

## Questions for Discussion from *Robeson in Spain*

### “Ol’ Man River”

Compare and contrast the two sets of lyrics to the song “Ol’ Man River.” How do they differ?

What do Paul Robeson’s new lyrics suggest about the feelings of African Americans in the U.S. during the 1930s?

Why did Paul Robeson change the words of the song?

### Spain and the International Crisis

Why did Paul Robeson decide to go to Spain during the Spanish Civil War?

Which countries supported the military uprising led by General Francisco Franco against the elected Spanish Republican government? Why?

Which countries supported the elected Republican government? Why?

Which side did Paul Robeson support?

What is “fascism”? Why did Paul Robeson oppose fascism?

What did the Spanish Republic stand for? Why did Paul Robeson support the Spanish Republic?

How did the civil war in Spain affect that nation’s civilian population?

What aspects of the Spanish Civil War suggest that “Spain was the first battlefield of World War II”?

The Spanish Republican leader Dolores Ibarruri said, “It is better to die on your feet than to live on your knees.” What did she mean? Do you agree with her statement?

Are all wars worth fighting? Are any wars worth fighting? Which, if any?

### The United States and the Spanish Civil War

What position did the U.S. government take on the Spanish Civil War?

Why were U.S. passports stamped “NOT VALID FOR TRAVEL IN SPAIN”?

Do you believe the government should prohibit the travel of citizens to other countries?

Which countries are U.S. citizens prohibited from visiting today? Why?

In October 1937, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt said that the international community should “quarantine” aggressor countries. What did he mean? Was that a realistic proposal?

### American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War

Why did some Americans view the Spanish Civil War as an American problem?

When, if ever, do you think it is appropriate for civilians of one country to become involved in the problems of another nation?

Why did 3,000 Americans volunteer to defend the Spanish Republic against the military rebellion? Did African Americans have particular reasons to volunteer?

Do you think it was appropriate for U.S. citizens to ignore their government's policies in order to volunteer to fight?

If you disagree with the U.S. government's foreign policy, how can you express your objections?

How could civilians assist the Spanish Republic without participating in the civil war?

What does the life of Captain Oliver Law reveal about U.S. race relations in the 1930s?

What does the career of Salaria Kea suggest about the status of African American women in the 1930s?

Why would the U.S. volunteers in Spain appreciate Paul Robeson's visit in 1938?