan to identify the time as the very end of April or the beginning of May 1938, hard times for the Internationals and the Republic, as he explains.

The fact that the three guests—John Little, Joe North, and Edwin Rolfe—as well as Alvah Bessie were all Jews certainly had something to do with my choice of the photo. The revision of names in the September *Volunteer* does not alter the fact that about one-third of the people in the picture are Jews—matching the percentage among American volunteers in Spain. The picture also includes a few of the people I interviewed in the early 1990s, such as George Watt and Hy Tabb. But it wasn't simply the ethnicity of some, but rather the fellowship across ethnicities that caught my attention, including the image of a Black soldier who seems to be reading a Yiddish newspaper. Joe Taylor, lower right, is the only person whose eyes are not otherwise fixed on the camera.

Sebastiaan mistakenly identifies the newspaper as "*The Forverts,* New York's leading progressive paper in Yiddish." Taylor is holding the Communist *Frayheyt* (פֿרײַהייט), not the *Forverts.*

In *Salud y Shalom* Abe Smorodin—not in the picture—explains the difference between the two journals when he describes the devotion of his (Communist) parents to the *Frayheyt* (which he calls by its full name):

> As a matter of fact, they were so ardent in their support that the struggle was not exactly a *class* struggle, so to speak; it was a struggle between the *Morgn Frayheyt* and the Yiddish *Forverts.* To my parents, the *Forverts*, which was the organ of the right-wing Social Democrats, was not only wrong politically, but it was a betrayer of the Yiddish language. They were polluting it with Americanisms, and if you wanted the true, classical, literary language, you would only find it in the *Morgn Frayheyt.*

Intricate, no? Talk about culture wars! In fact, the gap between these two organs of the immigrant culture played out in my own family. In 1930, the young woman who would become my mother entered an essay contest in an English language supplement of the *Forverts*. "I am a Jew and an American" was to be the topic. She lost the prize—$50—but her essay was printed, and she won a fan letter from the guy who would become my father. Two years and two thousand pages later, they were married in a rabbi's office in Chicago. That was 1933.

At home, we nodded to the authority of Abe Cahan, a novelist and the long-time editor of the *Forverts*, who may have also been their matchmaker. But when my parents came to translate Sholom Aleichem, ten years later, it was the *Morgn Frayheyt* edition of SA›s *Works* that came with the subscription they had given to my grandfather in 1938. By then, they were in the Party and enthusiastic adherents of the Spanish Republic. Their first collection of stories by Sholom Aleichem, *The Old Country,* came out in 1946.

Result? *Forverts* plus *Frayheyt* equals at least one landmark of Jewish-American culture—and one humble pedant.

Joe Butwin

—Seattle, WA



Tamiment Library, ALBA.PHOTOS.010 Box 3, Folder 8" with "Modotti and Vidali in Moscow, 1930s.

To the Editors:

In your September issue, I appreciated the interview with David Jorge about Tina Modotti and Vittorio Vidali, especially the way Jorge countered the slander about Vidali's role in Spain. Vidali's short memoir as a Communist senator in Italy includes a prescient forewarning of the difficulties the Communist movement already faced then and would face even more intensely after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Vidali was an independent Communist thinker at a time when the Italian party was criticized for "Eurocommunist" views—that is, for taking a more independent position from the Soviet Union.

In the interview, Jorge states: "As a photographer, Modotti had an artistic sensibility that predated her militant political commitment." I don't agree. As I explained in my own essay on Modotti (*The Volunteer,* December 2025), I believe her effort to develop the modernist style she first learned from Edward Weston took place *at the same time* as her political development, and that she was able to quickly adapt that modernism to her politics. That was a huge step—and it made her a true pioneer in photography for socially conscious photographers everywhere.

Saludos,

David Bacon, photographer

—Oakland, CA

The original group photograph (left) and the enhanced image by David Bacon.

ONLINE FEATURES



The Skill of an Unknown Photographer: More on the ALB Group Portrait

By David Bacon

David Bacon has been drawn to the iconic group photograph of Lincoln Brigade volunteers from the moment he first saw it. So when *The Volunteer* ran a piece on the discovery of the negative and the circumstances under which it was shot, he got inspired to do further research—and to enhance the picture.

I grew up with the history of the International Brigades; I could sing the words to "Los Cuatro Generales" before I knew Spanish—and "Freiheit" without knowing German. I was very moved, therefore, when I first saw the group photograph of IB volunteers taken after the battle of the Ebro, enough so that I made a rough copy that I taped on the wall where I work. As a photographer, I saw and admired the skill with which it was taken. The more I looked at it, the more I felt drawn to this image.

It could have been just a picture of uniformed men in stiff poses, taken for official purposes, but it's anything but that. We know that it was taken during a visit by Joe North, the *Daily Worker* reporter, and John Little, executive secretary of the Young Communist League. Its purpose was likely to memorialize the visit. But as much as a picture of an occasion it is a photograph of relationships. The men are relaxed, whether they're sitting or standing, physically bunched together, many touching and some leaning on each other. They've been through a terrible, traumatizing battle and have confidence in each other. They had each other's backs. North and Little want to be part of this. They hunker down to share in this relationship that already exists.

To read this article in full, visit our online edition at albavolunteer.org or scan the QR code.



The Uncertainty of Certainty: In Search of My Grandfather

By Salvador E. Gómez Salgado

For most of my life, my paternal grandfather, Salvador Gómez Soriano, existed as a vague figure, someone I had never met, his story shrouded in mystery and silence. My father and grandmother rarely spoke about him. All I knew for certain was that he was executed shortly after the Spanish Civil War. I overheard fragments: that he had been an "informant" for the Republic, that the accusations against him were false, and that a pardon arrived only after he had already been executed. He disappeared without ceremony.

Well into adulthood, all I really knew was that my grandfather had been executed by Franco's regime. Despite a close-knit family and childhood visits to Valencia, I knew almost nothing about him. My dad's cousin once told me he had been an animal-feed broker, a profession I could not reconcile with a death sentence. I did not know why he was executed, who accused him, what the charges were, when he was tried, or where his remains lay. We never visited a grave while in Valencia. Ambiguity filled every gap. Only now, while conducting research for this essay, do I understand that silence was a form of survival for my grandmother, my father, and my aunt.

This essay is the product of my decision, over eighty years later, to uncover the truth and shine a light on my grandfather's story. My regret is that I waited too long. My father, grandmother, and others who might have shed light on his story are gone. As Professor Sebastiaan Faber argues, descendants of the executed have become central to Spain's struggle to reclaim truth and dignity. I welcome the opportunity to join that struggle. My sister, my cousins, and our children will now know Salvador Gómez Soriano's story.

To read this article in full, visit our online edition at albavolunteer.org or scan the QR code.

Ben Barsky in Spain, Dec. 1937. Courtesy Czitrom family.

Kitchen Table History: Contending with My Family's Radical Past

By Daniel Czitrom

In his forthcoming historical memoir, ALBA's chair emeritus Daniel Czitrom explores how family memories and political beliefs through three generations shaped his life and his identity as a historian. An excerpt from the chapter "Three Roads to Spain."

I was nervous as hell for my first oral book report. I was barely fourteen, a sophomore at Bronx High School of Science. The book was Allen Guttmann's *The Wound in the Heart*, a 1962 history of America and the Spanish Civil War. Rather than summarizing Guttmann's analysis, I focused instead on what I saw as the enduring moral question: Why had the United States, Great Britain, and France stood idly by while General Francisco Franco's Fascist forces, aided and abetted by Germany and Italy, destroyed the Spanish Republic? I hammered away at what I considered the obvious hypocrisy and cowardice of the Western democracies. My passion failed to stir my classmates, who, in early 1965, were more wrapped up in the Beatles and the rest of the British pop invasion. I dug the Beatles too, but I was determined to share my growing preoccupation with the Spanish Civil War.

Was there any other possible topic? Spain had always been there, hovering over my family like a permanent storm cloud. It was the beginning or end of countless political arguments over the meaning and import of the Spanish Civil War, quarrels that got even more heated when some family members started traveling to Spain in the 1960s, while Franco still ruled. Three family members had volunteered to fight with the International Brigades in 1936–37, and two never returned. They were among the roughly 2,800 American men and women who had stepped forward to stop the spread of fascism, part of the global wave of roughly 40,000 international volunteers who streamed to Spain. Two were brothers, Joe and Leo Mendelowitz, known by their *nom de guerre* Gordon, my father's first cousins



who were very close to his family. The third was my mother's older brother, Ben Barsky. The extensive literature on Americans in Spain included many references to the Gordons. By contrast, Ben Barsky was just another anonymous casualty of a brutal war that routinely used raw, untrained, ideologically committed volunteers as shock troops who suffered devastating losses. In fact, it was not until thirty years after the Spanish Civil War that my family discovered what had happened to Ben. Starting with that tenth-grade book report, I began a halting process of discovery, a decades-long effort to learn not only the whys and hows of these volunteers but also to form a better sense of them as people. The Spanish Civil War produced (and continues to produce) historical writings deeply inflected by ideology and the settling of old scores; memoirs and personal accounts based on fading memories; and the collapse of the Soviet Union and the opening of archives long shut to researchers. I was more after the human angle of what it meant to go to Spain—for both the volunteers and their families. What was the flip side of the courage, the idealism, the belief in a cause? It was the mixture of shock, confusion, anger, and later grief felt by family members trying to make sense of it all. Volunteers made decisions and choices amid real uncertainty about how things would turn out, tangled up always in family relationships and obligations. I grew up learning about these three men over the kitchen table, but I got very little sense of them as people. I wanted to understand them beyond their ideological commitments and as more fully human—their reasons for going, its effect on them and their families, and what they did in Spain.

The Spanish crisis had a global urgency, and the volunteers shared a powerful desire to fight Fascism. That desire had been nurtured in the more immediate and intimate milieu of family, neighborhood, trade unions, and schools. There were (sometimes tragic) tensions between radical political action and the demands of family life. I grasped all this in the abstract. But how could I learn more about the character, lived lives, and experiences of these three family members?

As a boy I had heard about my father's two cousins, the brothers Leo and Joe Gordon, from him and other family members who knew them. I read about their time in Spain in two of the earliest accounts of Americans in Spain we had in the house, Edwin Rolfe's *The Lincoln Battalion* (1939) and Steve Nelson's 1953 memoir, *The Volunteers.* My dad

Jarama, 1937: Eli Begelman, Joe Gordon, Hy Stone, unknown. Courtesy Czitrom family.

had saved a few yellowed clippings from the *Daily Worker,* where accounts of Joe's heroism on the battlefield made him a legendary, if elusive, figure in my eyes. Joe seemed an especially compelling character: a genuine tough guy, a championship middleweight boxer in the US Army who deserted to go to Spain in late 1936.

The Gordons were well-known figures compared to Ben Barsky, who was a total cipher for me. The first breakthrough came in 1968. I was a college freshman, home on vacation, browsing in a Bronx bookstore. I came upon a copy of Arthur H. Landis' newly published book *The Abraham Lincoln Brigade,* a pioneering work of history and the first comprehensive account of the American volunteers in Spain. A brief index item took my breath away: Barsky, Ben, death, 543. A diary entry by a nineteen-year-old soldier provided a brief eyewitness account of his death. Here, after three decades, was a partial account of what happened to Ben Barsky. However, it raised more questions than it answered. Why and how did Ben go to Spain? Why had the family never received any notice of his death from the US government or anyone else? And, perhaps most importantly and painfully, why had Ben's life and sacrifice been such a taboo subject in the family for so many years? Ben's older sister, Esther, an active Communist in the 1930s, carried lifelong guilt over encouraging him to volunteer. However, she would never discuss her feelings. Nor would my mother, Betty, who was sixteen when Ben went to Spain. She recalled receiving beautiful letters he had written home, but no one knew what had happened to them. All anyone knew for sure was that he had never come back from Spain and that the family had never received any sort of confirmation, official or otherwise, as to his fate.

The three family members who went to Spain embodied the two main strains of Depression-era Jewish radicals: working-class activists and intellectual idealists. The Gordons were working class in origin and political perspective, having labored in salami factories, fur shops, tuna canneries, road construction, and woolen mills. They were dedicated Communists, as was Ben Barsky. Ben



went to Spain while he was a student at CCNY, where he had immersed himself in Communist Party activism and the bitter sectarian debates on campus. Ben was well-read and thoughtful, "a pure soul," as a friend recalled, and he had ambitions to be a teacher. Thus, for my father and his sisters, Joe and Leo Gordon embodied the ultimate in courage and sacrifice for the revolutionary cause. For my mother's family, Ben Barsky's political work had been largely hidden, and it remained shrouded in silence. I was frustrated by the limits of what I could learn over the kitchen table.

"Men went to Spain for various reasons," Alvah Bessie wrote in his essential 1939 memoir, *Men in Battle: A Story of Americans in Spain,* "but behind almost every man I met there was a common restlessness, a loneliness. In action these men would fight like devils, with the desperation of an ironbound conscience; in private conversation there was something else again." Bessie's book remains the best account of the trench-level, human experiences of American volunteers in Spain. Novelist, journalist, and later successful screenwriter before getting blacklisted as one of the Hollywood Ten, Bessie survived the Ebro campaign. He included his own thoughts on the profound question of what motivated the volunteers to put their lives on the line against such long odds. "These men behind these fragile rocks," he wrote, "these men whose tender flesh is torn to pieces by the hot and ragged steel; they could not accept their death with such good grace if they did not love so deeply and so well—were not determined that love must come alive into the world. What other reason could there be for dying?"

Yet I learned that there was more to it than just love. There was also the abandonment of love (Leo leaving behind his pregnant girlfriend Agnes), parental love disregarded (Ben secretly departing from his bewildered mother and father), and deep anger transmuted into love of a cause (Joe, surviving wounds at Jarama and Brunete, and then going down with his torpedoed Merchant Marine ship in 1943). These men saw themselves as revolutionaries, a disciplined cadre for whom politics was life and death. Nonetheless, the "rank-and-file tendencies" that troubled Joe Gordon's superiors could never be entirely stamped out, and outrage at incompetent leadership ran like an electric current through the trenches. Volunteers did not go to Spain because Joseph Stalin told them to; they went because it seemed the only logical step for confronting the Fascist tide in the world. They lost the battle in Spain, but they won the war against fascism by 1945. And they were right that Fascism could only be stopped by the force of arms. Yet their stories transcend ideology. Their political commitment, heroism, and sacrifice coexisted with the emotional toll taken on family—a mother who could never understand why her eldest son went to Spain, leaving her bitter for the rest of her life; a pregnant girlfriend left behind to wonder why and what might have been; and the lingering confusion and desperation over the volunteers' fates. Nor could idealism overcome disastrous military leadership, political cynicism, or the inevitable chaotic mishaps of war. Nearly a century after those terrible days, when family members faced death in the trenches and hills of Spain, I've come to understand how their complex, real-life tangles should never be separated from appreciating their bravery and courage. ⅄

From Kitchen Table History: Contending with My Family's Radical Past. *Copyright 2027 by the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois. Used with permission of the University of Illinois Press.* *Daniel Czitrom is an Emeritus Chair of the ALBA Board of Governors. He can be reached at dczitrom@mtholyoke.edu.*

"Many Saw Their Parents' World Fall Apart When the Soviet Union Collapsed"

Elke Weesjes on Growing Up Communist in the US, the UK, and the Netherlands

By Sebastiaan Faber

What was it like to be born into a Communist family during the Cold War? How do red-diaper babies look back on their childhood? How did geopolitics and their parents' political work shape their worldview? What legacies do they cherish, and which ones do they reject?

Over two decades' time, Elke Weesjes spoke at length with more than forty American, British, and Dutch men and women whose parents were active in the Communist Party. In a forthcoming essay for *The Oxford Handbook of Global Socialist Culture*, she summarizes her—sometimes surprising—findings.



Weesjes (b. 1979) grew up in the Netherlands, where she studied at VU University Amsterdam before earning a PhD in Contemporary History at the University of Sussex. In 2021, she published *Growing Up Communist in the Netherlands and Britain: Childhood, Political Activism, and Identity Formation*, followed by the Dutch-language nonfiction book *Mama Las Marx* (Mama Read Marx) in 2023. Her current research project explores the experiences of Americans who grew up in white supremacist families. Weesjes teaches at the City University of New York.

I'm curious what drew you to the topic. Are you a red-diaper baby?

Far from it! I grew up in a Dutch Reformed family in the east of the country. But that doesn't mean we didn't have political values. My grandparents, for example, were active in the Resistance during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands. My mother's father helped hide people on his farm before they were moved to other hiding places, and my father's mother distributed an illegal newspaper. I often think that, had they not been religious, they might well have been socialists. They believed in solidarity, albeit from a Christian moral framework.

What got you interested in the radical left?

As a teenager in the 1990s, I joined the punk scene. Then, while studying history in Amsterdam, I got an internship at the International Institute of Social History (IISH), where I helped with an interview project on Communist families. The institute houses the archive of the Communist Party of the Netherlands (CPN), alongside the archives of many other left-wing movements. I became fascinated by the Communist movement, partly because I recognized certain parallels with my own upbringing. We shared some core values, I felt—the idea, for example, that you never put yourself first.

What was it like to work with adults who'd grown up in Communist families?

I learned so much from them. As an interviewer, I always like to give my participants—a term that I prefer to "respondent"—a lot of agency in the conversation. Asking questions from a position of naivete tends to help with that. But of course, at the time I was only 21 and actually pretty naïve! *(Laughs.)* It was hard for them to see me as an equal. When I went back to interview them years later, after I'd become a parent myself, the nature of our conversation was very different. One of the fascinating aspects of longitudinal studies is that the perspective of both the researcher and her subjects change over time. In the beginning, I'd focused on the children's experiences. Later, I became more interested in the dilemmas that the parents faced. Similarly, in those early interviews we mostly spoke about my participants' fathers, often forgetting about the mothers, whose role had also been quite important, especially in the years of the anti-Nazi resistance. Even as a woman, it took me a while to become aware of that imbalance.

Tell me about the interviews.

Although I don't consider myself an oral historian in the traditional sense—I find the conventions and protocols of oral history way too rigid—my work as a social historian centers on gathering life histories. I usually take my time when interviewing participants. The better we know each other, the richer my material. The conversations, which typically last between two and three hours, can be quite intense, at times resembling a therapy session. This was especially true for my Dutch participants, many of whom had never been interviewed about their experiences and were not accustomed to sharing such intimate aspects of their lives with one another either. Their experiences have also received far less attention than those of, for example, children of American Communists. In the US, after all, the first memoirs

and interviews with red-diaper babies already came out in the 1980s. By contrast, the IISH interview project I worked on in the early 2000s was the first of its kind in the Netherlands.

Among your more surprising findings, at least to me, is that the degree of social isolation experienced by children growing up in Communist families varied considerably between the three countries. American children, for example, often grew up within a broader radical milieu, despite the much more severe state repression their families faced. British Communist families, meanwhile, remained embedded in trade unions and working-class communities. In the Netherlands, the situation was different. The vertical division of a society into separate ideological, religious, or socio-economic groups—known as "pillarization"—and longstanding divisions within the socialist movement meant that Communists were largely excluded from other political and social networks, including those of the Social Democrats.

Exactly. In the United States, a large part of the Communist movement overlapped with secular Jewish urban communities, where it often didn't make much difference whether you were, or had been, an actual Party member. Within the broader radical left, there was plenty of room for fellow travelers of different stripes. Friendships crossed those lines, and people could distance themselves from the Party without necessarily losing their social networks. There was simply more fluidity.

That said, I'm aware that this was particularly true of places like New York and Los Angeles, especially among middle-class secular Jewish families. It's much harder to find children of Communists from other milieus—say, Finnish American factory workers in Detroit. So, we have to be careful about generalizing from the experiences of those whose stories have been preserved.

In the Netherlands and Britain, participants' parents were more often working-class and less socially mobile than their American counterparts, sometimes deliberately so, out of principle. But the Dutch case was particularly distinctive. Because of pillarization and the longstanding divisions within the socialist movement, Dutch Communists were largely excluded from other political and social networks, including those of the Social Democrats. They developed their own close-knit community, which provided a strong sense of belonging but was also relatively isolated from the wider society. On top of that, in the immediate postwar years, Dutch Communists faced a fierce backlash. Having been celebrated as heroes for their role in the Resistance, they were suddenly portrayed as traitors and enemies of the state. This sudden shift had a profound psychological impact on parents and children alike.

What do you mean by that?

The Dutch Communist Party played a central role in the Resistance, often at enormous personal cost. Many Dutch Communists were captured, imprisoned, or deported to concentration camps, and many lost their lives. Immediately after the war, those who survived were celebrated as heroes, which was uncomfortable for many of them because of survivors' guilt. Yet mental health issues like survivors' guilt, depression, and what we now know as post-traumatic stress didn't really align with the official party stance. But that doesn't mean people weren't struggling with these issues at home.

And then, adding insult to injury, within just a few years, as the Cold War began, there was this enormous backlash. The very people who had been celebrated as heroes were suddenly branded as a fifth column. Talking with their children, I began to realize just how profound the psychological impact of all this must have been on these families. In fact, I suspect that if I'd been able to interview the parents themselves, some of this might not have come out nearly as clearly. Children often pick up on things that their parents may not have been willing or able to articulate themselves.

The presence and impact of surveillance, discrimination, and redbaiting have been studied extensively in the U.S. But I have the impression that Cold War culture, and particularly the experiences of Communist families, have been studied much less in the Netherlands. Is that reflected in how these families have been portrayed?

In some ways. Some recent memoirs by red-diaper babies have actually reinforced Cold War stereotypes. They paint a picture of families in which the Party always came first, at the expense of everything else, including the children. That is definitely not the picture that emerges from my research. Sure, the parents were busy during the week—but so were most other parents. Other than that, Communist families had normal lives, with fun on the weekends, birthday parties, and holiday celebrations.

Did many of your participants follow their parents into party politics?

Some did, at least initially, but certainly not all of them. Although the majority still identifies as leftist, most are no longer members of political parties. Their parents' experiences often turned them off to party politics, but not to political activism more broadly. Many are active in single-issue organizations, such as Greenpeace or Amnesty International. And if you look at the way they engage with their neighbors and communities, they're clearly committed and involved, often fighting for the underdog. And, of course, they vote. I also noticed that most of them ended up in socially oriented professional careers: they are teachers, social workers, dedicated to helping others. Let's say I did not run into anyone who'd become a corporate CEO. *(Laughs.)* You see the same thing when it comes to what they tried to transmit to their own children. They're not particularly concerned with passing on their own political affiliations, but they do instill in their children the importance of voting, of knowing how the world works: understanding who the oppressors are and who the oppressed—and standing in solidarity with the latter. It's the kind of intergenerational transmission of moral and social values that we also see in religious communities, in which people may leave a congregation but hold on to its moral core.

Did they draw any negative lessons from their parents' experience?

Many saw their parents' world fall apart when the Soviet Union collapsed. And they had to come to terms with their parents' support for the Soviet regime. Looking back, they often understand the choices their parents made, but they also see how much the Party asked of them. So, while most children have not renounced their parents' values, they are generally more skeptical and critical. Less likely to follow anything or anyone blindly.

Leonardo Padura in 2017. Photo Jorge Mejía Peralta. CC BY 2.0.

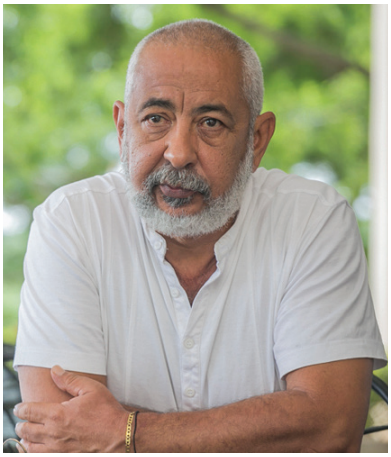
Intimate History: Leonardo Padura on the Spanish Civil War

By Jennifer Duprey

The Spanish Civil War features centrally in ***The Transparency of Time***, the ninth Mario Conde novel by the bestselling Cuban author Leonardo Padura, which reaches across seven centuries of violence, displacement, and survival.

First published in 2018 and translated three years later, Leonardo Padura's *The Transparency of Time* shows how wars, migrations, political disappointments, and inherited memories continue to shape lives long after the dust has supposedly settled. The ninth novel in the series featuring detective Mario Conde, *Transparency* is what Padura himself has called a *novela crepuscular,* a novel set at dusk. Conde is approaching sixty. Years of disappointment have left him skeptical and melancholic but also increasingly attentive to the passage of time and to what remains after political hopes fade. Although the novel begins as a detective story—Conde and his friends search for a Black Madonna, resembling Cuba's Virgin of Regla, stolen from his old friend, the art dealer Roberto Roque Rosell, known as Bobby—the search soon opens onto a more complicated account of war, migration, faith, and historical inheritance.

That story reaches across seven centuries through three Catalan men, all named Antoni Barral. Each finds himself caught in a defining conflict: the Crusades and the fall of Saint John of Acre in 1291, the Catalan Civil War of 1472, and the Spanish Civil War of 1936. Their lives are linked by an eleventh-century Romanesque Black Madonna carried from the Holy Land to Catalonia during the Crusades. Passed from one historical catastrophe to another, the sculpture becomes more than a religious artifact. It bears the traces of movement across borders



and generations, connecting people who have little power over the events that determine their lives.

In this historical continuum, the Spanish Civil War plays a central role. Padura does not treat the war as a self-contained Spanish conflict. Instead, he places it within a longer history of violence, displacement, belief, and survival, and then follows one of its displaced subjects across the Atlantic. The war entered ordinary lives, uprooted people from places they had scarcely imagined leaving, and carried its consequences into other countries and other histories.

In 1936, readers meet the youngest Antoni Barral, who is living with his father, Carles Barral, in the mountains near Camprodon, in the *Vall de Sant Jaume* of the *Alta Garrotxa*. Antoni is a Catalan peasant, a *pagès* shaped by an agrarian world of poverty, uncertainty, and hardship that seems far removed from the great events of history. In the hermitage of his village stands a black Romanesque Virgin, believed to have reached Catalonia during the Crusades and invested with profound spiritual meaning for the community. As the military coup against the democratically elected Second Republic reaches even this isolated corner of Catalonia, families that had shared the routines of rural life find themselves on opposing sides. War violently ruptures a world that had seemed governed by other rhythms.

During the first sacking of the village, Antoni kills in order to save the Virgin, marking a decisive break in his life. Violence forces the *pagès* to recognize that the movements of History are no longer distant from him: they have entered his village, his home, and his own actions. He eventually leaves Catalonia as a stowaway aboard the *Saint Martin*, bound for an unknown island called Cuba and a city called Havana, where, as the village's dissident priest has told him, anything good or bad might happen. What begins as the history of a remote Catalan village thus becomes a story of wartime displacement across the Atlantic.

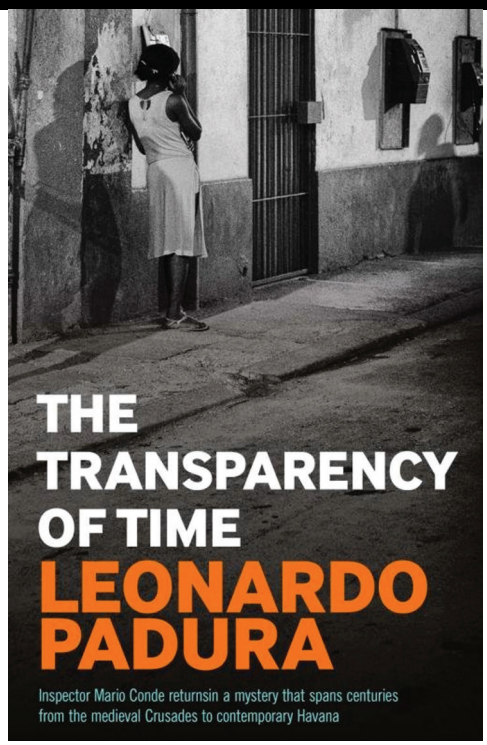
Padura's choice of Havana is crucial. The seemingly miraculous city in which Antoni encounters another Black Virgin—the Virgin of Regla, one that, like his own, carries the scent of the sea—is itself traversed by histories moving across the Atlantic. Arriving in 1936, Antoni enters a Cuba still marked by the fall of Gerardo Machado, decades of U.S. intervention, and the growing political power of the

military under Fulgencio Batista. At the same time, Havana had become a center of internationalist support for the Spanish Republic and the anti-fascist struggle in the very war from which Antoni had fled. The crisis of the Cuban Republic and the Spanish Civil War therefore meet within a single urban space and, more intimately, within the trajectory of a single migrant.

This transatlantic movement complicates any simple understanding of exile as departure from one history and arrival in another. Antoni leaves the Spanish Civil War behind—but history accompanies him: Havana is another place where political struggles, migrations, memories, and solidarities converge. Padura's Cuba becomes part of the history of the Spanish war, just as Antoni's displacement becomes part of a longer Cuban history of arrivals, departures, and transatlantic attachments.

The story of Mario Conde, set in the present, gives this history another resonance. Conde and his friends belong to a Cuban generation whose expectations have steadily eroded. The ideals that once promised a different future have given way to economic hardship, inequality, and uncertainty. Their friendship becomes one of the few forms of continuity available to them. That solidarity is tested when their friend El Conejo decides to leave Cuba for Miami. Across a very different political and historical context, his departure recalls the recurring experience of having to abandon one's country. Rather than equating Spain in the 1930s with contemporary Cuba, Padura places different histories of departure beside one another, while exile and migration emerge as experiences through which large political transformations enter private lives.

Antoni Barral is central to this vision because he represents precisely the kind of person who rarely gets to write his own history. In Ronald Fraser's formulation from *Las dos guerras de España,* such lives register the contradictions of history's long and impersonal movements. Padura's peasant does not



command armies, lead parties, or determine the course of the war. History happens around him and to him, yet it is through his body, his possessions, his losses, and his movements that the consequences of war become tangible.

The peasant from the Vall de Sant Jaume who arrives in Cuba aboard the *Saint Martin* dies in Havana in 1989. At the threshold of death, the Black Romanesque Virgin remains a silent witness to the weight of history upon his life. Yet precisely as the material world recedes, Padura returns Antoni to the most elemental material trace of his journey: his feet.

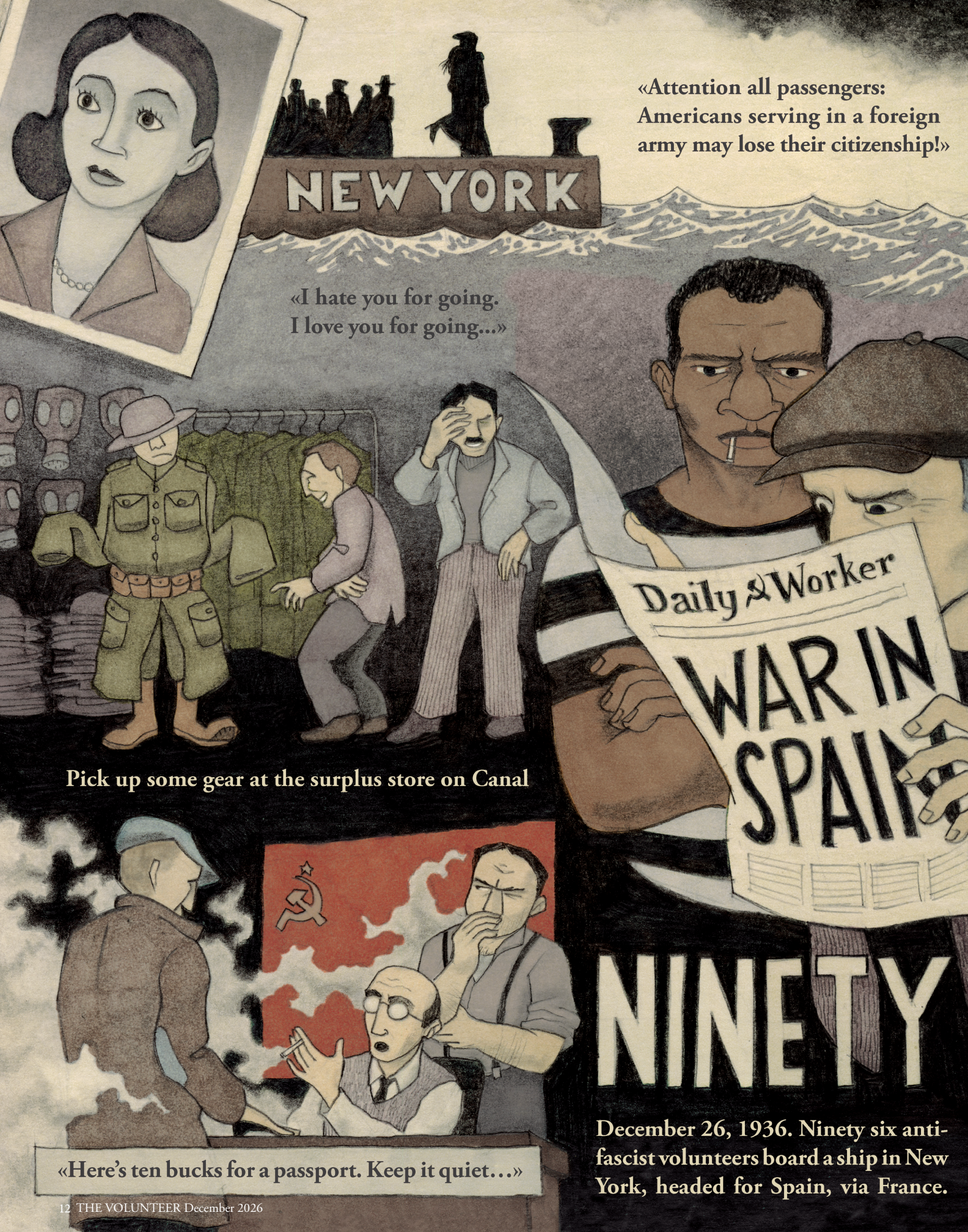
In 1936, after fourteen days hidden in the hold of the *Saint Martin*, Antoni finds his worn espadrilles and looks down: "Once again, they were on their way." More than five decades later, his deformed and useless feet condense the paths his life had taken, whether "chosen or imposed," from Camprodon and the Vall de Sant Jaume to Cuba. With them he had passed "from innocence to guilt, from ignorance to knowledge, from peace to death." The body becomes an archive of displacement. Antoni's feet preserve the material traces of a life transformed by war, migration, and circumstances he could never control.

The Black Virgin does similar work. Carried across seas and centuries, protected during war, and eventually transported to Cuba, the object survives the people and conflicts that surround it. Its meaning changes as it moves, but it continues to bind together histories that conventional national narratives tend to separate. The Crusades, Catalonia, the Spanish Civil War, and Cuba become connected not through an abstract claim about historical continuity but through the movement of a material object and the lives attached to it.

This is where Padura's novel speaks most powerfully to the history of the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath. War is not only a sequence of battles, political decisions, military campaigns, victories, and defeats. It is also a transformation of more intimate worlds: a village divided, a sacred object threatened, a pair of worn espadrilles, a young man hidden in the hold of a ship, and a body that decades later still bears the traces of the journey.

Antoni Barral's apparently marginal life is historically significant precisely because he does not make history in the conventional sense. He cannot determine its course. But history passes through him and leaves its marks. His trajectory from the *Alta Garrotxa* to Havana brings together the Spanish Civil War, migration, the troubled Cuban Republic, and the centuries-spanning movement of people and beliefs across the Atlantic. Padura reminds us that the great upheavals of the twentieth century were also intimate events, lived by ordinary people who crossed borders, endured violence, carried objects and memories with them, and remade their lives in places they could never have imagined reaching.

Jennifer Duprey, an associate professor at Rutgers University, works on the literature, history, and culture of the modern and contemporary Iberian Peninsula.



December 26, 1936. Ninety six anti-fascist volunteers board a ship in New York, headed for Spain, via France.



Illustration by Seisdedos

[TO BE CONTINUED]

A Newsreel Christmas: New York, 1936

By James D. Fernández

To be read out loud, with the booming voice and breathless cadence of a newsreel narrator.

Christmas in New York. Unseasonably warm temperatures— fifteen degrees above normal, mildest day of the month. Train stations packed. Mailbags overflowing. Airplanes filled with passengers and packages—and travelers turned away. "Happiest Yuletide in Years," declares the *Times*. Biggest Christmas trade since 1930. Gifts bought. Journeys made. Money moving again. Even the weather seems to offer a reprieve.

Got three cents? You can buy a different Christmas at the same newsstand.

Across the *Daily Worker*'s front page, photographs of workers, children, demonstrators. "Peace on earth—good will toward men." Beneath them, a headline in enormous capitals with Franco's Christmas wish list:

"FRANCO ASKS HITLER FOR 60,000 TROOPS."

Holiday feel-good stories alongside accounts of bombing, industrial struggle, and threatened evictions. Peace is the dream. War is the news.

O Tannenbaum, o Tannenbaum, wie treu sind deine Blätter!

In Harlem, eight hundred children gather around Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, dressed as Santa for the occasion. Police and fire officials help distribute toys. At City Hall Park, carols sung by children beside the Christmas tree compete with the chants of the nearby WPA picketers. "Children's Voices Win"—according to the Times, at least.

The Worker trims a different tree. More than a thousand children gather around another Christmas tree at 135th Street and Seventh Avenue. Music. Loudspeakers. Officials. But few gifts. A child says the celebration has made him hungry. Another asks whether Santa Claus has a relief budget. "Long on Spirit, Short on Gifts," is the headline's verdict.

For hate is strong, and mocks the song of peace on earth, good will to men.

"Murdered Babes in Fascist Planes' Christmas Raids," shrieks the *Daily Worker*. Women and children killed in attacks on Spanish towns. The *Times* chimes in: "Shells Kill 5 in Heart of Madrid; Explode Among Holiday Strollers." Refugees crowd the Telephone Building's basement. For an hour and a half, the city's holiday streets become "a place of tragedy and terror." Ralph Bates insists that Franco will not take Madrid. The city of Rochester, NY, sends eight hundred dollars to help the Spanish wounded.

Now the Christmas count! More than five thousand worshippers at St. Patrick's. Six thousand needy people fed by the Salvation Army. At the Advertising Club, two hundred elderly guests dine, dance, unwrap presents. Warm food. A song. A place at the table.

O tidings of comfort and joy

But in Hell's Kitchen, reporter Beth McHenry finds a hand-me-down Christmas. A mother shows her a doll retrieved from the garbage, its head crooked, one arm gone. Another family has a broken scooter. A child brings out a picture book with pages torn away. The mothers worry about rent. Christmas has come; the landlord will come, too.

At the waterfront, two thousand striking seamen eat Christmas dinner at their decked-out headquarters. Entertainers perform. The picketing continues. The *Worker* describes "the yule and strike spirit" at the docks. Nationwide, between fifty and seventy thousand workers are spending this Christmas on strike.

Let nothing you dismay

A Japanese envoy presses for harsher action in China. In Cuba, Batista's puppet Federico Laredo Bru is installed as president. From Berlin comes news of an antifascist worker sentenced to death. From Houston, a report of fifteen seamen injured in a police assault involving gunfire and tear gas. And the *Times* surveys the world: "WORLD CELEBRATES JOYOUS CHRISTMAS." Beneath it, like a footnote: "Only Discord Is Spain's War."

Night at the Winter Garden! Beatrice Lillie! Bert Lahr! *The Show Is On* opens on Christmas night. The *Daily Worker* carries their photograph on its stage-and-screen page. In both papers, holiday listings advertise dances, concerts, gatherings. In New York, there is always somewhere to go, someone to meet, music to hear.

"Santa Claus Visits the Wrong People," writes McHenry in the *Worker*. Remember political prisoners, their families, and the people of Spain. Send clothing to the Spanish consulate or the Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy. Even a small gift can make a big difference.

Turn to the sports page to escape from the politics…

"Fifty steeled athletes march out today to Commercial Field to do their bit for their embattled brothers in Spain." A Christmas soccer double-header. Another benefit. Spain is even in the box scores.

All is calm, all is bright…

December 26. The morning papers arrive at New York's newsstands.

"Madrid Searches for Bodies While Xmas Bells Peal."

Women dressed in black sift through debris. Artillery continues. People scramble for shelter. Nearby, the Canadian surgeon Norman Bethune works to keep his blood bank ready for the wounded—making new advances in blood preservation and storage, reports the *Times*.

John Dewey will preside at a coming Madison Square Garden rally for Fernando de los Ríos, the Republic's ambassador. United Spanish Societies sponsor the gathering.

Back on the waterfront: The *Normandie* arrived yesterday after a frightful crossing, battered by eighty-five-mile-an-hour winds and fifty-foot waves. Inbound passengers barely reached New York in time for Christmas. Outbound passengers make last-minute preparations for the journey.

Among them: Fritz Reiner, operatic conductor; Miss Jeannine Garanga, French fancy skating champion; Buddy Rogers, actor; Miss Lillian Hellman, playwright.

And 96 antifascist volunteers bound for Spain.

O come, all ye faithful

They have attended meetings. Followed instructions. Drilled at the Ukrainian Hall on East Third Street. Bought military-surplus clothing and gear on Canal Street. Obtained passports. Invented alibis. Packed black cardboard suitcases and secured them with yellow straps. They will travel third class and try to keep a low profile. They will probably stick out like sore thumbs.

At the Second Avenue Yiddish Theater, a farewell gathering. Gifts for the journey: cigarettes, a razor, two cakes of soap, a tin of coffee.

Pier 88 on the Hudson. Final farewells. Some have told their families where they are going. Others have not. All aboard. Bon voyage.

The newspapers and newsreels have brought the war into New York.

Now these are the first New Yorkers to head into the war.

James D. Fernández teaches at NYU, where he also directs the Espacio de Culturas.

About the Centerfold: The centerfold art commemorating the first group of US International Brigade volunteers was designed and executed exclusively for ALBA by Seisdedos, a well-known Spanish illustrator and comic artist. See more of his work at seisdedos-ilustracion.com.

Clipping from the *Daily Worker*, Aug. 6, 1936.

ARKIVO

By James D. Fernández

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

The Cuban journalist, intellectual, and activist Pablo de la Torriente Brau (1901-1936) was living in exile in New York when the Spanish Civil War erupted in July 1936. Here he chronicled two of the earliest solidarity gatherings held in New York in support of the Spanish Republic: a parade and meeting at the Spanish Workers' Club in Harlem and, a week later, a mass rally in Union Square. His account captures the political fervor that gripped the city that summer and fall. Just five months later, on December 26, 1936, 96 volunteers would sail from New York aboard the *Normandie* bound for Spain by way of France.

Moved by the mobilization he witnessed in New York, particularly the Union Square rally, de la Torriente Brau himself traveled to Spain in September 1936 as a correspondent. He subsequently joined the Republican forces. On December 19, he was killed in combat at Majadahonda, northwest of Madrid, while helping defend the capital.



DAILY WORKER, NEW YORK, MONDAY, AUGUST 3, 1936

PART OF MASS RALLY FOR SPAIN AND PEOPLE'S FRONT TROOPS IN ACTION

On the left is shown part of the united demonstration in Union Square Friday in support of the Spanish Popular Front's fight against Fascist rebels. On the right are shown armed worker-soldiers at Madrid. When the workers captured the Montana barracks held by Fascists there, snipers fired from the windows. These workers are hunting out the snipers.

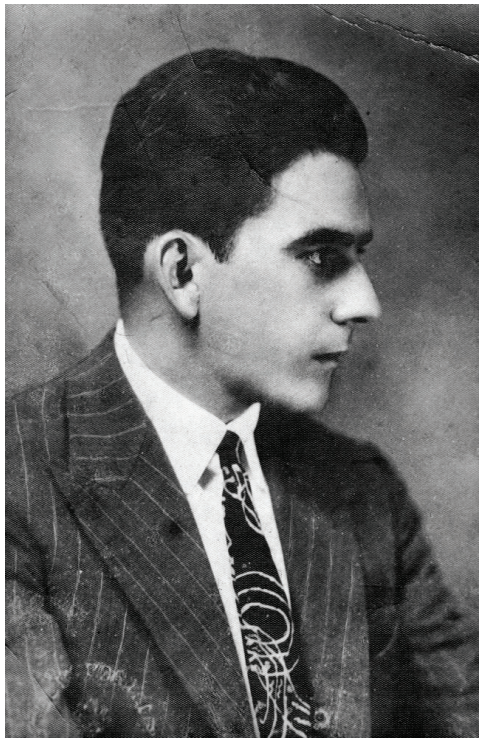
July 24, 25, 1936, Spanish Harlem, Ablaze

…On July 24, in Harlem, a torchlight parade made its way along the avenues. Beneath the blazing lights, the delirious enthusiasm of the red flags waved, and perched on their characteristic stepladder platforms, the speakers hailed the inevitable triumph of the militias over an army without popular support.

And the following day, at the Spanish Workers' Center on Madison Avenue, the workers' hall was packed to the rafters, and the staircase creaked under the weight of all the people so eager to get in. The reason was that the first sailors had arrived from Havana aboard the *Cristóbal Colón*, and since the fleet had shown such formidable unity in favor of the government, people wanted to encourage these men who were now bound for Spain. Anarchists, socialists, and communists laid out their views. For all of them there is only one possible outcome: victory. The audience, as electrified by enthusiasm as the speakers, grows restless. Impassioned. Everyone who has a peso gives it. And if not, a peseta, a real. Everyone gives. People shout that all Spaniards and all sympathizers with the revolution through-

Pablo de la Torriente Brau, ca. 1936. Public domain.

out the world must make sacrifices. And whoever cannot offer his body and his life must offer part of his labor, a little of his food, for the tireless heroes. Someone shouts that the women are fighting; that the children are fighting; that there is no alternative but victory or death; that sacrifices must be made. Someone says that the sailors of the *Colón*, during their stay in Havana, have obtained $27,000.00, and that many thousands more pesos will be sent from Cuba to the Popular Front government. And one sailor declares that "they would seize the ship if the officers did not come out in favor of the government." Never had there been more uproar and clamor there. And several hundred pesos were collected.



July 31, 1936, Union Square

Union Square, as everyone knows, is New York's Red Square. The May Day parades end there. All the demonstrations against war and fascism take place there, and it is there that American workers put forward their demands. Every day of the year, there are always groups of men and women talking about the revolution. They are invariably from different parts of the world. But they understand one another in New Yorkese, which is a kind of English. The police hate that square. The revolution loves it because it has been the scene of its first difficult struggles. It is not small, but nor is it one of those typical American parks with lakes, woods, and walking paths. An uneven wall of buildings surrounds it, recalling the pretentious old New York of just a few years ago, when neither the Chrysler nor the Empire State Building had yet been built. On one corner, from a lofty tower, a great clock measures time, the city's absolute master. And Fourteenth Street, the street of noisy sales and sidewalk vendors, is a river of people bordering the square.



This was where the great demonstration of international workers' solidarity took place in favor of the Spanish Popular Front government and against the fascist and monarchist insurgents. At four in the afternoon, the large open space set aside for rallies was filled with a heterogeneous crowd. [...] As the hour advanced, workers leaving the nearby factories streamed into the demonstration. On a truck decorated with red symbols, loudspeakers spread out like the trumpets of the Last Judgment. Mounted police surrounded the audience. And a closely packed line of reporters and photographers took up "strategic positions" on the wall of the pergola that marks the square's end at Seventeenth Street. On the roofs of their vehicles, the newsreel cameramen cranked away at "the event," always on the lookout for something exceptional or some commotion.

[,,,]

De la Torriente Brau (second from the left, without hat) on the streets of NYC. Ca. 1936. Public domain.

And the red banners of all the clubs waved. Not only those of the Spaniards. Not only those of the Spanish Americans. Also, those of the German, Italian, Chinese, American, and French clubs. And the speakers spoke in the same fashion. No one understood their words, but everyone understood them. One spoke in German. Another in Yiddish. Another in Russian. When one began to speak in Italian, many people exclaimed sympathetically: "That one's Spanish!…" And when the Spanish speakers Garriga, García, and Alonso spoke, the great ovations came.

There were delegations from the "Mella Club," the "Tampa," and the "Martí Club." Pamphlets and manifestos were distributed. Newspapers were sold. *La Estampa Libera*, in Italian, *El Socialista*, *Daily Worker*, *The Fight*, *Socialist Call*, *New Masses*, *China Today*, *Frente Hispano*.

[...]

Before the rally closed, money was collected from the audience in red flags, while, after an appeal from the chairman, everyone who had a dollar raised it overhead, and the bills passed from hand to hand up to the platform, to swell the funds, to raise half a million dollars for the Spanish workers. Then, the Internationale, the Red Flag, and fists held high, like a single, solid cheer.

And the rally closed with the slogan: whoever cannot go must send help. For here the half-million dollars will be collected, and even more, undoubtedly, because people are determined not to be outdone, and it is known that Cuba will make a great effort, as will Mexico, and Chile, and Argentina, and every people of Latin America. But many here are not content with sending money; they want to go, and the Consulate is now looking for a solution to the problem facing the Spanish volunteers. There are even those who want to go to form a counter-Foreign Legion. Everyone who yearns to witness and be part of these momentous events wants to ship out to Spain. For in Spain, extraordinary and scarcely believable things are happening every day. And it is a spectacle not to be missed.

De la Torriente Brau wrote the chronicles "La Revolución española se refleja en Nueva York" for the Cuban magazine Bohemia*, but for some reason they were not published until many years later in* Cartas y crónicas de España*, edited by Víctor Casaus, Ediciones La Memoria, Centro Cultural Pablo de la Torriente Brau, 1999, pp. 269-277.*

Peter Carroll. Photo Jeannette Ferrary.

"In Every Part of His Work, Peter Developed Relationships."

PETER CARROLL'S PAPERS, PROCESSED AND CATALOGUED, ARE NOW OPEN TO RESEARCHERS

By Sebastiaan Faber

In October, NYU's Tamiment Library announced that the papers of Peter N. Carroll, who passed away in 2024, have been catalogued and are open to researchers. Peter Carroll, a historian and former ALBA Chair born in New York in 1943, spent more than fifty years interviewing, researching, and writing about the Lincoln Brigade. How does one process and catalog a life's worth of work? We spoke with Shannon O'Neill, the curator for the Tamiment-Wagner collections, and processing archivist Rae Mahre. "It is a very intimate thing to witness and catalog somebody's work."



How do the Peter Carroll papers compare in size and scope to some of the other collections from researchers or authors within the ALBA Collection?

Shannon O'Neill (SON): What really strikes me about the ALBA collections produced by researchers and authors is that no matter the size of the individual collection—be it Peter's, Frances Patai's, Fredericka Martin's, or Carl Geiser's—they are all extremely rich in depth. And while there are certainly overlaps, each one has a distinct style that, seems to me, reflects the nature and approaches that each of these documentarians took. Peter's collection strikes me as somewhat unique in that it's a kind of meta-collection that allows us to witness Peter's ever-expanding understanding and knowledge of the Lincoln Brigade and Spanish Civil War. He was absolutely tenacious in this pursuit. What also really stands out to me in Peter's collection is you can observe his relationship with ALBA and the vets evolve—from a reverent curiosity to a deep commitment to this history and the people who lived it.

I see there are more than 30GB worth of computer files in the collection. Is that common these days?

Rae Mahre (RM): For collections that contain materials from the 1990s to the present day, computer files on optical discs, floppy disks, and hard drives are very common. In the Peter Carroll Papers, these born-digital materials consist mostly of scanned archival documents, digital photographs, and digital videos. In other collections, I've seen email correspondence, instant messages, website HTML files, and entire computer back-ups. To process these materials, we take a look at the files using a software program called Forensic ToolKit. Although this software is developed for the purpose of digital forensics, it serves archivists' purposes well because it allows us to analyze data and determine its integrity without altering the content. Here, we can look at files across carriers, tag them, and filter them in various ways to analyze and arrange their content, all without altering the files on their original carriers. In the case of computer backups, we would only preserve files with research value—such as working files stored on the computer—and we would not preserve things like software applications, operating system files, or default

Shannon O'Neill at an ALBA event in December 2025. Photo Alex Arbuckle.

backgrounds and fonts. Researcher access to files preserved from computer backups would look similar to files obtained from, for example, a floppy disk—the files would be isolated from the rest of the backup and arranged and described according to their content.

SON: To echo Rae, this is very common. As we increasingly only create documentation digitally, it will only become even more so. It's kind of interesting to consider how the bulk of the ALBA collections are entirely analog, given the period in which they were created and the period that they document. Peter's collection really sits at that nexus of the shift from the creation of records in analog formats to digital formats and makes me wonder what the future of collecting ALBA's history will look like.

These materials were donated over almost 15 years' time, from 2011 to 2025. Were they also processed gradually?

RM: No, they were processed in bulk in 2026. This is often the case, but not always. Sometimes if a collection contains many different donations over a span of several years, they may be processed individually rather than altogether. We never consider a collection to be "finished"—there may always be further edits due to additional information, digitization work, or donations to the collection. At NYU, as at many other large libraries and archives, we have a significant backlog of collections that are not yet processed. The collections get prioritized for processing based on many different factors, including research value, physical condition of the materials, or grant funding.

The finding aid says that "18 commercial, duplicate, or corrupted born-digital carriers were deaccessioned." Do we know what those might have contained?

RM: In this case, the corrupted born-digital carriers were indeed two floppy disks. Floppy disks are a fragile format, and recovering their data can be complicated because the way they are encoded depends on what operating system was used (e.g., Windows 95). Thankfully, we believe these two floppy disks duplicated paper materials in



the collection; based on their labels and original arrangement, one likely contained finding aids from Russian Archives, found in Series II. B, and one likely contained a submission to *The Volunteer*, found in Series I. The other 16 born-digital carriers that were deaccessioned contained duplicate or commercial content. This collection contained many commercial recordings on the Abraham Lincoln Brigade collected by Carroll. While we do not have the legal rights to serve these materials to researchers, they are available through other means, often found online or in a library's circulating collections.

I imagine that there's a way in which the *content* of a collection like this, but also its sheer *organization*, or lack thereof, ends up drawing a portrait of the human being responsible for it. What does Peter look like to a processing archivist?

RM: I love this question. It is a very intimate thing to witness and catalog somebody's work in this way. Peter comes across as someone who was very dedicated to his work. His research notes are very thorough, meticulously labeled, and mostly handwritten. (The labels made my job a lot easier!) I was struck by how much oral history work Peter did in the writing of his book *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*. This is someone who developed relationships in every part of his work. His place in his community can be seen not only through the roles he held and the events he participated in, but also in the effort he took to represent people's stories with intention. This was also my first time processing an ALBA collection, and I very much enjoyed learning about the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. They strike me as a group with a lot of integrity and also a great sense of humor.

SON: Rae's response is really moving to me. It defines Peter, as I got to know him, perfectly. I don't have the honor of saying that I knew Peter well, but the ways that I did know him made me admire him immensely. I will say that Peter's collection really makes me wish that I had had more time with him, but I'm so grateful for his papers because they demonstrate his intellect, his labor, his ethics, and his relationships. In this way, I think we'll all get to keep knowing Peter and knowing more about Peter. And that is a real gift.

Sebastiaan Faber, a longtime ALBA board member, teaches at Oberlin College.

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Finding Aid for the Peter N. Carroll Papers

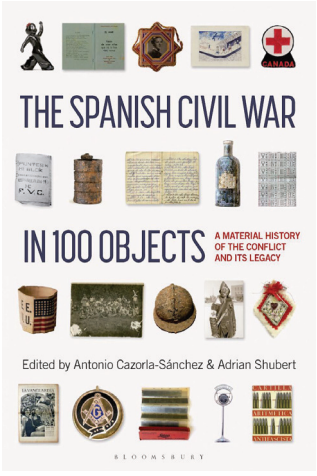
Digitized historical issues of *The Volunteer*

The *Daily Worker* and the *Daily World* Negatives Collection

Book Reviews

The Spanish Civil War in 100 Objects: A Material History of the Conflict and Its Legacy, edited by Antonio Cazorla-Sánchez and Adrian Shubert, translated by Esther Shubert-Palacios. Bloomsbury Academic, 2025. 299 + xii pp., 100 photographs. $34.95 (paperback).

Reviewed by Robert Shaffer



Inspired especially by the influential British Museum's radio series and 2010 book *A History of the World in 100 Objects*, Antonio Cazorla-Sánchez and Adrian Shubert, who co-direct the Canada-based Virtual Museum of the Spanish Civil War (https://www.vscw.ca/), have compiled a similarly impressive volume focused on the conflict in Spain. The editors and their nine additional contributors, all prominent Spanish scholars or journalists, have chosen a hundred objects—defined to include documents, films, and physical sites—to present a wide range of perspectives and experiences. Photographs of each object, presented in roughly chronological order, are accompanied by a two- or three-page explanation. The result is both scholarly and emotionally wrenching, conveyed with a decided sympathy for the Republic and a pervasively critical approach to the Nationalist uprising and dictatorship. But the contributors also forthrightly examine Loyalists' faults and excesses.

The "objects" range from a 4-inch-tall grenade produced from scrap materials by resourceful Republican troops to filing cabinets in which Francoists kept the names of hundreds of thousands targeted for imprisonment and execution. A diary of a pro-Republican Galician conscripted into the rebel army and subsequently executed appears alongside the 1937 *Joint Letter of the Bishops of Spain to the Bishops of the Whole World*, which portrayed the war as a struggle between "spiritual" and "materialistic" values.

Objects from daily life, such as tobacco pouches, take on greater significance. As each side sought to show that it could best provide this "necessity" for its soldiers, "the tables turned in 1937" in the Nationalists' favor when they came to control Spain's tobacco-growing regions. Other objects show the increasingly desperate circumstances of the Republic, such as the "bread bombs" that Nationalist planes dropped over Madrid in 1938 to propagandistically dramatize the severe food shortages in Loyalist zones.

Numerous objects were unearthed in the archaeological digs spurred by the movement to recover this historical memory of the war years. These include the binding that tied the hands of a Basque man who was executed for expressing sympathy for the Republic and whose body was exhumed in 2019.

Readers of *The Volunteer* will likely be most interested in the several objects in the book that relate to the International Brigades and other expressions of solidarity for the Republic. Interestingly, the only IB identification card reproduced is of a Spanish soldier who served with the Rakosi (Czech and Hungarian) battalion—reminding us that national distinctions among Loyalist forces were not always clear-cut. We also see the shoulder patch of Norman Bethune, the Canadian physician who helped set up a blood transfusion system for Republican armies. The accompanying description notes that the "prickly" Bethune sparred with government leaders and left Spain after only six months.

A .303 caliber bullet clip excavated from a Madrid trench in 2016 illuminates a fascinating episode of international history: thousands of these US-made cartridges made their way to Britain in World War I, were captured by the Red Army from British forces intervening in Russia's Civil War and then comprised a portion of Soviet aid to the Republic. A photo of Gerda Taro with her Leica camera serves as a backdrop for a perceptive discussion of how new technology helped launch 1930s-era photo-filled newsmagazines—and thus ushered in "modern war coverage" (even if the commentary misdates the publication of this war's iconic photograph, Robert Capa's "Falling Soldier").

The contributors also cover the international support for Franco. The description accompanying a "Certificate of Service in Eoin O'Duffy's Irish Brigade" reveals that more Irish volunteers served with the rebels—to defend Catholicism—than in the IBs. A drawing of "Betty Boop" (more demure than in her original American version) appeared in a publication of Women at the Service of Spain, one of numerous right-wing organizations that sewed clothing for Nationalist soldiers. Nevertheless, one of this book's recurring themes, hammered home in numerous objects and descriptions, is the stark contrast between Republican moves towards gender equality and the Francoist commitment—often backed by sexual violence—to women's subordination.

Brutal and wanton violence, while routinely practiced by the Nationalist insurgency and dictatorship, was not limited to the rebel side. Supporters of the Republic will be pained to read of the August 1936 murders of dozens of young Catholics in one community in northeastern Spain—illustrated by their final words etched onto a piano stool—and to view a rosary unearthed from a mass grave in Toledo that testified to the "savage anticlericalism that characterized the revolutionary violence" of the war's early months. The book's contributors attribute these atrocities primarily to Anarchist forces, noting that the central government soon tried to rein them in. Nevertheless, the toll in lives and property, and the publicity value for the Nationalists of such destruction, are sobering, indeed.

While many contributions refer informally to new studies of the conflict, some readers will lament the omission of footnotes and a bibliography. Moreover, the translation is marred by far-too-frequent typographical errors and several factual mistakes. Some photographs are too hazy to make a true visual impact. (A map of the country's provinces and major cities, mentioned throughout, would have helped non-Spanish readers.)

Still, the composite portrait that emerges in *The Spanish Civil War in 100 Objects* will be of great value both to those well-versed in the subject and others beginning to learn about it. The book's structure—linking intriguing images with brief, readable vignettes—encourages browsing and will make it especially valuable for high school and college classrooms, whether instructors assign the whole book or pick-and-choose notable examples. ▲

Robert Shaffer, professor emeritus of history at Shippensburg University, is the author of "The Spanish Civil War in 'World History' Textbooks," published in World History Connected *(2022).*

The Rose Held in the Teeth: An Anthology Marking the 90th Anniversary of the Outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, edited by Alan McGuire, Culture Matters, 2026, 84 pp.

Reviewed by Anthony Geist

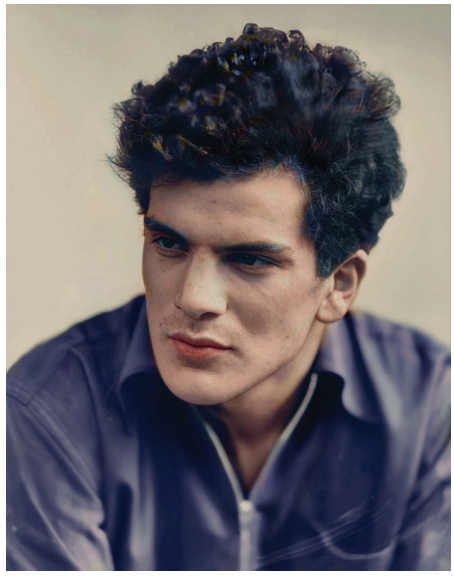


The Rose Held in the Teeth brings together the work of 15 British poets: eight who were in Spain during the Civil War (three of whom died in combat), and seven contemporary writers who reflect on the war from the present. This book makes an important contribution to our knowledge of the importance of art and literature during the conflict in Spain, filling the gap left by *The Penguin Book of Spanish Civil War Verse* (1980, 1996), now long out of print.

Both in history books and literary studies in the English-speaking world, the Spanish Civil War is often overshadowed by the two world wars that bookended it. Yet at the time, and throughout the world, it was understood as the first armed resistance to the rise of fascism. In response to the attempted coup led by Franco and a considerable part of the Spanish armed forces, the Spanish people took up arms to defend the recently established democracy in their country. As the Republic was vastly outgunned by Franco's forces—supported by arms and soldiers from Nazi Germany and fascist Italy—some 40,000 volunteers from over 50 countries came to its aid, forming the International Brigades. Many of the volunteers were working class; among them were a number of artists and poets. The vast majority of Spanish writers and artists took the side of the Republic, using their art as a weapon. Notable among them were Rafael Alberti, Miguel Hernández, and Manuel Altolaguirre.

In his insightful foreword, Alan McGuire begins by reviewing the history of Spain after the death of Franco, parsing the different narratives of the Transition. The newly established democracy promoted the Pact of Forgetting (*el Pacto del Olvido*) or the Pact of Silence (*el Pacto del Silencio*), yet the civil war remains an open wound. As McGuire states, it still "shapes the language of politics, the memory of the streets, and the uneven visibility of state violence."

John Cornford in the 1930s. Colorized by Tina Paterson.



The poems included by McGuire by the poets who fought in Spain describe an array of actions and emotions, ranging from the commitment that led them to volunteer to the experience of battle, prisons, hospitals, and comradeship. John Cornford, killed in action at Lopera one day after his twenty-first birthday, wrote:

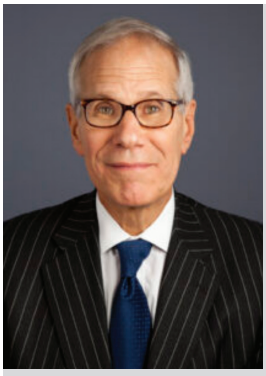
> Freedom is an easily spoken word
>
> But facts are stub born things. Here, too, in Spain
>
> Our fight's not won until the workers of all the world
>
> Stand by our guard on Huesca's plain
>
> Swear that our dead fought not in vain,
>
> Raise the red flag triumphantly
>
> For Communism and liberty.

Alex McDade, who died in the battle of Brunete, wrote what has become the iconic song of the Spanish Civil War, "Jarama Valley":

> There's a valley in Spain called Jarama,
>
> That's a place that we all know so well,
>
> for 'tis there that we wasted our manhood,
>
> And most of our old age as well.

While the poets who participated in the civil war largely wrote about their experience in the first person and present tense, the poems of the seven contemporary writers most often are cast in the third person and past tense, often naming brigadistas who lost their lives in the conflict. They look back with sorrow and admiration. Rob Hindle reconstructs the execution of Lorca. Alan McGuire devotes a poem to Miguel Hernández. In another, he grieves: "No open graves / ghosts still haunt / the present / from the past." Others pay homage, with names and dates, to the fallen poets. To the best of my knowledge, relatively few contemporary Spanish poets write as explicitly about the war and its effects still felt in Spain today. ▲

Tony Geist, a longtime ALBA board member, teaches at the University of Washington in Seattle.



John Brickman (1944-2026)

John Brickman, longtime ALBA Board member and partner and head of litigation at the Long Island office of McLaughlin & Stern, LLP, passed away on September 10, 2026, five days before his 82nd birthday. Born in New York in 1944, John attended Johns Hopkins and graduated cum laude from Columbia Law. He began his career as Executive Director of the New York City Board of Correction and later served as chair and a member of the Board of Directors of the Correctional Association of New York, remaining committed to improving oversight, transparency, and accountability in prisons and jails.

John valued community engagement and public service. Long before John joined the ALBA board, he and his wife, the historian Jane Pacht Brickman—whose research involved progressive medical professionals caught in the Second Red Scare—were early and enthusiastic supporters of ALBA's work. As a dedicated ALBA board member, John generously lent his legal expertise whenever it was needed. He also was a board member of the Levitt Foundation and worked as pro bono counsel to the Manhasset-Great Neck Community Service Center. A true professional and "lawyer's lawyer," he taught civility, legal ethics, and trial advocacy. He served on the New York State Legislative Ethics Commission and the New York State Commission on Public Integrity, which enforced lobbying and public employee ethics laws. He was also a director of the Nassau Health Care Corporation, which operates the Nassau University Medical Center, and a director and former chairman of the Correctional Association of New York, an organization founded in 1844 that visits prisons and engages in research and advocacy in criminal justice.

A consummate, Manhattan-born-and-raised New Yorker, John was a devoted family man, an avid Yankees fan, a member of the Century Association, a New York Philharmonic regular, a daily listener of WQXR and WNYC, and a devoted *New York Times* reader and frequent letter-to-the-editor writer. He loved to travel, take photos, and listen to folk music; among his favorites were Woody Guthrie, Judy Collins, Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, and especially Pete Seeger. John is survived by his wife of 54 years, Jane Pacht Brickman; daughters Elizabeth Greilsheimer (Jeffrey) and Suzanna Brickman (James Ralph); grandchildren Daniel, Allison, Eleanor, and Annabelle; sister Penny Brickman (James Thomashower); and many others in the extended and tight-knit Pacht and Brickman families.

KITCHEN TABLE HISTORY

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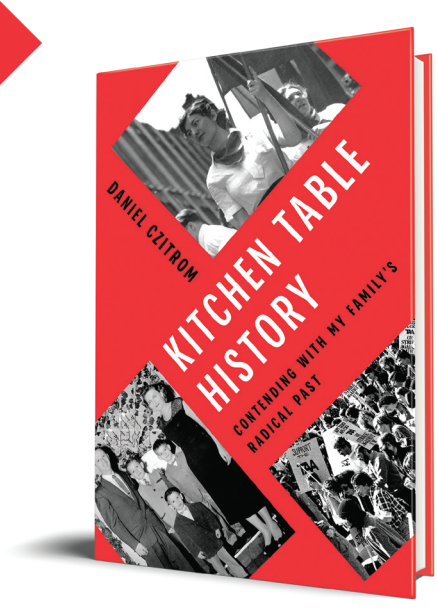

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