

"...and that government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

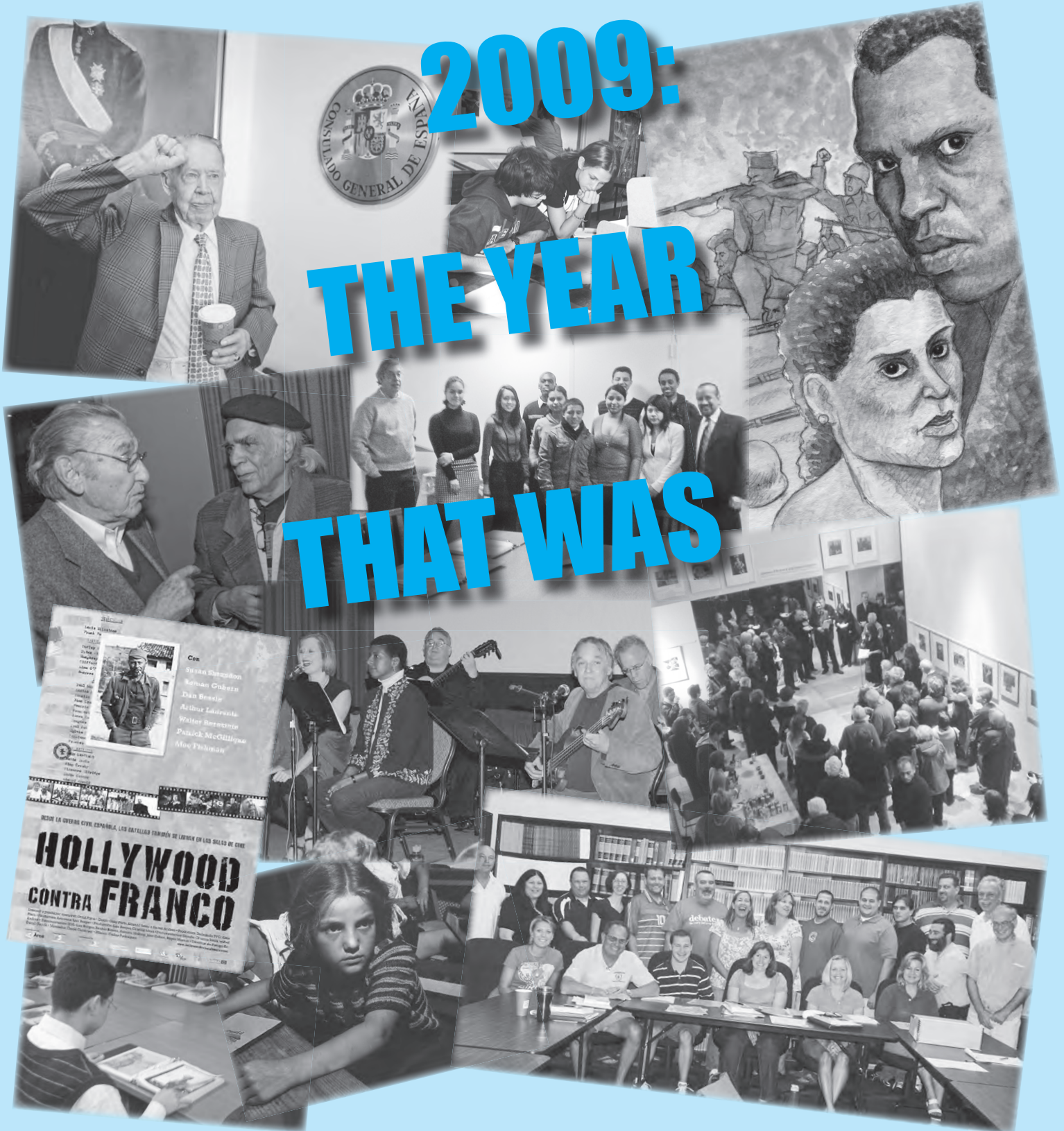
# The Volunteer

FOUNDED BY THE VETERANS OF THE ABRAHAM LINCOLN BRIGADE

# 2009:

# THE YEAR

# THAT WAS



Con:  
 Susan Swanson  
 Nathan Gabeza  
 Dan Beale  
 Arthur Lakravala  
 Walter Berencia  
 Patrick McGilmore  
 Moe Fishman

**HOLLYWOOD**  
**CONTRA FRANCO**

SEGUN LA OBRA DE CINE ESPAÑOL, LOS BATALLAS FRENTE DE LONDRES EN LOS SALAS DE CINE

Dear ALBA Friends,

It's been a busy year. My first week with ALBA, in October 2008, gave me a wonderful introduction to our community with the 70th anniversary *Despedida* event. Also in October, historian Helen Graham gave the Bill Susman Lecture on what the Brigadistas have taught us about crossing borders of all kinds.

In 2009, we continued with the inspirational lessons of crossing borders. Many of our programs and events were made possible through wonderful institutional partnerships, including the Puffin Foundation, Tamiment Library, the King Juan Carlos I Center, the Steinhardt School of Education, the Catalan Center, the Gotham Center for NYC History and the Instituto Cervantes New York.

We began the year with a Walter Rosenblum photographic exhibit on refugees. This theme continued in the spring with a full-day symposium and with our San Francisco and New York 73rd anniversary reunions. In New York, Pete Seeger's friends decided to hold his birthday party the same day as the ALBA reunion. True to what I have learned about the ALBA community, there was no competition. Instead, there was a characteristically inclusive effort to do both events. What I have learned about the ALBA community is that we are dedicated, energetic, and really a lot of fun!

There have been many other wonderful events this past year, too numerous to list. It has been especially uplifting that we have been able to reach out to new generations with our educational programs.

The year 2009 also has been a time of anniversaries, celebrations and remembrance. Founded in 1979, ALBA celebrated its 30th anniversary. And recently, we gathered for a 25th year anniversary screening of the documentary film, *The Good Fight: the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and the Spanish Civil War*. ALBA also participated in the dedication of a new commemorative plaque at the cemetery of Fuencarral, Madrid.

We have also seen volunteers take advantage of the Spanish government's offer of citizenship for the



International Brigades. As volunteer Matti Mattson said, he and his fellow Brigaders have claimed this citizenship in the name of all those who volunteered and are no longer with us.

On behalf of ALBA and its Board of Governors, I thank all of the ALBA community for their support. Working together, 2010 will see our continued dedication to the history and legacy of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade.

All My Best for the New Year,  
Jeanne Houck  
Executive Director  
Jhouck@alba-valb.org

## The Volunteer

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Veterans of the  
Abraham Lincoln Brigade

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# New Jersey Teachers Keep the Memory Alive: A Letter to ALBA

The history of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade has all but been forgotten in American high schools, with history textbooks barely making mention of these “premature anti-fascists.” But over the last two years, 33 students from the Bergen County Academies, a magnet high school in Hackensack, New Jersey, have opted to learn more about the American volunteers of the Spanish Civil War by enrolling in a new open project called “Political Activism Then and Now: Lessons of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade.”

The idea for this course originated in the summer of 2008 during a week-long workshop at New York University. Three teachers from BCA, Gabriella Calandra and Carlos Gonzalez from the World Language Department and Sergei Alschen from History, were among the 16 teachers that participated.

The project allows students to explore not only the confluence of international, Spanish, and American conditions that led to the Spanish Civil War, but also to learn about what motivated young people in the 1930s to take up the cause of justice and to fight against fascism on the other side of the world, when their own country prohibited them from doing so. The project culminates with the students identifying contemporary



issues—political, social, economic, or environmental—and drawing up a plan of political action based on a cause they would like to take up.

The two classes learned a lesson in historiography by taking a field trip to the Tamiment Library at NYU in April and October and conducting archival research. The students spent time reading letters written by and to the veterans, which they used to produce a short written account of what they learned. Having access to the actual documents written in a trench at the front or a hospital behind the lines brought the realities of conflict closer to home for the students. They also browsed the political posters from the Spanish Civil War, learning the importance of the messages conveyed in them to mobilize support for the Republican cause. Finally, the students viewed the documentary movie *The Good Fight: The Abraham Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War*, which culminated in a spirited class discussion about the heroism of the veterans.

Mrs. Calandra and I would like to thank the following people for making

this project possible: Principal Danny Jaye and Lee Frissell of NYU for giving us the opportunity to participate in the workshop that led to the creation of this project; NYU Professor James Fernandez, Jeanne Houck, Executive Director of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives, and Gail Malmgreen, Associate Head for Archival Collections at the Tamiment for providing us with access to the archival documents; and Peter Carroll for all of his guidance during our NYU summer seminar and for his wonderful book, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, which we use as one of our textbooks for the project. Most of all, thanks to the students that have enrolled in this project for making it so interesting and so much fun to teach.

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Bergen County Academies



# Matti Mattson, Citizen of Spain



Matti Mattson (seated) at the consulate proceedings.  
Photo by Nicole Tung/*New York Times* ([www.nicoletung.com](http://www.nicoletung.com)).

Matti Mattson's big day was covered by *The New York Times*, which published a significant article the next day. The article can be seen at [www.nytimes.com/2009/08/27/nyregion/27lincoln.html?r=1&partner=rss&emc=rss](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/27/nyregion/27lincoln.html?r=1&partner=rss&emc=rss).

ALBA and James D. Fernández produced a five-minute video reportage of the day, which can be viewed at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=NpSzMNFOWzU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NpSzMNFOWzU).

On August 26, 2009, Matti Mattson became the third surviving Lincoln vet to take advantage of one of the key provisions of Spain's controversial "Law of Historical Memory," which allows veterans of the International Brigades to acquire Spanish citizenship without renouncing their other nationality.

In becoming a citizen of democratic Spain, Mattson joins the ranks of his comrades Clarence Kailin (who recently passed away) and John Hovan.

At a ceremony in the private office of Fernando Villalonga, Spain's Consul General in New York, Mattson accepted the honor "not only for the guys that are buried here, but also for the guys that are buried in Spain. And there's a lot of them." ▀

## Beijing Commemorates Spain

The 70th anniversary of the Spanish Civil War brought a cycle of conferences to Beijing's Cervantes Institute. The first, a bilingual event in Spanish and Chinese, focused on the role of the Chinese volunteers in the war. The hall was packed with Chinese of all ages.

Professor Laureano Ramirez, who had proposed this series, gave an overview of the project to study the Spanish Civil War and its relationship with China.

Then I gave a brief presentation entitled "Defend Madrid! Build New China!" an account of the dozen

or so veterans of the Spanish Civil War—including my father, David Crook—who served with the emerging Peoples' Republic of China.

Prof. Zhang Kai gave a meticulously documented account of China's support of the war, as well as of the heroic deeds of veterans of the Spanish Civil War who went to China to help in the war of resistance against Japanese aggression (1937-1945).

The piece de resistance was Hwei-Ru Ni's presentation, a well-illustrated record of the heroism of the Chinese volunteers in Spain, a tantalizing taste of the content of her

book, expected to be translated into Spanish soon.

For organizing this most convivial event, I am most grateful to the Cervantes Institute Peking, the Universita Autonoma de Barcelona, and the sponsors.

If any reader has leads or can tell us more about veterans who served in China, please contact me! The China Society for People's Friendship Studies would be most grateful!

Long live peoples' friendship!

Michael Crook

[Crookm06@gmail.com](mailto:Crookm06@gmail.com) ▀

# NY Teachers Praise Program

**W**ith public school pupils released from classes on election day in New York last month, ALBA took the opportunity to create a day-long professional development program for 25 high school teachers, co-hosted by New York University's Steinhardt School of Human Development and Learning, the King Juan Carlos Center, and Tamiment Library.

Aimed to introduce teachers to the riches of the ALBA collection and to explain its relevance to various curricular requirements, the program was coordinated by Professors James Fernandez (Spanish Department and ALBA), Robert Cohen (Teaching & Learning), Peter N. Carroll (ALBA), and Lee Frissell (NYU).

The 25 social studies teachers, selected from over 200 applicants from public high schools in the five boroughs, were able to conduct hands-on explorations of the archives and to discuss ways to incorporate ALBA's unique resources into their high school classrooms. The workshop participants explored nine manuscript collections, as well as a selection of original Spanish Civil War posters, postcards, and photographs.

When does a war start? Why has the Spanish Civil War been largely written out of U.S. history textbooks? What are the links between Depression-era activism in the states and the war in Spain? What are some of the implications of the racially integrated nature of the International Brigades? Why was President Roosevelt slow to challenge German and Italian intervention on the Franco side of the war?

Using original archival sources, the teachers discovered fresh ways of

addressing such questions in their classrooms and integrating a forgotten subject into the regular teaching experience. Their response was enthusiastic, as seen in some of the anonymous post-session reports to ALBA:

"I gained important knowledge about the issues, but more important, realized that the issue is vital to bring into U.S. and global classrooms."

"The topic is useful in so many ways besides the obvious topic of "The Spanish Civil War" or "U.S. involvement prior to World War II." The

stories are an excellent avenue to discuss so-called radicalism in the U.S., African American experience in the 1930s, and a grasp of American commitment to democratic ideals."

"I would use these documents to help DBQ [Document Based Question] essay writing skills."

"I would open this workshop up to ALL humanities teachers!"

"The professors are wonderful in their knowledge and presentation."

As for ALBA, we consider this just the beginning! ▀







From left, Charles Woolfolk, Peter Carroll, Dr. Muriel Petzioni, Susan Robeson, and Jacob Morris.

## PAUL ROBESON BOULEVARD

**T**he volunteers of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade created a self-selected identity: out of the 130 million people living in the United States in the 1930s, only 2800 put their lives on the line to defend the democratic government of Spain.

Plus two: Two other people were given honorary membership as veterans of the brigade. One was Dr. Edward K. Barsky, who helped create the American Medical Bureau to Save Spanish Democracy and became a front-line surgeon who saved hundreds of lives; the second was Paul Robeson, singer, actor, activist, who visited the brigade in Spain, toured the embattled countryside, and sang songs of resistance for the wounded in hospitals.

After the war ended, the trajectory of Robeson and the Lincoln vets remained inextricably intertwined. Both supported the Spanish refugees and advocated breaking diplomatic relations with the Franco regime. Both faced the wrath of the Un-American Activities committees and the black list. Robeson sang songs of protest at VALB reunions; the vets acted as his personal body guards during the red scare. They had forged a lifetime commitment to the good fight.

The recent publication of *Robeson in Spain* brought ALBA a welcome invitation to participate in the public ceremonies on September 26 surrounding the renaming of the New York street where Robeson lived from

1939 to 1941 as “Paul Robeson Boulevard.” The formal ceremony took place at the intersection of Paul Robeson Boulevard and Count Basie Place (formerly Edgecombe Avenue & 160th Street).

After the ceremony, I spoke about the Robesons’ connections to Spain at the nearby Morris-Jumel Mansion. The Robesons’ granddaughter, Susan Robeson, also participated, along with several municipal officials. The crowd was entertained by Marjorie Eliot and friends. The program was organized by a local activist, Norman Skinner.

—Peter N. Carroll ■

# Paul Robeson's Legacy

Ol' Man River: he changed the lyrics  
one night in Albert Hall, 1937:

No more

*I'm tired of livin'  
And scared of dyin'*

but a vow

*I must keep fightin'  
until I'm dyin'.*

And the Negro baritone brought his voice  
to soldiers defending Spain's Republic,  
fightin' fascism: Franco, Hitler, Mussolini.  
Anti-fascists embraced the new version,  
especially 90-odd African American volunteers  
of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade,  
including

Canute Frankson, who dreamed aloud  
*if we crush Fascism here  
we'll save our people in America . . .  
build us a new society . . . no color line,  
no jim-crow trains, no lynching.*

And after Spain, back in America  
Robeson taught the songs

*All your tears of sorrow  
We shall avenge them  
And all our age-old bondage  
We'll break asunder.*

(Belafonte took notes, carried away the dream.)

La lucha continua: the war continued  
(in the Jim Crow army)  
against fascism  
(the Red Cross segregated colored blood)  
(a captain court-martialed Jackie Robinson  
for refusing to sit in the back of the bus)

La lucha continua: they were already  
(when Rosa Parks did not stand up)  
in the fight  
(when Dr. King dreamed)  
*to give my life to something eternal  
and absolute. Not to these little gods  
that are here today and gone tomorrow.*

Robeson's Spanish Civil War veterans re-entered  
the front lines: in Mississippi, south side Chicago,  
Louisville, Harlem, Selma, Newark, Detroit,  
Seattle, Sacramento, San Francisco, LA.

La lucha continua: the struggle goes on  
*until I'm dyin'*

and goes on.

—Peter Neil Carroll  
Barcelona, October 2008

This poem was originally published in *I Have a Dream: International Tribute Exhibition to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*, edited by Gabi Serrano (Sitges, Spain, 2009). ■

Peter Neil Carroll is the author of *Riverborne: A Mississippi Requiem* (2008). For more about his poetry visit:  
<http://poetspace.ning.com/profile/PeterNeilCarroll>.

## Book Notes

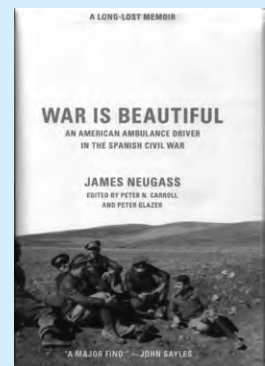


### **Norway & the Spanish Civil War**

*Tusen Dager: Norge og den Spanske Borgerkrigen 1936-1939* (*A Thousand Days: Norway and the Spanish Civil War 1936-1939*), a Norwegian language book about the Norwegian volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, by Jo Stein Moen and Rolf Sæther, has recently been published. The ISBN is 9788205393516. To order the book, go to [www.tusendager.no](http://www.tusendager.no).

### **War is Beautiful**

Poet James Neugass's account of the Spanish Civil War, along with other Spanish Civil War books, is available from Powell's Books through the ALBA website, [www.alba-valb.org/books](http://www.alba-valb.org/books), and the ALBA office, 212-674-5398. Hardcover: \$26.95



# Children's Drawings in Havana

By Tony Geist

**D**rawings of airplanes, bombing raids, soldiers in combat, and civilians wounded and dying made by young Spaniards in Children's Colonies saw the light of day 70 years later in Havana, Cuba. On September 22, 2009, I had the honor of speaking at the opening of "They Still Draw Pictures: Children's Drawings from the Spanish Civil War," on display in the Pablo de la Torriente Brau Cultural Center, named for the Cuban volunteer who died defending Madrid early in the war.

The exhibit consists of 49 facsimiles of drawings held in the archives of the Avery Library of Art and Architecture at Columbia University. Eight photographs, four by Robert Capa, accompany them. The exhibit, in various configurations, has traveled throughout the U.S. as well as Russia and Spain. This is its first venue in Latin America. The exhibition in Cuba was made possible by the generosity of The Puffin Foundation.

On a sweltering afternoon, the exhibit was enthusiastically received by some 50 Cubans. Among them were a number of "niños de la guerra," adults who went into exile as children at the end of the war, including Aitana Alberti, daughter of the great poet of Republican Spain, Rafael Alberti. Víctor Casaus, director of el Centro Pablo, and Vivian Núñez, responsible for hanging the show, welcomed the audience, contextualizing the exhibit in the mission of the Center and explaining its relevance for today's struggles throughout the world. In my remarks, I explained the origin of the drawings, the history of the exhibit, and ALBA's mission as a living archive. Finally, two "niños de la



Tony Geist (holding print) with "niños de la guerra" and Victor Casaus (far right).

guerra" spoke movingly of the war and exile.

Historian Aurea Matilde Fernández (recipient of the Cuban National Prize for Social Science) related the experience of returning to her native Asturias 40 years later. She visited the cemetery where her father was executed and learned that her mother was thrown by the fascists into the sea. "Nothing can bring back our loved ones, but these homages give a certain sense of peace. Peace, yes, but we shall never forget."

Rafael Morante (awarded the Cuban National Prize for Design) said that 1937 started badly for many people. He recalled being shelled by Nazi warships at age five, as he clutched his mother's hand, fleeing up the coast road in Almería. "I thought the world had come to an end and would never be the same again."

At the end of the ceremony, four more "niños de la guerra" stepped forward and gave me a print done by their older brother, José Luis Posada, who came to Cuba as a child and became one of the island's foremost graphic artists in the 1960s.

The following day, in a local movie house, I introduced and showed *La guerra dibujada* (*The War in Drawings*), a documentary on the children's drawings produced in 2006 by Spanish filmmakers Amanda Gascó and Xabier Cortés. It has subsequently been screened several times on Cuban TV, with a pre-taped interview with me, as has my documentary on the Lincoln Brigade, *Almas sin fronteras*.

My experience with the children's drawings in Havana confirms that the memory of that distant war is still alive. Cubans feel the Spanish Civil War very personally. I couldn't avoid noting the eerie similarity between the U.S. embargo on aid to the Spanish Republic and the blockade of Cuba that has lasted nearly half a century.

The exhibit received extensive coverage by Radio Habana, Cuban television, and the print media, with articles appearing in *La Jiribilla* and *Granma*. ▀

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Tony Geist, Chair of the Spanish Department at the University of Washington, is the longest serving ALBA board member.



# Truth in the Making: The Never-Ending Saga of Capa's FALLING SOLDIER

By Sebastiaan Faber

This past July, around the 73rd anniversary of the outbreak of the Civil War and 11 days after the opening of a large Robert Capa exhibit at the Catalan National Museum of Art, the Barcelona newspaper *El Periódico de Catalunya* published what was billed as a stunning revelation: Capa's legendary photograph of *The Falling Soldier* was a fake. New evidence, the paper claimed, proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that the image was not taken at Cerro Muriano near Córdoba, as had long been assumed, but some 50 kilometers south, near the town of Espejo, which Capa and Gerda Taro had visited previously. This meant that the militiaman depicted was definitively not Federico Borrell García, an anarchist known to have been killed at Cerro Muriano. In fact, because there is no record of any battle action in Espejo when Capa was there, the paper concluded that the photo must have been staged.

In the following weeks, pundits and columnists in Spain and elsewhere pondered this revelation. Was Capa a fraud? Should his whole work be re-examined? Did he intend to deceive the public or did the editors of *Vu* and *Life*, who first published the image and wrote the initial captions—with *Life* claiming Capa had captured “the moment of death”? An editorial

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Sebastiaan Faber is Chair of Hispanic Studies at Oberlin College. His latest books are *Anglo-American Hispanists and the Spanish Civil War* (Palgrave, 2008) and *Contra el olvido. El exilio español en Estados Unidos* (Universidad de Alcalá, 2009).

in *El Periódico* forgivingly called Capa's trespass *un pecado de juventud*, or sin of youth (Capa was 22 at the time). Others went further. The president of Journalists without Borders questioned Capa's professional integrity. Some accused him of cheating for the sake of money and fame. But the photographer had defenders, too, some of whom, even while admitting the new evidence of the photo's location, still refused to accept that the image was necessarily false. As others, including Capa's biographer Richard Whalen, had done before, they maintained that the soldier may have posed for the camera, only to be unexpectedly hit by a live bullet, perhaps from a sniper.

As the controversy spread, it was hard to avoid the impression that there was something fishy about the affair. While *El Periódico's* coverage was picked up in the international press—in the English-language media, it was featured by the BBC, *Time*, and the *New York Times*—it was ignored by *El País*, Spain's largest national paper and leading online news portal for the Spanish-speaking world. Moreover, most of *El Periódico's* revelations were not really new. The data on the new location were largely based on a book by José Manuel Susperregui Etxebeste, a Professor of Audiovisual Communications at the University of Basque Country. This book, *Sombras de la fotografía. Los enigmas desvelados de Nicolasa Ugartemendia, Muerte de un miliciano, La aldea española y El Lute*, had come out months earlier and had been covered by Giles Tremlett in *The Guardian* (June 14), as well as by *El País* (July 6 and 7). Some years

before, moreover, two documentaries—*Los héroes nunca mueren* (2004) by Jan Arnold and *La sombra del Iceberg* (2007) by Hugo Doménech and Raúl Riebenbahuer—had revealed that the soldier could not have been Borrell. To be sure, *El Periódico* claimed to have found additional evidence confirming Susperregui's findings and to have located the exact place the photo was taken by analyzing the shape of the mountain range in the background of one of Capa's photos taken the same day. But the landscape case had been made a month before by a photography blogger, José Manuel Serrano Esparza (see [elrectanguloenlamano.blogspot.com](http://elrectanguloenlamano.blogspot.com)). The timing of the scoop was a bit suspicious. Was *El Periódico* trying to milk the anniversary of the war's outbreak and take advantage of the opportunity in a slow summer month?

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The question is not so much where Capa's photo was actually taken or if it's “real” (whatever that may mean), but why so many people continue to feel so strongly about it. Different explanations suggest themselves. The debates about the “recovery of historical memory” have made clear that the war still matters to present-day Spaniards. There is a widespread sense that unpleasant truths remain to be revealed or, similarly, that some long-held certainties will be exposed for the lies they really are. Andalucía is currently in uproar over the grave of the poet Federico Garcia Lorca: It is clear that there are several bodies at

Continued on page 8

# FALLING

Continued from page 7

Víznar, near Granada, which Lorca's biographer Ian Gibson long ago signaled as the poet's burying place. But conspiracy theories abound. Is one of those bodies really Lorca's? Was he secretly disinterred? The Lorca family initially objected to exhumation. Gibson insists that the issue transcends family considerations: All of Spain deserves to know whether the remains are Lorca's or not. The Lorca case also raises questions at the heart of the Capa controversy. Who owns the story of the Civil War, for example, and who can make claims to the historical truth?

During the Franco years—when historical research in Spain was severely hampered by the regime, while exiled Republican historians had no access to archives and often lacked institutional support—foreign academics, particularly from France, Britain and the United States, took the lead in shaping the narrative of 20th century Spanish history. The first standard studies were penned by Pierre Vilar, Raymond Carr, Gabriel Jackson, Hugh Thomas, Herbert Southworth, Stanley Payne and, later on, by Paul Preston, Helen Graham, and Carolyn Boyd. While Spanish intellectuals respected these hispanistas, they also felt that this hegemony of foreign scholars was anomalous and, in the end, embarrassing. The foreigners liked to claim that they were more objective because they were less involved in Spain's political rifts. Others argued that non-Spaniards were more prone to romanticize or misread Spanish reality—as had many of the foreigners who, like Capa, flocked to Spain after the outbreak of war, and not all of whom were driven by a pure, disinterested desire to help

(In 1969, the Nobel Prize-winning novelist Camilo José Cela expressly did not dedicate his Civil-War novel *San Camilo, 1936* to “the adventurers from abroad, Fascists and Marxists, who had their fill of killing Spaniards like rabbits and whom no one had invited to take part in our funeral.”)

Proving Capa's photo a fake, undermining its legendary status as an iconic image of the war and suggesting that the Hungarian was willing to compromise journalistic integrity for the sake of political propaganda or to help launch his career—all this is not just about getting to the truth. It marks one more step in the Spaniards' gradual reconquest of the right to shape and tell their history. (Interestingly, this summer's Capa coverage was an almost exclusively Catalan affair, led by the same newspaper that has given ample attention to the recent discovery of the archives of Agustí Centelles, one of the Republic's official photographers. Some of Centelles' most iconic images, including a photo of two *guardias de asalto* shooting rifles from behind a pile of dead horses, are, ironically, also known to have been posed.)

But this is not the only issue. The *recuperación de la memoria histórica*, spearheaded in 2000 by Emilio Silva when he founded the association of the same name, continues to be controversial. It has exposed or fueled tensions not just between Left and Right and between the Spanish central government and the autonomous regions, but also between established academic historians and non-academics who claim to tell stories about the past that are true and relevant—including aging victims of repression and their family members, citizen

activists, journalists and documentary makers, or amateur scholars. Those same tensions are at play in the debate around Capa's *Falling Soldier*, in which key contributions have been made not just by curators and scholars with access to the full archive, but also by journalists, amateur historians, and bloggers armed with little more than a ticket to an exhibit, a digital camera, and time to scout out locations. But now there is mutual distrust and suspicion; rather than a collective effort to get to the truth, the debate has become what the Spaniards call a *diálogo de sordos*, or deaf man's dialogue.

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The book that located *The Falling Soldier* in Espejo is not just about Capa. It aims to reveal the truth behind four photographic images, or sets of images, that have achieved iconic status. Besides Capa's print, it has sections on a much-circulated shot of a forlorn family of Basque refugees (who happen to be the author's aunt, cousin, and great-grandmother), Eugene W. Smith's reportage of a Spanish village (published by *Life* in 1951), and photos registering the capture of the infamous criminal “El Lute.” The author, J.M. Susperregui, is driven by a philosophically naïve but useful principle: press photography, he maintains, is either true or false. It either registers actual events as they occurred in reality or it seeks to manipulate that reality, thus deceiving the audience. The only way to find out which is which is by carefully looking at the image while, at the same time, reconstructing the exact circumstances of its creation. This is precisely what he did for the Capa photo, beginning with



a detailed review of all the evidence and arguments presented so far, and then moving to his own analysis and conclusions. Although Susperregui's style is more essayistic than academic—he tends to be colloquial, chatty and a bit prolix, and the book is not edited very thoroughly—he presents his case with a good dose of common sense. His final position is clear: the militiaman depicted is not Federico Borrell; the picture was not taken at Cerro Muriano, but at Espejo, and before September 5; it was not taken with Capa's Leica, but with Taro's Rolleiflex, and likely from a tri-

the picture, or perhaps even a tripod, belying his later claim to have shot it by lifting his arm above a trench and without looking through the view finder. The fact that both photos published in *Vu* are of two different soldiers dying in exactly the same spot, and that both images are almost identically framed—as is a third photo from the series depicting a running militiaman—further supports the tripod hypothesis. How likely is it that two different men were killed on the same precise square meter in the rearguard, within moments of each other, with a photographer there to

circumstantial data as definitive proof. The fact that a certain Federico Borrell was killed at Cerro Muriano, for instance, and that, when asked, some of his aging family members claimed to recognize him in Capa's photograph, was considered enough to declare the case closed. (It later turned out that the real Borrell did not much resemble the man in the photo and was shot while sheltered behind a tree.)

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For those who have doubted the authenticity of *The Falling Soldier*, the status of Capa's photograph is directly linked to the photographer's integrity: If the picture was a fraud, then so was he. The biggest tactical mistake of Capa's biographer, Robert Whelan, was to accept this premise, in effect allowing Capa's reputation to rest on this one question. In 2002, when all evidence seemed to point in the direction of Borrell, Whelan concluded in an article in *Aperture*: "May the slanderous controversy that has plagued Robert Capa's reputation for more than twenty-five years now, at last come to an end with a verdict decisively in favor of Capa's integrity. It is time to let both Capa and Borrell rest in peace, and to acclaim *The Falling Soldier* once again as an unquestioned masterpiece of photojournalism and as perhaps the greatest war photograph ever made." Implicit here is the admission that reopening of the case will automatically draw Capa's integrity into question once again.

A whole photographic career, however, does not stand or fall by a single image. More important, Susperregui's driving principle, that a documentary photograph is either true or false, does

Continued on page 10

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*A whole photographic career, however, does not stand or fall by a single image.*

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pod; it was posed; and the soldier is only pretending to have been hit.

Regardless of whether Susperregui is right, he brings up a number of issues that have been glossed over by previous scholars—some surprisingly so, because they are photo-technical in nature. Susperregui notes, for instance, that the image in *Life* in July 1937 contains a much larger portion of sky than the first published version in *Vu* of late September 1936. The changed aspect ratio suggests that the photo may have been taken with Gerda Taro's Rolleiflex (which produces square negatives) rather than with Capa's Leica (whose negatives have a 3:2 ratio). This is not a crazy supposition: We know Capa and Taro were both there, and of the 40 prints that have been preserved, at least eight were taken with the Rolleiflex. Given that this was a heavier camera, however, it is likelier that Capa would have used both hands to take

capture both deaths with an amazingly steady hand?

Susperregui is convinced that those defending the image's authenticity—particularly the International Center of Photography in New York and Magnum—are operating in bad faith, purposely ignoring evidence to protect their institutional interests. This charge is misplaced and unhelpful. In fact, the catalog and the exhibit allot ample space to the issue and present all the available documentation in an exemplary way, allowing everyone to draw their own conclusions. There are other reasons why it took so long to find out what we know now. We have to remember that Capa himself supplied very little information on the film. He sent it to Paris to be developed and later gave several mutually contradictory accounts of its creation. Still, reading Susperregui's analysis, one is surprised how quick previous investigators were to accept

Continued from page 9

not hold up in practice. Documentary evidence is more complicated. The working conditions for journalists in Spain were extremely difficult, as Paul Preston has made clear in *We Saw Spain Die*. The majority of what we consider documentary material of the Spanish Civil War was doctored or manipulated in some way, if not by the writers and photographers, then by the Spanish censors or the editors at home. And even if objectivity or neutrality had been possible in the coverage of the war, few people thought it desirable. The political stakes were high—and so were the publishers' and the public's demand for sensational images of suffering and death.

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It's time to ask the central question: What if *The Falling Soldier* were staged? Would the knowledge that the man depicted in this image did not

borrow Geoff Pingree's words.

We should remember that Capa's work was as much about illusion as about reality. His job as a photographer was to allow the readers of *Life*, *Vu*, and *Picture Post* to feel *as if* they were on the battlefield without leaving the safety and comfort of their homes. This illusion—made possible by new technologies as much as by the photographers' courage—was half of the excitement. It is no coincidence that in December 1938, *Picture Post* printed a full-page portrait of Capa, author of "the finest pictures of front-line action ever taken," while *Life* claimed that its camera (that is, Capa's) "gets closer to the Spanish war than any camera has ever got before." In the end, the magazines' infatuation with their sensational reporting is not unlike *El Periódico's* fascination with its coverage of the Capa affair this past summer.

Capa's photos mobilized the illusion of proximity, and his own rep-

mean that this dramatic image does not accurately represent the deaths of thousands like him. Fiction and non-fiction are not synonyms for falsity and truth. An undoctored photograph can be a lie, in the same way that a doctored one may well reveal the world as it really is. The fact that Capa's *Falling Soldier*—by all accounts a realist, representative image of the Spanish Civil War—almost immediately acquired the status of *symbol* representing the whole struggle of a people (or, alternatively, the horrors of war) made the question of whether the photo was or wasn't "authentic" even more irrelevant. In this sense, revealing that Capa's image was staged would be like revealing that there is no actual body in the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Susperregui's book makes a significant contribution to a long-standing debate. When it comes to establishing whether *The Falling Soldier* was staged or not, Susperregui certainly bolsters the doubters' case. But if he is right, the only thing lost is our certainty that the photographer *happened to be there* when one particular death occurred, while we know that hundreds of thousands died, with or without a photographer present. This may lessen our belief in serendipity, but it should not affect much else. ■

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*Fiction and non-fiction are not synonyms for falsity and truth. An undoctored photograph can be a lie, in the same way that a doctored one may well reveal the world as it really is.*

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die at the moment the photo was taken change the way we think about Spain, the Civil War, or 20th century history? The answer is that it wouldn't. Capa did not record a news event at Espejo. What made his image so powerful was not that it pictured a history-changing, unique incident—the moon landing or the murder of a president or the conquest of Teruel. We see an unknown man dying at an unknown location in Spain, and we know, as did Capa's first viewers, that hundreds of Spanish men and women were dying in this way every day.

Limiting the discussion to the true-or-false question does "not initiate the most useful lines of examination," to

utation, to tell truths about the world, in much the same way that good realist fiction does. That this man may not have been dying or dead when Capa pressed the shutter release does not

## An Unexpected Gift

When the popular San Francisco vet Bill Bailey died eleven years ago, the Bay Area VALB Post and his many friends initiated a project to preserve his small cottage on public park land in his home city. Unfortunately, a lack of funds and public support has led to abandonment of the project. This year, the unused funds (around \$6,500) have been transferred to ALBA, acting as a non-profit educational corporation. After talking with some of Bill's friends and his son, we've marked the money for the maintenance fund of San Francisco's monument to all the Abraham Lincoln Brigade volunteers. Bill's memory lives on with the cause he supported.





## Hilda Bell Roberts (1915-2009)

Hilda Bell Roberts, the last surviving U.S. woman volunteer in the Spanish Civil War, died September 23 in northern California, where she had lived for many years.

Hilda was born in Philadelphia in 1915 of Jewish Russian immigrant parents. Unlike most of the women in her family, who were employed in the garment industries, she wanted to become a nurse. Soon after she graduated from the Jewish Hospital for Nursing in 1937, she volunteered to go to Spain, arriving there in May 1937.

In Spain Hilda worked as a staff nurse in the operating room at the Universidad Hospital and at the Cruz Roja Hospital in Murcia before transferring to the Aragon front. She also traveled with the autochir, a mobile hospital that set up surgical units in a variety of temporary locations. She was evacuated from Spain in December 1938 along with other International Brigade volunteers.

During World War II, Hilda served as a U.S. Army nurse and was stationed in the Pacific theater in the New Guinea campaign from 1942 to 1944.

She was in the military until 1946. She received two bronze battle stars.

After the war, Hilda married Kris Kirk in California. The couple became active in politics in the Bay Area, but they left the Communist Party over disillusionment with Stalin. Nevertheless, they lost their family's passports during the red scare of the 1950s.

Hilda attended San Francisco State University, where she took advanced nursing classes, and the Langley Porter school as well. She received her degree from the University of California San Francisco.

After her husband died, Hilda married family friend Bob Roberts in 1965. She was hired by Napa Community College to teach in the nursing program, and they moved to St. Helena. When she retired, she worked at Napa State Hospital and convalescent hospitals in the area.

After Bob's death, Hilda became even more active in local politics. She went to Nicaragua to pick coffee. She traveled with Pastors for Peace on yellow school buses trying to bring computer and medical supplies to Cuba. She was on that famous trip when the convoy was stopped at the border and the passengers protested by fasting in Laredo in the hot sun and refusing to leave the bus. She became active in various groups opposed to U.S. policies in Central America and the Middle East.

Hilda continued her political enterprises when she moved to Berkeley, where she met Jane Wilford, who became a close friend and later her caretaker. "Hilda was always willing to protest with me," Jane says, and they were with Women in Black every week until Hilda lost her understand-

ing with Alzheimer's Disease.

Hilda is survived by her son, Theodore Kirk, his half brothers, Neil and Keith Kirk, and their families, stepdaughter Elizabeth Karan, and various nieces and nephews, especially Joan Paul, who took care of her with Jane during the last years. For more information, see <http://www.alba-valb.org/volunteers/hilda-roberts>.

—Ethel Kirk



## Clarence Kailin (1914-2009)

Clarence Kailin, Lincoln vet and a fixture in the activist community of his hometown, Madison, Wisconsin, died of a stroke on October 25 at the age of 95.

Just two months earlier, hundreds of family members and friends had joined Clarence in a birthday celebration that included a personal song by folksinger Si Kahn, a rap performance by Clarence's grandson, a political encomium by *Nation* columnist John Nicolls, and the old fighter's parting words. (See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b6752gP2TvY>.)

"We've got a lot of work to do," Clarence said. "Nobody's going to do



# Added to Memory's Roster



it for us. So get going. We'll eventually get it done."

Clarence went to Spain at the age of 22 and saw action at Jarama and Brunete. "There were a lot of socialists and communists among us, a lot of Jews who saw it as an opportunity to fight against Hitler and anti-Semitism," he told an interviewer recently. "We believed that if Spain, which was the first country to stand up to fascism, was beaten, then World War II would be inevitable, and we were right."

After Spain, Clarence brought the fight for labor rights and social justice back to Madison. He organized unions and fought to end racial discrimination in housing and jobs. During World War II, he trained radio operators at the Navy School in Madison. After the war, Clarence became active in the United Steel Workers of America union. Later, he found steady work in the department of photography at the University of Wisconsin.

Clarence remained at the forefront of radical politics on the home front. He organized protests against the Vietnam War, opposed U.S. intervention in Nicaragua in the 1980s, and spoke against war in Iraq. Fittingly, the Madison chapter of Veterans for Peace is named after Clarence Kailin. He was also the inspiration for the erection of a monument to the Wisconsin volunteers of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, and he published the letters of his close friend, John Cookson, who was killed in Spain.

Feisty and uncompromising, but with a keen sense of humor, Clarence fought the good fight to the very end. Staff workers at his nursing home told the family, "We'll never see anyone like your Dad again." And his fellow

residents are saying, "Who is going to bring outside speakers to us now?"

—Peter N. Carroll

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## Marcus J. Billings (1914-2009)

Native Californian Mark Billings, who interrupted his schooling at the University of California at Berkeley in 1937 to join the Lincoln Brigade, died in November at the age of 95.

Mark was the last survivor of the seven UC undergraduates who participated in the Spanish Civil War.

Mark served as a truck driver and mechanic in Spain. He was wounded



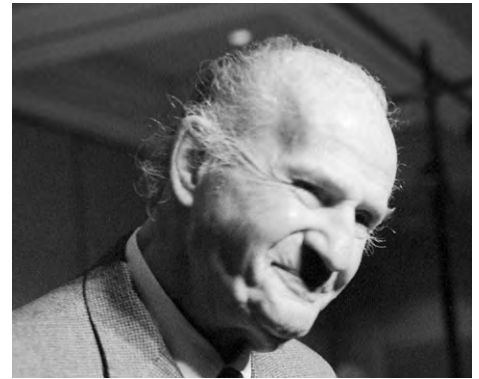
by shrapnel while in the Mediterranean town of Almeria when the German battleship *Deutschland* opened fire on the defenseless city. His injuries brought him home in 1938.

Mark remained a lifelong socialist and participated in demonstrations into his 90s.

Last year, when the *New York Times* learned that both presidential candidates mentioned the influence of Ernest Hemingway's novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* on their lives, a reporter interviewed Mark about his opinions. Of John McCain, he said, "He's the very antithesis of what we stood for."

The *Times* added, "He says he is only guardedly optimistic about Mr. Obama."

—Peter N. Carroll



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## Saul Shapiro (1915-2009)

Saul Meyer Shapiro, a veteran of the International Brigades, passed away on September 21. He was 94 years old.

Born in New York City, Saul moved to Canada as a child and went to Spain from Montreal. He served with the Lincoln-Washington battalion at Jarama, Brunete, the Aragon, and in the Ebro offensive.

After his return from Spain, Saul was fortunate enough to start his own business. During those early years, he was able to hire other veterans who could not find work elsewhere, having been blackballed as communists. Saul suffered numerous investigations from the "authorities" (read FBI) due to his support of his fellow comrades.

Saul is survived by his three children and six grandchildren. His first marriage was to a wonderful Cuban woman, Mirta. He spent his twilight years with his second wife, Lupita, from Mexico. He will be missed.

— Mark Shapiro



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**FROM THE ARCHIVES**  
**Paul Robeson & the Vets, 1945**

Lincoln's Birthday  
February 12, 1945.

Dear Mr. Taylor:

To brand Franco as the fascist enemy he is and to end all our polite dealings with him -- an action surely long overdue!

To their statement calling for the breaking of all relations between our country and Franco Spain, the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade have already secured nearly three hundred outstanding signers. I consider the statement so important and its signatures so influential that I have proposed their appearance, in the enclosed form, as advertisements in one or more of the large metropolitan newspapers.

The Veterans of the Lincoln Brigade is, of course, a small organization, most of whose members are now fighting in our armed forces. They have not the resources for the ambitious project I propose. But I am sure that their friends and the friends of a Free Spain and a total victory over fascism will enable them to carry it through.

I am contributing money myself and feel that you may wish to join me for this purpose.

Hundreds of brave American "premature anti-fascists" gave their lives in Spain. Many from the Lincoln Brigade have died on today's battlefields. Recently all America was grieved to learn of the death of Captain Herman Bittcher, who followed his service in Spain by becoming the outstanding hero of the Pacific war theatre.

I am sure that the most fitting tribute to these courageous men would be to aid in continuing the patriotic work which they began in 1937 and which their comrades-in-arms are carrying forward today. And this includes arousing America to an understanding of the menace of Franco and his Falange.

May I look forward to a generous check from you, made out either to me or to the Veterans of the Lincoln Brigade?

Sincerely,



Paul Robeson

Feb. 8, 1945

For more information on Paul Robeson in the Spanish Civil War, visit our website:  
[www.alba-valb.org/resources/robeson](http://www.alba-valb.org/resources/robeson).  
To order ALBA's graphic novel, *Paul Robeson in Spain*, contact Jeanne Houck: [jhouck@alba-valb.org](mailto:jhouck@alba-valb.org); 212-674-5398.