



ABRAHAM LINCOLN BRIGADE ARCHIVES

Summer Institute for Teachers: 2009

La Retaguardia de Tampa:

The Spanish Civil War and its Impact on Florida and U.S. History

Political Participation in the US & the Spanish Civil War

Participants Lesson Plan: Brian Hoover

Course: American Government

Materials Packet for Lesson Plan

INTRODUCTION TO THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

For all its international repercussions, the war's root causes were domestic. Political and social tensions had been building up in Spain for years. Still predominantly an agrarian society with limited industrial centers, the country was rife with inequalities. In the countryside, traditional divisions endured between wealthy landowners, doggedly preserving their position, and a huge number of landless laborers and poverty-stricken smallholders, desperate to lift themselves from an existence of near-starvation. The situation of the urban working class was equally dismal, and illiteracy rates were high.

The newly elected government that came to power after the proclamation of the Republic in 1931 embarked on an ambitious program of modernization, secularization, social justice, and greater regional autonomy. It had the support of the liberal middle classes, the Socialist and Communist parties, the unions and the regionalist parties, as well as the powerful Anarchist movement. It met with strong resistance, however, from the landowners, the army, and the Catholic Church, who saw their lock on power diminished. These same three groups, together with the small but powerful fascist party (Falange), were to become the backbone of the Nationalists.

The Spanish Civil War broke out in July 1936, after a group of military conservatives tried to overthrow the progressive government of the Popular Front. Expecting an easy coup, the rebels were surprised to encounter massive popular resistance, especially in the large urban centers. In a matter of days, the country was split in half: one zone controlled by the government supporters (known as Republicans, Loyalists, or Reds), and the other by the rebels (referred to as Nationalists, Fascists, or Whites). Three years of bloody fighting followed. General Francisco Franco emerged as the rebel's Nationalist commander in chief. The main Republican leaders were President Azaña and Prime Ministers Largo Caballero and Negrín.

The war quickly became internationalized. Global public opinion rallied around one of the two factions, seeing the war as either a struggle of democracy vs. fascism or, conversely, of Christian civilization vs. Communism. Fearful of escalation, several Western governments signed a Non-Intervention Pact. It was a dead letter from the outset. Franco immediately requested and received extensive military support from Nazi Germany and fascist Italy. The Republic was in turn supported by the Soviet Union and, to a smaller extent, by Mexico. The other Western powers refused to stand by the embattled Republic and established an embargo on arms sales to either side on the international market.

Nevertheless, thousands of concerned citizens from some fifty nations, ignoring their own governments' purported neutrality, rallied to the Republic's support. Almost forty thousand men and women from fifty-two countries, including 2,800 Americans, traveled to Spain to help fight fascism. Most of them joined the International Brigades, organized in 1936 by the Communist International. The U.S. volunteers in Spain formed several battalions and served in various units (medical, combat and transportation) and came to be known collectively as the Abraham Lincoln

Brigade. After three years of brutal conflict, the Republican forces were overwhelmed by the Nationalist war machine, which declared victory on April 1, 1939. Franco would rule Spain as a ruthless dictator until his death in 1975.

The Spanish Civil War claimed an estimated 500,000 dead; of the American volunteers about one third died in Spain. Many of the remaining veterans continued their fight against fascism during World War II, as did thousands of Republican exiles. With their help, fascism was finally defeated in 1945. Ironically, the outbreak of the Cold War helped secure Franco's position as Spain's anti-Communist dictator. After Franco's death in 1975, Spain finally became a democracy, and the government bestowed honorary citizenship on the international volunteers, in appreciation for their sacrifice in defense of the Republic.

Many of the international brigaders remained life-long activists, and the aging Lincoln Vets have lent their support to progressive causes of all kinds, from the Civil Rights movement to the protests against the wars in Vietnam and Iraq.

THE ABRAHAM LINCOLN BRIGADE

During the time that the men and women of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade were fighting fascism in Spain, the Friends of the ALB was formed in New York City. With roughly a dozen chapters around the country, they were dedicated to supporting the veterans and their families on the home front. The FALB held fund-raisers and other public events to raise money for injured veterans and to support the Spanish government and other progressive causes. When the war ended, the FALB, having served its purpose, disbanded, and the the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade (VALB), formed their own organization to continue and compliment the FALB's various activities.,

Immediately after its founding, VALB had begun to reach out to the larger educational, cultural, and political community. It also instituted a representative board and executive committee that included members from all constituencies with interest in the legacy of the Spanish Civil War, the International Brigades, and the antifascist struggle of the 1930s as well as politically progressive, activist struggles thereafter. Fueled by a group of dedicated veterans for more than four decades, the VALB pursued its goals – prime among them aiding refugees of the Spanish Civil War and protesting against US ties to Franco. – Annual events and reunions, which are held to this day, celebrate the actions of the veterans and keep the memory of the Spanish conflict alive. Beside the main office in New York, VALB "Posts" appeared in numerous cities, such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Chicago.

In 1979, recognizing the vital importance of their radical history, and the need to collect and preserve writings, letters, photographs, oral histories and artifacts that would preserve that history, the VALB formed the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives (ALBA). By the early 1990s, with the archival project well on its way and the veterans aging, ALBA began to take over the commemorative performances, helping to produce these key events telling, re-telling and contextualizing the veterans' stories, as part of its educational mission.

VALB ceased to exist as an independent organization in April 2008.

WHY SPAIN?

Selected letters and documents

Hyman (Chaim) Katz - letter to his mother
Evelyn Hutchins – excerpts from an interview
Dorothy Parker – Soldiers of the Republic, *The New Yorker*, February 5, 1938
James Lardner – letter to his mother
Ernest Hemingway – *On the American Dead in Spain*
Crawford Morgan - Congressional testimony
Canute Frankson – letter to friend

Hyman (Chaim) Katz

Hyman Katz was a volunteer from New York. He went to Spain without telling his mother because he did not want to upset her. But when he was wounded in action in 1937, the young volunteer decided to explain to his mother why he had enlisted against her wishes.

His letter home reveals the motives of many other Jewish volunteers.

Citation:

Aaron Katz, "Letter from the Front in Spain," *Jewish Currents*, XL (February 1979), pp. 4-6, 16-17.

11/25/37

Dear Ma,

It's quite difficult for me to write this letter, but it must be done; Claire writes me that you know I'm in Spain. Of course, you know that the reason I didn't tell you where I was, is that I didn't want to hurt you. I realize that I was foolish for not understanding that you would have to find out.

I came to Spain because I felt I had to. Look at the world situation. We didn't worry when Mussolini came to power in Italy. We felt bad when Hitler became Chancellor of Germany, but what could we do? We felt--though we tried to help and sympathize--that it was their problem and wouldn't affect us. Then the fascist governments sent out agents and began to gain power in other countries. Remember the anti-Semitic troubles in Austria only about a year ago. Look at what is happening in Poland; and see how the fascists are increasing their power in the Balkans--and Greece--and how the Italians are trying to play up to the Arab leaders.

Seeing all these things--how fascism is grasping power in many countries (including the U.S., where there are many Nazi organizations and Nazi agents and spies)--can't you see that fascism is our problem--that it may come to us as it came in other countries? And don't you realize that we Jews will be the first to suffer if fascism comes?

But if we didn't see clearly the hand of Mussolini and Hitler in all these countries, in Spain we can't help seeing it. Together with their agent, Franco, they are trying to set up the same anti-progressive, anti-Semitic regime in Spain, as they have in Italy and Germany.

If we sit by and let them grow stronger by taking Spain, they will move on to France and will not stop there; and it won't be long before they get to America. Realizing this, can I sit by and wait until the beasts get to my very door--until it is too late, and there is no one I can call on for help? And would I even deserve help from others when the trouble comes upon me, if I were to refuse help to those who need it today? If I permitted such a time to come--as a Jew and a progressive, I would be among the first to fall under the axe of the fascists;--all I could do then would be to curse myself and say, "Why didn't I wake up when the alarm-clock rang?"

But then it would be too late--just as it was too late for the Jews in Germany to find out in 1933 that they were wrong in believing that Hitler would never rule Germany.

I know that you are worried about me; but how often is the operation which worries us, most necessary to save us? Many mothers here, in places not close to the battle-front, would not let their children go to fight, until the fascist bombing planes came along; and then it was too late. Many mothers here have been crippled or killed, or their husbands and children maimed or killed; yet some of these mothers did not want to send their sons and husbands to the war, until the fascist bombs taught them in such a horrible manner--what common sense could not teach them.

Yes, Ma, this is a case where sons must go against their mothers' wishes for the sake of their mothers themselves. So I took up arms against the persecutors of my people--the Jews--and my class--the Oppressed. I am fighting against those who establish an inquisition like that of their ideological ancestors several centuries ago, in Spain. Are these traits which you admire so much in a Prophet Jeremiah or a Judas Maccabeus, bad when your son exhibits them? Of course, I am not a Jeremiah or a Judas; but I'm trying with my own meager capabilities, to do what they did with their great capabilities, in the struggle for Liberty, well-being, and Peace....

Lovingly,
Chaim

Evelyn Hutchins

Evelyn Hutchins was born in Snohomish, Washington in 1910 and developed an independent spirit as a child. Her divorced mother was a worker and agitator for suffrage for women, her stepfather a maritime worker blacklisted on the west coast for striking. Evelyn moved to New York as a young woman to be a dancer, but wound up in sleazy burlesque clubs when the Depression forced her to accept any work.

Educated in the school of hard knocks, she demanded respect as a feminist. When the Spanish Civil War broke out, she drove trucks to collect clothing and other humanitarian aid to ship to Spain, and when the call for recruits for the American Medical Bureau went out in late 1936, she volunteered to be an ambulance driver. However, the organizers considered her unqualified for the risky work because she was a woman. Hutchins continued to agitate for the opportunity and eventually convinced them to send her to Spain. There she served courageously as a truck driver, experiencing dangerous combat conditions on many occasions.

After the war, the Yale University sociologist Dr. John Dollard interviewed Hutchins as part of a study on the meaning of fear in battle; his published work was used by the U.S. Army for morale training during World War II.

Dollard's interview, conducted around 1942, is excerpted below.

Citation:

The complete interview can be found in John Dollard's manuscript collection: ALBA Collection #122, Tamiment Library, New York University.

Excerpt from an Interview with Evelyn Hutchins

I went to drive. They probably considered that in case something went wrong I could do a lot of clerical work. On that basis they were willing to send me there.

I had driven a number of ambulances here around the city, taking them back and forth to the boat, and they were satisfied that I really could handle the cars. It was found that I could drive the car as well as, and better than, some of the fellows who were going...Some fellows thought it was very funny that I should be there driving. I am little but I never made any attempt to swagger or act mannish. I acted just the way I always acted. I used to argue with them about it. They would

say, "You are so little, what can you do?" And I would tell them, "I am just me." I was a girl, I was small and didn't weigh much but I was doing a job and wasn't that enough. They would like to take pictures of me next to my truck; because I was small they thought it was very funny. Some of them would say, "All I have to do is give one hard blow and you'll keel over." But the important thing was that the fellows who understood why I wanted to be there, why I had taken the job of driving which was the only possibility of getting as close as I could to the actual fighting, they didn't think a girl shouldn't want to fight and have a machine gun instead of driving a car - these fellows were the fellows who took the thing seriously, and I found them to have a more serious and level headed attitude about things that happened.

I always had to shift for myself and take care of myself and make my own decisions, and sometimes it would be tough on me. If that conditions you, I was conditioned. On the other hand I have always been very incensed at a lot of different injustices I have seen, and at the injustices I have seen against women. I have been frustrated so many times because I was not a man. So I probably see things faster than somebody else who doesn't care. Some girls might not mind not being allowed to go to the army...I was always told by everybody that I must not do this, or I must not do that because girls don't do those things. I was told so many times that girls are inferior to men, that men can do things and girls can't, and I couldn't take it. I didn't care how hard it was on me.

So far as the political situation in Europe, I am not like some people who think that all this stuff is just propaganda. I remember when Mussolini issued a decree - I was just a kid at the time - he issued a decree that women were not to wear short skirts, and that they were to keep their proper places. Well, Mussolini was definitely out so far as I was concerned. I was convinced that anybody with that kind of an attitude was absolutely no good for the people generally. I never felt that I was an outstanding genius, but people had to give me a chance to think and develop whatever thinkabilities I had. If a person would not give me a chance I would fight them. Hitler has the system where he sends women to camps to be breeders. That strikes me at my very most innermost desire for freedom, and self-expression, and for culture, and education. Just being an ordinary human-being I couldn't tolerate a thing like that. It has gotten to mean so much to me that I don't care what I do in the process of fighting against conditions like that.

I got the idea of going to Spain first and then my husband got the idea and my brother got the idea, and they got there ahead of me. And I worked so hard to go over there. I had saved money for it, I had to convince people. I had to argue with them, and to prove things. But the average fellow or my husband had no difficulty getting there. It might have helped that he was there. I don't know....I went over there because I wanted to do a job.

Dorothy Parker

Dorothy Parker (August 22, 1893–June 7, 1967) was an American writer and poet, best known for her caustic wit, wisecracks, and sharp eye for 20th century urban foibles.

She sold her first poem to *Vanity Fair* magazine in 1914 and some months later, she was hired as an editorial assistant for another Condé Nast magazine, *Vogue*. She moved to *Vanity Fair* as a staff writer following two years at *Vogue*.

Her greatest period of productivity and success came in the next 15 years. In the 1920s alone she published some 300 poems and free verses in outlets including the

aforementioned *Vanity Fair*, *Vogue*, "The Conning Tower" and *The New Yorker* along with *Life*, *McCall's* and *The New Republic*.

Some of her most popular work was published in *The New Yorker* in the form of acerbic book reviews under the byline "Constant Reader."

Citation:

"Soldiers of the Republic", originally appeared in *The New Yorker* on February 5, 1938. This biography excerpt was taken from Wikipedia.

James Lardner

The second of four sons of writer Ring Lardner, James was born in Chicago in 1914. Educated at Andover and Harvard, he went on to become a reporter for the New York *Herald Tribune*, and in 1938 he joined the Paris bureau.

After his articles about the Spanish Civil War did not have the expected impact, Lardner joined the Lincoln Brigade, the Americans fighting for the democratically elected government of Spain. He was the last American killed in the conflict.

In this letter, he explains to his mother why he has quit his job at the *Herald Tribune* in order to join the ranks of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade.

Citation:

James Lardner Mss, ALBA Collection #67, Tamiment Library, New York University

Ernest Hemingway

Ernest Hemingway traveled to Spain as a journalist for the North American Newspaper Alliance four times during the Spanish Civil War. He also supported the Republican cause in speeches and writings, paid for the passage of some volunteers, arranged for the purchase of ambulances, and narrated the pro-Republican documentary film, *The Spanish Earth* (1937).

He used some of his experiences in writing the novel, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* as well as several short stories and a play, *The Fifth Column*.

Citation:

"On the American Dead in Spain" originally appeared in *New Masses* in February 1938.

On the American Dead in Spain
[Ernest Hemingway, 1938]

The dead sleep cold in Spain tonight. Snow blows through the olive groves, silting against the tree roots. Snow drifts over the mounds with the small headboards. (When there was time for headboards.) The olive trees are thin in the cold wind because their lower branches were once cut to cover tanks, and the dead sleep cold in the small hills above the Jarama River. It was cold that February when they died and since then the dead have not noticed the changes of the seasons.

It is two years now since the Lincoln Battalion held for four and a half months along the heights of the Jarama, and the first American dead have been a part of the earth for a long time now.

The dead sleep cold in Spain tonight and will sleep cold all this winter as the earth sleeps with them. But in the spring the rain will come to make the earth kind again. The wind will blow soft over the hills from the south. The black trees will come to life with small green leaves, and there will be blossoms on the apple trees along the Jarama River. This spring the dead will feel the earth beginning to live again.

For our dead are a part of the earth of Spain now and the earth of Spain can never die. Each winter it will seem to die and each spring it will come alive again. Our dead will live with it forever.

Just as the earth can never die, neither will those who have ever been free return to slavery. The peasants who work the earth where our dead lie know what these dead died for. There was time during the war for them to learn these things, and there is forever for them to remember them in.

Our dead live in the hearts and minds of the Spanish peasants, of the Spanish workers, of all the good simple honest people who believed in and fought for the Spanish Republic. And as long as all our dead live in the Spanish earth, and they will live as long as the earth lives, no system of tyranny ever will prevail in Spain.

The fascists may spread over the land, blasting their way with weight of metal brought from other countries. They may advance aided by traitors and by cowards. They may destroy cities and villages and try to hold the people in slavery. But you cannot hold any people in slavery.

The Spanish people will rise again as they have always risen before against tyranny.

The dead do not need to rise. They are a part of the earth now and the earth can never be conquered. For the earth endureth forever. It will outlive all systems of tyranny.

Those who have entered it honorably, and no men ever entered earth more honorably than those who died in Spain, already have achieved immortality.

Crawford Morgan

Morgan was born November 4, 1910 in Rockingham, North Carolina. While still a child, he moved with his family to Norfolk, Virginia where he attended high school. After graduation, Morgan studied to become a printer. In 1932, he joined the Young Communist League. During the Depression he became involved in organizations of the unemployed in New York and was on one occasion arrested in a demonstration at the Home Relief Bureau.

On March 10, 1937 Morgan boarded the Washington bound for France. In Spain he was assigned to the infantry attached to the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion and later transferred to the Lincoln-Washington Battalion. His battalion went into action at the end of August 1937 on the Aragon front and Morgan received a leg wound storming the town of Quinto. After recovery, Morgan rejoined the Lincoln-Washington Battalion's Third Company. This was shortly after the action at Fuentes de Ebro in October 1937. Complications from his leg wound resulted in his transfer to the 15th Brigade's Transport Unit where Morgan remained for the remainder of the war. Morgan returned from Spain, on the SS Paris, on December 15, 1938.

In August 1942 Morgan enlisted in the U.S. Army and served in an all-black unit, until May 1946. After leaving the army Morgan resided in Norfolk, Virginia and worked as a truck driver until 1949. He later returned to New York and became an offset printer.

On September 15 and 16, 1954, Morgan testified at length on behalf of the VALB in hearings before the Subversive Activities Control Board (SACB) of the U.S. Department of Justice. The SACB was in the process of declaring the VALB to be a subversive organization. The VALB attorney called Morgan as a defense witness. He testified "being a Negro, and all of the stuff that I have had to take in this country, I had a pretty good idea of what fascism was. I got a chance there [in Spain] to fight it with bullets, and I went there and fought it with bullets. If I get a chance to fight it with bullets again, I will fight it with bullets again."

Morgan remained an active member of the VALB. In the early 1970's, he worked with the group's Historical Commission to gather information on other African American volunteers. Morgan died on August 27, 1976.

Citation:

This Ain't Ethiopia, But It'll Do: African-Americans in the Spanish Civil War by Danny Duncan Collum, Editor, and Victor A. Berch, Chief Researcher.

Excerpts of Congressional Testimony

In September 1954, the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade (VALB) were brought before the Subversive Activities Control Board (SACB) in response to a petition by U.S. Attorney General Herbert Brownell to classify the VALB as a subversive organization.

On September 15 and 16, 1954, Crawford Morgan, an African-American member of VALB, testified before the SACB. The following are excerpts:

SACB: Did you have any understanding, Mr. Morgan, before you went to Spain, of what the issues were connected to that war?

Morgan: I felt that I had a pretty good idea of what fascism was and most of its ramifications. Being aware of what the Fascist Italian government did to the Ethiopians, and also the way that I and all the rest of the Negroes in this country have been treated ever since slavery, I figured I had a pretty good idea of what fascism was.

We have quite a few fascist tendencies in this country. Didn't come to the point of taking up arms and killing a lot of people, but for the longest time Negroes have been getting lynched in this country by mobs, and that was fascism on a small scale.

But over there [in Spain] it was one whole big group against the other. It was the Franco group that didn't like democracy. And they rebelled against the people after the 1936 elections and tried to stick their ideas down the throats of the freedom-loving people of Spain. So I, being a Negro, and all of the stuff that I have had to take in this country, I had a pretty good idea of what fascism

was and I didn't want no part of it. I got a chance to fight it there with bullets and I went there and fought it with bullets. If I get a chance to fight it with bullets again, I will fight it with bullets again.

SACB: Mr. Morgan, were those thoughts in your mind before you went to Spain?

Morgan: Ever since I have been big enough to understand things I have rebelled. As a small child of three or four years old I would rebel at human injustice in the way I understood it at that age. And as long as I have been able to remember, up until now, the government and a lot of people have treated me as a second-class citizen. I am 43 years old, and all my life I have been treated as a second-class citizen, and naturally if you always have been treated like one you start feeling it at a very tender age.

With Hitler on the march, and fascism starting the fight in Spain, I felt that it could serve two purposes: I felt that if we could lick the Fascists in Spain, I felt that in the trend of things it would offset a bloodbath later. I felt that if we didn't lick Franco and stop fascism there, it would spread over lots of the world. And it is bad enough for white people to live under fascism, those of the white people that like freedom and democracy. But Negroes couldn't live under it. They would be wiped out.

SACB: Were you aware, at any time, that you were a member of the International Brigades, of receiving any different treatment because of your race?

Morgan: No, from the time I arrived in Spain until after the time I left, for that period of my life, I felt like a human being, like a man. People didn't look at me with hatred in their eyes because I was black, and I wasn't refused this or refused that because I was black. I was treated like all the rest of the people were treated, and when you have been in the world for quite a long time and have been treated worse than people treat their dogs, it is quite a nice feeling to go someplace and feel like a human being.

Canute Frankson

Frankson was born in the Parish of St. Catherine, Old Harbor, Jamaica on April 13, 1890. In 1917, together with his wife, Rachel, he emigrated to Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania, where Frankson worked as a machinist. Frankson eventually settled in Detroit, where he worked in the auto industry. Frankson joined the Communist Party in 1934. He sailed for Europe aboard the Queen Mary on April 21, 1937.

In Spain, skilled machinists were scarce and Frankson with his proven ability was rapidly promoted. He was appointed Head Mechanic at the International Garage in Albacete. Fellow International Garage veteran, Marion Noble, noted that Frankson's fluency in Spanish was a great asset and that many hours of his free time were spent teaching engine repair classes to young Spaniards.

Frankson returned to the United States aboard the President Harding on September 24, 1938. Frankson was killed in an auto accident in either 1939 or 1940.

Citation:

Cary Nelson and Jefferson Hendricks, *Madrid 1937* (New York, 1996), pp. 33-35.

Excerpts from letter

Albacete, Spain
July 6, 1937

My Dear Friend,

I'm sure that by this time you are still waiting for a detailed explanation of what has this international struggle to do with my being here. Since this is a war between whites who for centuries have held us in slavery, and have heaped every kind of insult and abuse upon us, segregated and jim-crowed us; why I, a Negro who have fought through these years for the rights of my people, am here in Spain today?

Because we are no longer an isolated minority group fighting hopelessly against an immense giant. Because, my dear, we have joined with, and become an active part of, a great progressive force on whose shoulders rests the responsibility of saving human civilization from the planned destruction of a small group of degenerates gone mad in their lust for power. Because if we crush Fascism here we'll save our people in America, and in other parts of the world from the vicious persecution, wholesale imprisonment, and slaughter which the Jewish people suffered and are suffering under Hitler's Fascist heels. All we have to do is to think of the lynching of our people. We can but look back at the pages of American history stained with the blood of Negroes; stink with the burning bodies of our people hanging from trees; bitter with the groans of our tortured loved ones from whose living bodies ears, fingers, toes have been cut for souvenirs³ living bodies into which red-hot poker have been thrust. All because of a hate created in the minds of men and women by their masters who keep us all under their heels while they suck our blood, while they live in their bed of ease by exploiting us....

...We will crush them. We will build us a new society - a society of peace and plenty. There will be no color line, no jim-crow trains, no lynching. That is why, my dear, I'm here in Spain.

On the battlefields of Spain we fight for the preservation of democracy. Here, we're laying the foundation for world peace, and for the liberation of my people, and of the human race. Here, where we're engaged in one of the most bitter struggles of human history, there is no color line, no discrimination, no race hatred. There's only one hate, and that is the hate for Fascism. We know why our enemies are. The Spanish people are very sympathetic towards us. They are lovely people. I'll tell you about them later....

Don't think for one moment that the strain of this terrible war or the many miles between us has changed my feelings towards you. Our friendship has meant a great deal to me, and still means much to me. I appreciate it because it has always been a friendship of devoted and mutual interest. And I'll do whatever is within my power to maintain it.

No one knows the time he'll die, even under the most favorable conditions. So I, a soldier in active service, must know far less about how far or how close is death. But as long as I hold out I'll keep you in touch with events. Sometimes when I go to the fronts the shells drop pretty close. Then I think it's only a matter of minutes. After I return here to the base I seem to see life from a new angle. Somehow it seems to be more beautiful. I'd think of you, home and all my friends, then get to working more feverishly than ever. Each of us must give all we have if this Fascist beast is to be destroyed.

After this is over I hope to share my happiness with you....

So long. Until some future date. One never knows when there'll be time to write. There's so much to do and so little time in which to do it. Love,

Salud,
Canute

Excerpts:

***The Good fight Continues: World War II Letters
from the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, edited by
peter N Carroll, Michael Nash, and Melvin
Small (New York University Press, 2006)***

From Canute Frankson

Albacete, Spain
July 6, 1937

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All we have to do is to think of the lynching of our people. We can but look back at the pages of American history stained with the blood of Negroes, stink with the burning bodies of our people hanging from trees; bitter with the groans of our tortured loved ones from whose living bodies, ears, fingers, toes, have been cut for souvenirs — living bodies into which red-hot pokers have been thrust. All because of a hate created in the minds of men and women by their masters who keep us all under their heels while they suck our blood, while they live in their bed of ease by exploiting us.

But these people who howl like hungry wolves for our blood, must we hate them? Must we keep the flame which these masters kindled constantly fed? Are these men and women responsible for the programs of their masters, and the conditions which force them to such degraded depths? I think not. They are tools in the hands of unscrupulous masters. These same people are as hungry as we are. They live in dives and wear rags the same as we do. They too are robbed by the masters, and their faces kept down in the filth of a decayed system. They are our fellowmen. Soon and very soon they and we will understand. Soon many Angelo Herndons¹ will rise from among them, and from among us, and will lead us both against those who live by the stench of our bunt flesh. We will crush them. We will build us a new society—a society of peace and plenty. There will be no color line, no jim-crow trains, no lynching. That is why, my dear, I'm here in Spain.

On the battlefields of Spain we fight for the preservation of democracy. Here, we're laying the foundation for world peace, and for the liberation of my people, and of the human race. Here, where we're engaged in one of the most bitter struggles of human history, there is no color line, no discrimination, no race hatred. There's only one hate, and that is the hate for fascism. We know who our enemies are. The Spanish people are very sympathetic towards us. They are lovely people. I'll tell you about them later.

I promised not to preach, but by all indications this seems more like a sermon than a letter to an old friend. But how can I help it, being face to face with such trying circumstances? I'm quite conscious of the clumsiness of my effort to write you an intimate letter, but your knowledge of my earnestness and sincerity, with your intelligence and patience will enable you to understand and be tolerant. Later, after I've overcome this strain, I'm sure I'll be able to write more intimately. The consciousness of my responsibility for my actions has kept me under terrific strain. Because I think it has caused you a lot of unpleasantness.

Don't think for one moment that the strain of this terrible war or the many miles between us has changed my feelings towards you. Our friendship has meant a great deal to me,

¹ Angelo Herndon was an African American communist convicted for violating Georgia's criminal insurrection law after he helped organize an interracial hunger march in Atlanta in 1932. In 1937 the United States Supreme Court found Georgia's insurrection law to be unconstitutional.

and still means much to me. I appreciate it because it has always been a friendship of devoted mutual interest. And I'll do whatever is within my power to maintain it.

No one knows the time he'll die, even under the most favorable conditions. So I, a soldier in active service, must know far less about how far or how close is death. But as long as I hold out I'll keep you in touch with events. Sometimes when I go to the front the shells drop pretty close. Then I think it is only a matter of minutes. After I return here to the base I seem to see life from a new angle. Somehow it seems to be more beautiful. I'd think of you, home and all my friends, then get to working more feverishly than ever. Each of us must give all we have if this Fascist beast is to be destroyed.

After this is over I hope to share my happiness with you. It will be a happiness which could not have been achieved in any other way than having served in a cause so worthy. I hope that the apparent wrong which I committed may be compensated for by the service I'm giving here for the cause of democracy. I hope that you're well, and that you will, or have, forgiven me. My sincere desire is that you are happy, and when this is over that we meet again. But if a Fascist bullet stops me don't worry about it. If I am conscious before I die I don't think I'll be afraid. Of one thing I 'm certain: I'll be satisfied that I've done my part.

So long. Until some future date. One never knows when there'll be time to write. There's so much to do, and so little time in which to do it. Love.

Salude.

Canute

Frankson (1890-194?) came to the United States from Jamaica in 1917. A skilled machinist, he was an automotive mechanic in Spain.

From Hyman Katz

November 25, 1937

Dear Ma,

It's quite difficult for me to write this letter, but it must be done; Claire writes me that you know I'm in Spain.

Of course, you know that the reason I didn't tell you where I was is that I didn't want to hurt you. I realize that I was foolish for not understanding that you would have to find out.

I came to Spain because I felt I had to. Look at the world situation. We didn't worry when Mussolini came to power in Italy. We felt bad when Hitler became Chancellor of Germany, but what could we do? We felt —though we tried to help and sympathize—that was their problem and it wouldn't effect us. Then the fascist governments sent out agents and began to gain power in other countries. Remember the anti-Semitic troubles in Austria only about a year ago. Look at what is happening in Poland; and see how the fascists are increasing their power in the Balkans — and Greece—and how the Italians are trying to play up to the Arab leaders.

Seeing all these things—how fascism is grasping power in many countries (including the U.S. where there are many Nazi organizations and Nazi agents and spies)— can't you see that fascism is our own problem — that it may come to us as it came to other countries? And don't you realize that Jews will be the first to suffer if fascism comes?

But if we didn't see clearly the hand of Mussolini and Hitler in all these countries, in Spain we can't help seeing it. Together with their agent, Franco, they are trying to set up the same anti-progressive, anti-Semitic regime in Spain as they have in Italy and Germany. If we sit by and let them grow stronger by taking Spain, they will move on to France and will not stop there; and it won't be long before they get to America. Realizing this, can I sit by and wait until the beasts get to my very door — until it is too late, and there is no one I can call on for help? And would I even deserve help from others when the trouble comes upon me, if I were to refuse to help those who need it today? If I permitted such a time to come— and as a Jew and a progressive, I would be among the first to fall under the axe of the fascists — all I could do then would be to curse myself and say, "Why didn't I wake up when the alarm-clock rang?"

But then it would be too late — just as it was too late for the Jews in Germany to find out in 1933 that they were wrong in believing Hitler would never rule Germany.

I know you are worried about me; but how often is the operation which worries most, is most necessary to save us? Many mothers here, in places not close to the battle front would not let their children go to fight, until the fascist bombing planes came along, and then it was too late. Many mothers here have been crippled or killed, or their husbands and children maimed or killed; yet some of these mothers did not want to send their sons and husbands to the war, until the fascist bombs taught them in such a horrible manner— what common sense could not teach them.

Yes, Ma, this is a case where sons must go against their mothers' wishes for the sake of their mothers themselves.

So I took up arms against the persecutors of my people — the Jews—and my class — the Oppressed. I am fighting against those who would establish an inquisition like that of their ideological ancestors several centuries ago, in Spain. Are these traits which you admire so much in a Prophet Jeremiah or a Judas Maccabbeus² bad when your son exhibits them? Of course, I am not Jeremiah or a Judas; but I 'm trying with my own meager capabilities, to do what they did with their great capabilities, in the struggle for Liberty, Well-being and Peace.

Now for a little news. I am a good soldier and I have held several offices in the few months that I've been in Spain. I am now convalescing from a wound on my thigh, received October 13. I'm feeling swell now; I got such good treatment in the hospital that I've gained an awful lot of weight. Now, I'm at a seaside resort which was once inhabited by Franco and other swanks. In New York, when it got cold we used to hear about people going to Florida, but who would ever have thought that I, too, would someday celebrate Thanksgiving (and Armistice day) by swimming and playing volley-ball dressed only in tights.

I'd better stop writing or I'll have nothing to say next time. I've been writing to you regularly thru the Paris address, which did not turn out to be very reliable. I only received one letter from you, which Claire typed the first week in September. Now all this will be changed; you can write me direct:

H Katz
S.R # 17.1
Plaza de Altozano
Albacete, Spain

.... Give them all my regards.

Lovingly,
Chaim

Katz (1914-38) was killed during the retreats in Spain in March 1938

² Judas Maccabeus started the revolt against the Roman overloads in Judea. His victory in 165 B.C. is celebrated by the holiday of Chanukah

Salaria Kee, *A Negro Nurse in Republican Spain* ³

What have Negroes to do with Spain? What has Spain for us? What about Ethiopia? Why should Negro men be fighting in Spain? What do we expect out of it? These are questions Negroes are continuously asking. It is their immediate response to any appeal for Spain. Quite apart from the broad question of humanitarianism the answers are simple.

Fascist Italy invaded and overpowered Ethiopia. This was a terrible blow to Negroes throughout the world. Ethiopia represented the last outpost of Negro authority, of Negro self-government. Hundreds of Negroes in this country attempted to join the Ethiopian forces. But Ethiopia at that time was so remote that few succeeded. I say 'at that time' advisedly. Since then the rapid move of world events has brought Europe and the Orient much closer to local thinking and knowledge.

Even at that time thousands of dollars were collected from people in all the liberty loving countries of the world. Sweden and Denmark sent ambulances and medical supplies. Negroes from New York sent a 75-bed field hospital and 2 tons of medical supplies. They sent two delegations to Emperor Haile Selassie. They brought two Ethiopian delegations to this country to win support for Ethiopia. A young white physician from Evanston, Illinois was the first foreign casualty. He was killed in an Italian-fascist airplane raid on the Ethiopian field hospitals. Germany and Italy and Japan conspicuously sent nothing except poison gas with which to slaughter the Ethiopians.

Italy moved on from the invasion of Ethiopia. She advanced her troops into Spain. Here was a second small nation, feudal and underdeveloped. Bitter resentment against Italy still rankled. The hundreds of Negro boys who had been prevented from going to Ethiopia understood the issues more clearly now. To them Spain was now the battlefield on which Italian fascism might be defeated. And perhaps Italy defeated in Spain would be forced to withdraw from Ethiopia. Ethiopia's only hope for recovery lies in Italy's defeat. The place to defeat Italy now is in Spain.

The lynching of Negroes in America, discrimination in education and on jobs, lack of hospital facilities for Negroes in most cities and very poor ones in others, all this appeared to them as part of the picture of fascism; of a dominant group impoverishing and degrading a less powerful group. The open pronouncements of Germany and Italy against all non-Aryans is convincing evidence. Thinking thus, hundreds of Negro men went to Spain. Here in the international Brigade of Volunteers they found other Negroes.

³ This essay was published as a pamphlet by the Negro Committee to Aid Spain (1938).

From Djibouti⁴, Emperor Haile Selassie's chief mechanic came to strike a blow for free Ethiopia. From South Africa, from Cuba, from French Senegal, from Haiti, from the Cameroon's, Negroes came, stayed and fought.

Negro physicians came to man hospitals and serve the wounded. Negro ambulance drivers and stretchers. And one young Negro nurse.

Kee (1913-91) was born in Georgia and studied nursing at the Harlem Hospital Training School. Kee was the only African American nurse to serve in Spain. During World War II she enlisted in the Army Nurse corps and later worked in hospitals in New York City.

⁴ A French colony bordering on Ethiopia.

