



# The Volunteer

JOURNAL OF THE VETERANS OF THE ABRAHAM LINCOLN BRIGADE

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

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

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Thank you for your continued support in keeping the fine traditions of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade a vital and living legacy!

## Letters

Dear friends,

I am disappointed about the article written by Paul Preston in your last issue. This article does not reflect the reality of Spain.

King Juan Carlos is the continuity of Franco's ideology by other means. As the regime needed foreign investments, they needed to soften the regime and of course give it a superficial democratic face. The Constitution was a mere compromise between the post-Francoists and the weak real democrats. In a way to clean the dictatorship, post-Francoists presented the Monarchy.

Spain has become richer in the last 25 years, mainly because of the foreign investments and not because of the policies of their governments. We also must add the large amounts of European funds that have gone to Spain.

The real majority that rules the country are post-Francoists or their descendants, except in the Basque Country and Catalonia. In these territories a Francoist party has never won any election.

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## The Volunteer

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799 Broadway, Rm. 227  
New York, NY 10003  
(212) 674-5398

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# Chicago Students Salute the Lincoln Brigade



Chicago history and drama students

**By Sandy Meyer (with Hector Cambray, Nick Morales, Tony Torres, Curtis Jackson, and Jackie Rodriguez)**

*I was born shortly after World War II and was raised by leftist parents who took me to peace marches and civil rights events. I spent time with family friends like Chuck Hall, who told me about his time in Spain. These events played a huge role in my becoming a radical student leader in the sixties and later a high school teacher who always tries to find opportunities for my students to learn about our history. Five times in my teaching career that meant taking students through the stages necessary to become competitors in National History Day, with projects on the anti-Vietnam War movement, Rosie*

Sandy Meyer has been a high school drama and history teacher for the Chicago public schools since 1972.

*the Riveter, the Emmett Till murder, and, this past year, the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. But I'll let my students, Hector Cambray, Nick Morales, Tony Torres, Curtis Jackson, and Jackie Rodriguez, tell you in their own words what they did.*

We chose the Spanish Civil War as our topic because we are very concerned with the war in Iraq. We discussed the causes of war and those who waged war in the past. We examined tyrants from history, the biggest of whom was Hitler. We also studied the political careers of Mussolini, Salazar, and Franco. We became extremely interested in Franco when we learned he was the first dictator to fight against democratic ideas after World War I. This gave Hitler's ideas a new wave of popularity in Germany. The liberal democratic parties were gaining power, and Hitler

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## New Show Planned

Last year, Jamie O'Reilly, co-creator of the musical performance "Passiones: Songs of the Spanish Civil War," invited ALBA to collaborate with Chicago's Free Street Theater group in producing a student performance based on songs and texts of the Spanish Civil War, as interpreted by contemporary students. As reported in *The Volunteer* (March 2004), the result was *Jugar/Muerte (Play/Dead)*, a production by and for high school students that told the story of the Lincoln Brigade and focused on the moral choices that young people face in a world of war.

Inspired by the performance, a class at Curie High School, taught by Sandy Meyer, adopted the topic for its project in the National History Day competition. [See accompanying article.] The Curie students won first prize in their school, then in the northern Illinois district, and finally in the state's history fair, earning the right to represent Illinois in the final competition in Washington, D.C. At a ceremony last May to honor the students' achievement, the awards committee also paid tribute to Lincoln vet Chuck Hall—not only for enlisting in the fight against fascism, but also for his personal involvement with today's students.

This year ALBA is supporting another version of Chicago's Free Street project, thanks to the continuing commitment of Jamie O'Reilly and teachers like Sandy Meyer. In October, ALBA Chair Peter Carroll joined a group of teachers at Curie High School to explore the 2005 program. ALBA, in turn, acknowledges the recent grant from the Puffin Foundation that makes this important work possible.



# Students

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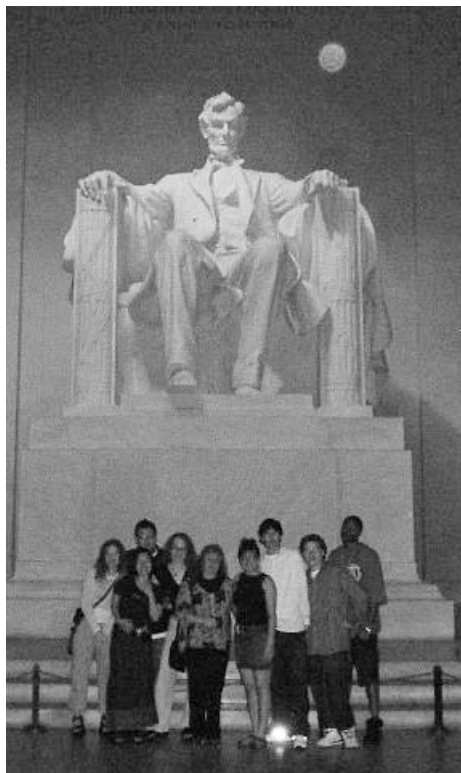
wanted it stopped. He used Franco's war as a blueprint for handling his opposition and he gave much support to Franco. At this point, we knew we wanted to do our project on Franco's war.

At the beginning of our research, we watched a Free Street production of a play on the Spanish Civil War entitled *Jugar/Muerte (Play/Dead)*. It deeply affected us and ignited our interest in learning about the war. We learned people can have all of their basic liberties taken away by force and be left with no recourse but to fight. We then met with Free Street actors who researched and wrote the play. And then we met Chuck Hall, a member of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, who told us firsthand stories of his experiences during the Spanish Civil War. These stories brought the learning process to life. He loaned us videos of volunteers who were in Spain and we read several of their memoirs. We continued to learn more by reading books, as well as articles in *The Volunteer: Journal of the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*.

We loved that the brave fighters of the ALB exchanged talk for action. They picked up rifles and actively supported their ideas. And we loved having Chuck Hall finally honored, even though it was 50 years later at the Chicago Metro History Fair's awards ceremony last spring, for his courage and his solidarity with the Spanish people in their encounters with the fascists in Spain. As history students, we learned a big lesson: sometimes we have to fight for our beliefs, no matter what we encounter along the way.

We feel very passionate about the subject of fascism because millions of people died from its oppression. Due to the very dramatic nature of these events, we felt it necessary to stage *Fighting the Good Fight* as a live performance. Also, as drama majors in our high school, we love to act. Some of us hope to pursue careers in acting, and this project allows us the opportunity

to show our historical knowledge in a passionate manner. Most importantly, as history students, it reminds us of the price that must be paid when our principles, values, and beliefs are opposed by what appear to be overwhelming odds and forces.



*As great an experience as this was for the kids, it meant so much to me (and his family and my family) to see Chuck finally get the recognition he so deserved. The standing ovation that he received at the Chicago Historical Society's awards event recognized him as an historical figure in his own right. We so often see the generals get the accolades, but that day Charles Hall was acknowledged as a true hero for living out his ideals. As a teacher, it is my greatest satisfaction to turn on new generations to historical truths, as I see them.*



# Dispatch from Madrid: Trading One Flag for Another

By Miguel Ángel Nieto  
(Translated by Tony Geist)

In the military parade held on October 12 every year in Spain, the symbols and weapons of the victors have always been on display, until today. The uniforms are those worn by those who have called themselves victors for centuries, for October 12 commemorates the date Christopher Columbus supposedly first set foot on American shores.

Francisco Franco always used this military spectacle to show the world the presumed might of the armed forces of his dictatorial regime. And former president José María Aznar followed suit, initiating a new practice in 2001: the presence of the flag of the United States.

In 2001, the U.S. flag was present in honor of the victims of the brutal terrorist attacks of September 11. The following year it was also there, as one of the member nations of NATO, specially invited. And in 2003 it flew again in the Spanish parade, as symbolic confirmation of the "Pact Against Evil" signed in the Azores just before.

Last year, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, today prime minister of the Spanish government, refused to salute the American flag as it passed the authorities' stand. No one could have imagined the stunning turn of events that would bring the man who remained seated and silent when the flag that represented the war in Iraq marched by to be the prime minister of the Spanish government. Nor could they have imagined that in the Columbus Day parade of 2004, the flag of the United States would be replaced by the flag of France.

The French flag was invited this year not because France refused to sign the Azores accords, but because

this past summer in Paris, France honored the men and women who formed the Leclerc Brigade in 1943 and scarcely a year later, in 1944, contributed decisively to the liberation of France from Nazi occupation. The Spaniards who were part of the Leclerc Brigade, like the Americans of the Lincoln Brigade in Spain, have never been included in official parades in this country. This year, though, things have changed dramatically. Not only did a surviving veteran of the Leclerc Brigade march escorted by the French

flag, he was accompanied by a surviving vet of the Blue Division. This is the first time, to the astonishment of Spanish citizens, that there has been official, though symbolic, recognition of the terrible episode in the history of Spain called the Civil War.

Other Socialist leaders have gone even farther than the Zapatero government in the "flag affair": "I would say that the only thing missing in the military parade this year is the

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Prime minister of Spain, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (center), with vets Matti Mattson (left) and Moe Fishman (right)

## Spain's Zapatero Praises Lincoln Brigade

In September, His Excellency José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, the Prime Minister of Spain, came to New York to attend the opening session of the United Nations. Because Spain was about to rotate into the presidency of the UN Security Council, the Prime Minister was accompanied by an important Spanish delegation.

The General Director of the Instituto Cervantes, César Antonio

Molina, held a reception for the Prime Minister and his delegation on Monday, September 20, 2004. Before being appointed head of Spain's most important cultural organization by the Zapatero government, Molina had been the director of Madrid's Círculo de Bellas Artes. Under his leadership, the center has mounted several major exhibitions and events related to the

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Miguel Ángel Nieto is a prominent journalist based in Madrid.

# Flag Controversy Taints Spain's Holiday Parade

By Robert Coale

The participation of two antagonistic veterans groups during Spain's National Holiday ceremonies in October marred the traditional day of patriotism. Spain's Minister of Defense José Bono defended his invitation to one Spanish veteran of the Free French Second Armored Division, known as the Leclerc Division, which fought with the Allies in liberating Paris in 1944, as well as to veterans of the Spanish Volunteer Division, otherwise known as the Blue Division, which fought with the German army on the Eastern Front, as a symbol of national reconciliation. But this gesture has been

widely criticized by different political parties in Spain.

The Leclerc Division, arguably the most famous Free French fighting unit of World War II, served as a rallying point for volunteers from France and the rest of the world who refused to accept the defeat of the French army in 1940. It began as a hodgepodge column in 1941, and by 1943 was a modern armored division of some 16,000 men, supplied by and integrated into Patton's Third U.S. Army. As a result of the Allied invasion of North Africa in November 1942, several hundred Spanish Republicans deserted the Vichy France units they were forced into in 1939 and took up arms



Luis Royo-Ibáñez in front of a photograph of the half-track he rode into Paris while fighting the Nazis in WWII. Photo courtesy of Coasques.

## Zapatero Praises Lincolns

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Spanish Civil War and the International Brigades. The host of the New York reception was the new director of the Instituto Cervantes in New York, Antonio Muñoz Molina, Spain's most acclaimed novelist, who is also keenly interested in the Spanish Civil War and the International Brigades. Many of his novels deal with the legacy of the war in contemporary Spain. And Zapatero himself, though born in 1960, traces the origin of his interest in politics to the family memory of his grandfather, a military officer who was executed by the fascists during the Spanish Civil War because of his allegiance to the Republic.

It is probably because of this interest in the Spanish Civil War, shared by Molina, Muñoz Molina and Zapatero, that a few veterans of the Lincoln Brigade received special invitations to attend the September 20 event at New York's Instituto Cervantes. Matti Mattson and I attended to represent the VALB. The

people invited to make remarks at the event were New York-area representatives of Sephardic Jews, Latin American artists, and Spanish Republican exiles. It seemed clear that through this guest list and the choice of speakers, the Instituto Cervantes was intending to signal its broad and inclusive conception of Spanish culture. Prime Minister Zapatero, in his remarks, made explicit mention of the many young American idealists who had come to Spain to defend the Spanish Republic in the ranks of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade.

The evening concluded with cocktails in the Instituto Cervantes garden. Matti and I formed a flying wedge and made our way through a crowd of the Prime Minister's friends and admirers right to Sr. Zapatero's elbow. We told him who we were, and he greeted us warmly. We asked if he would take just a moment to have a photo taken with us. He graciously agreed. And here it is.

—Moe Fishman

with De Gaulle to fight Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco. Most of these men wound up in the armored infantry of Leclerc, where they were respected for their civil war combat experience. In a true quirk of history, it was an advance column of these Spaniards that first entered Paris in halftracks baptized "Ebro," "Teruel," "Guadalajara," and even "Don Quixote." They went on to participate in the liberation of eastern France, Strasbourg, and Hitler's Eagle's Nest in Berchtesgaden.

In the wake of Charles De Gaulle's rise to power, the contribution of volunteers of other nationalities was quieted in the interest of French

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Robert Coale is writing a book about Spanish participation in the French army during World War II.



# Reconsidering Spain's Wartime Prime Minister

By Gabriel Jackson

Let me say at the start that Juan Negrín has been badly treated in the historiography of the Spanish Civil War. Naturally, for the rightwing dictatorship, which won the war and then governed Spain for 36 years (1939-1975), Negrín was an agent of Stalin, the man who "robbed" the gold of the Bank of Spain and handed it to the Russians. But also, within the Republic, Negrín's tenure as prime minister (May 1937-March 1939) coincided with the loss of revolutionary hopes among socialist and anarchist workers, steady military defeats, increasing food shortages, the total diplomatic isolation of the Republic except for Soviet Russia and Mexico, and the final loss of the war. Dozens of writers among the exiled republican and socialist leaders wrote memoirs in which Negrín is blamed for most of the catastrophes that befell the Republic, especially in the last year of the war, after Franco's forces had reached the Mediterranean and cut the Republican territories in two.

Negrín did not keep a diary—at least none that has survived—nor did he write many newspaper articles. Other major leaders, such as Manuel Azaña, Indalecio Prieto, Luis Araquistain, and Martínez Barrio, produced reams of prose explaining the shortcomings and errors of Negrín. But except for a handful of wartime speeches, a public exchange of letters with Prieto in 1939, and his formal resignation at the Cortes of August 1945 in Mexico, Negrín did not defend himself against these thousands of pages lambasting his actions.

If there had not been a Republican

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Gabriel Jackson's biography of Juan Negrín will soon be published in Spain.

revolution in 1931 and a civil war five years later, Juan Negrín would have spent his life as a professor of physiology, an occasional medical practitioner (it was never his main occupation), an academic administrator, a financial organizer and manager, an inveterate book collector, and a man of endless curiosity about languages, anthropology, cuisine, sex, and human nature from childhood to old age.

Negrín was born in Las Palmas, principal port city of the island of Gran Canaria, in February 1892. The Canary Islands had belonged to the kingdom of Castile since 1479, but because the islands straddled all the main trade routes being opened from the 15th century to the present between Africa, Latin America, and Europe, the islanders were much more interested in world commerce than were their cousins on the Iberian peninsula. Negrín was an excellent student in both the sciences and the humanities, graduated from high school with high honors at the age of 14, and maintained a lifelong interest in the culture of the Guanches, the native peoples who had inhabited the archipelago for centuries before the European arrivals.

On the advice of his German business associates, Negrín's father, a successful self-made merchant and land investor, sent his son to be educated in German universities. Between 1908 and 1916 Juan Negrín acquired two doctorates, one in medicine and one in physiology, published a half dozen research articles, and substituted in 1914-15 for one of his professors who was called to active military service at the start of World War I. Negrín was by this time completely fluent in French, English, and German, also spoke some Russian and Italian, and had become a privatdozent, an important step towards a full professorial career in Germany



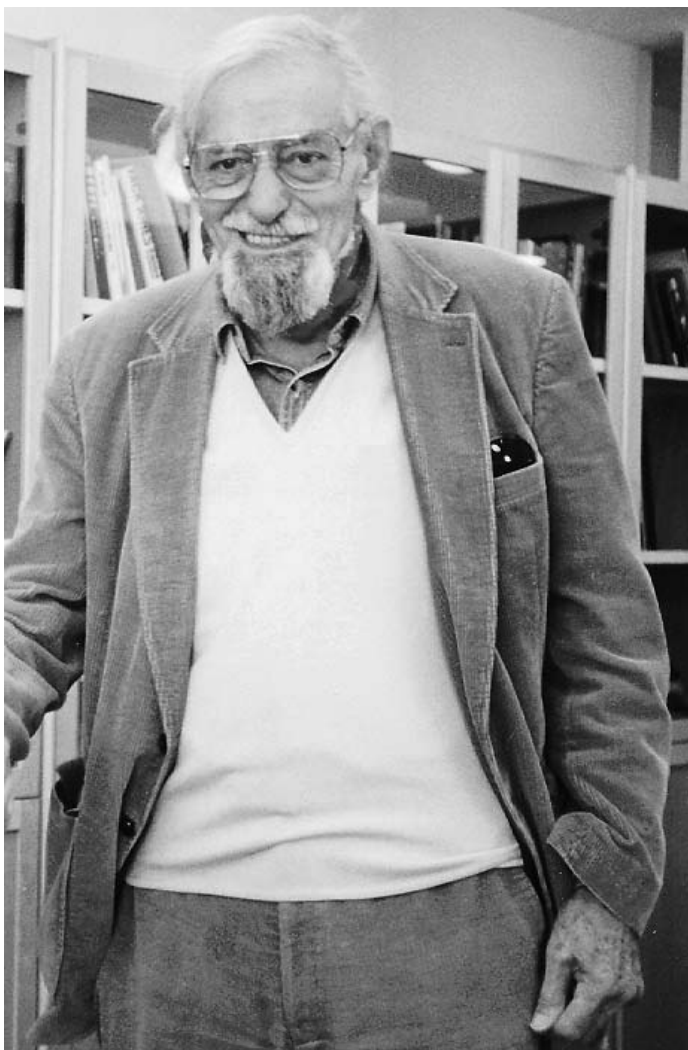
had he desired to stay on.

In 1916 he returned to neutral Spain with his Russian-Jewish pianist wife and their two infant sons. Negrín's Leipzig education and his research publications had attracted the highly favorable attention of Santiago Ramón y Cajal, Spain's Nobel Prize-winning physiologist. Negrín was put in charge of the new physiology laboratories being developed in what is now the Residencia de Estudiantes in Madrid. By 1922 he was a professor of experimental physiology and the secretary of the medical school faculty at the University of Madrid (now called the Complutense). He also founded a laboratory of chemical analysis that served the needs of his own patients and those of several colleagues and a publishing house, which in 1927 issued the first up-to-date Spanish textbook in medical physiology and also the Spanish translation of Erich

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## Lincoln Vets Join Veterans for Peace Demonstrating at the Republican National Convention

Lincoln vets and friends marching with the Veterans for Peace joined thousands of demonstrators who protested at the Republican national convention in New York. Vet Matti Mattson marches with the VALB banner (right).



## Commemoration of the Defense of Madrid

To commemorate the 67th anniversary of the battle to defend Madrid in November 1936, the Asociación de Amigos de las Brigadas Internacionales (AABI) held a series of programs that focused on the role of international volunteers, hosting appearances by the Lincoln Brigade's last commander, Milton Wolff, and ALBA chair Peter Carroll. The events, which were held at the Centro Cultural de Rivas Vaciamadrid, included the opening of an exhibition, "Volunteers for Liberty," and round-table discussions that included both veterans of the war and historians. The Amigos also organized a tour of nearby battlefields.

[WWW.ALBA-VALB.ORG](http://WWW.ALBA-VALB.ORG)



# Harry Fisher's Letters Depict Lincoln Vets in World War II

By Michael Nash

The World War II correspondence of Harry Fisher (1911 – 2003) is the most recent addition to the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archive at New York University's Tamiment Library. This is a massive archive, some 2,000 letters describing the day-to-day life of a Lincoln veteran who was kept stateside until the end of the war because his politics and Spanish

## World War II Letters Sought

ALBA is seeking letters written by Lincoln Brigade veterans from the World War II era for inclusion in a volume that will be published by New York University Press. Anyone with such material is encouraged to contact Executive Director Julia Newman, 799 Broadway (Rm. 227), New York, NY 10003; 212-674-5398; [exemplaryone@aol.com](mailto:exemplaryone@aol.com).

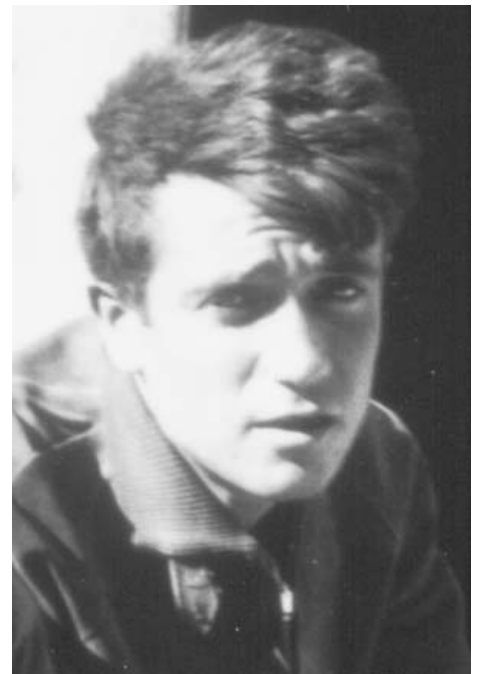
Civil War service made him suspect in the eyes of the United States military.

Fisher was a department store worker, seaman, and political activist who served with the Lincoln Brigade in Spain from March 1937 until September 1938. He participated in most of the major campaigns of the war, including the battle at Jarama in the spring of 1937, the Brunete offense that summer, and the battle at Teruel in the winter of 1938. In Brunete, he served as a runner for Commander

Michael Nash is head of the Tamiment Library at New York University.

Oliver Law, the first African American to command an integrated military unit.

During World War II, Fisher trained as an engineer gunner in the U.S. Army Air Corps, but he never saw action because of the discrimination he faced as a Lincoln Brigade veteran. After the war, he became chief of communications for the Tass news agency in New York City. Like many of the veterans, Fisher was at the center of most of the political and economic struggles that defined post-war America: resistance to the McCarthy witch hunts, the civil rights movement, the peace movement dur-



Harry Fisher

ing the Vietnam era, the effort to raise money for ambulances for Nicaragua, and opposition to the war in Iraq.

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## Excerpt of letter from Harry Fisher to Ruth Fisher

June 27, 1943  
Sweetheart:

The other day I got into an argument with a corporal. It was while I was getting processed—the part where I was getting fit for uniforms. I don't want to go into details, but I can assure you it was his fault, or I'd have kept my mouth shut. Anyways, I kept my mouth shut so long as I could, but after the fifth time he called me a son-of-a-bitch, I lost my meekness and opened my mouth. I told him he was one of these 2 stripe generals with a soft job in the rear, trying to bulldoze the new green guys in the army—that if he were a real soldier, he wouldn't be in a reception camp. Then he started to threaten me, and I told him to go four letter word himself. And that was that! Later on another soldier comes over to me and says—"You fought in a war before didn't you." I told him that I fought with the Loyalists in Spain. That was the first time I mentioned Spain here. The guy spoke as though he knew. He said—"You volunteered for Spain, didn't you?" I said I did. "Did you volunteer for the American army," he asked belligerently. "It's none of your god-damn business, Bud," I answered. After that, all the fellows got around me and wanted to know all about Spain. About half the group were Italians, but they were all sympathetic anti mussolini. Some of them never even heard of that war. To some of them, it made no difference that I fought with the Loyalists—what mattered is that I fought in a war....

Regards to all.  
Harry

# Flag Controversy

Continued from page 6

participation in the Allied victory. Then suddenly, 60 years later, the forgotten volunteer Spanish Republicans of the Leclerc Division were back in the vanguard when the mayor of Paris, socialist Bertrand Delanoë, seconded by his lieutenant mayor of Spanish origins, Anne Hidalgo, decided to inaugurate a plaque in their honor during official ceremonies in August 2004. The event received considerable news coverage in France and Spain. It was the Spanish Minister of Defense in person who, shortly afterwards, invited Luis Royo-Ibáñez, one of the two surviving veterans, to Madrid.

On the other hand, the Spanish Volunteer Division, or the “Blue Division,” named for the color of the Spanish fascist Falange uniform

friendly interpretations of the unit Franco sent to help Hitler claim that volunteers were recruited from prison or joined in order to buy freedom for

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*Luis Royo-Ibáñez was not pleased at the idea of marching next to a veteran who had worn a Nazi uniform.*

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shirts, was created in 1943 and fought in the German army on the Eastern Front against the Soviet Red Army. Recruited in Spain, some 40,000 soldiers fought in its ranks through a system of rotations. Sixty years later,

detained family members, or even to desert to the USSR once at the front. While there were such cases, they were a small minority. This was a unit commanded by proven Francoist generals and infused with enthusiasm for the Nazi agenda.

Flash forward to Madrid in October 2004. Luis Royo-Ibáñez was not pleased at the idea of marching next to a veteran who had worn a Nazi uniform. One exchange caught on video for the nightly news went as follows: “While you were fighting to enslave part of Europe for Hitler, I was fighting for democracy.” “Whatever you say,” responded Mr. Salamanca, veteran of the Blue Division. “Darned right,” stated Mr. Royo-Ibáñez. The latter, who fought in the Ebro battle at the age of 17, said that participating in the ceremony next to a veteran of Franco’s army in the civil war would not have upset him, because in the civil war each side defended its vision for the future of Spain. In fact, he thought that national reconciliation could be a positive step. But marching next to a volunteer for Hitler was a completely different matter.

The subsequent public debate has proven that many agree with Mr. Royo-Ibáñez. Now that the transition to democracy has been firmly established in Spanish society, people believe that it is time to take a critical look at the legacy of the Franco regime, still present in Spanish cities through statues and streets named for rebellious generals, forgotten graves, and unforgotten prison sentences, before the reconciliation can truly take hold. ■

## Fisher Letters

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Harry Fisher’s letters from the battlefields of Spain that have been part of the ALBA collection for many years capture the spirit of the volunteers and the Spanish people. On March 16, 1937, shortly after arriving in Spain, he wrote: “It is impossible for me to express the spirit of these children. They will fight fascism to death.”

In World War II, Harry Fisher experienced the type of discrimination that was all too typical. Like many of his comrades, he saw that war as a continuation of the anti-fascist struggle they had begun in Spain. However, Fisher’s service in the Spanish Civil War set him apart from the other soldiers, as the government classified him as a security risk who should not be sent to the front lines. On September 25, 1943, he wrote to his wife Ruth:

I learned this morning that the radio gunners who shipped out this week are now at Fort Monmouth, N.J. I was supposed to be with that gang.... I was not shipped because I’m being investigated.

In hundreds of letters, he

expressed frustration at not being allowed to fight in Europe, watching many of the soldiers he trained with going off to war while he remained in the United States. It was February 1945 before the Air Corps sent Fisher to a base in France. By then the war was almost over, and as result, he did not see real action. For Fisher, the war was characterized by frustration and boredom. One of his brighter moments came at an August 1945 Paul Robeson concert that was held on a French military base. In an August 6 letter Fisher, with considerable satisfaction, quotes Robeson saying, “I sang for the American boys of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, who were the first Americans to fight against fascism.”

Many of Harry Fisher’s letters will be published in a forthcoming book on the Lincoln Brigade veterans during World War II. This edited collection of letters will describe the full range of experiences of the Lincoln Brigade—from those who served heroically on the front lines to those who, like Harry Fisher, were kept out of action because of their politics. ■

# Argentina and the Spanish Civil War

By Jerónimo Boragina  
(Translated by Tony Geist)

For the last several years a group of historians called "History from Below" has been meeting in Mar del Plata, Argentina, near Buenos Aires. We believe that history must be understood from a position counter to the story told by the elite and those who hold power. That is, history in which the people, workers, and society in general are the creators and participants in social change, not merely observers.

The Credicorp Bank recently offered us support and space to organize an event concerning the Spanish Civil War. We were already aware of Spanish exile groups in Mar del Plata, and our fascination with the International Brigades led us to organize a series of lectures and discussions that took place on four successive Fridays in the month of March 2004. Over 50 people attended each session.

Argentinean volunteers recall the importance of international solidarity, telling tales of ships from different countries arriving in Spain laden with food, medicine, clothing, etc. Argentina was the second most active country per capita to send aid to the Spanish Republic. Campaigns, events, parties, donation of a day's wages (workers donated one day's work to feed a Spanish miliciano) were among the many expressions of support from the Argentinean people to Spain. The Centro Republicano Español, created in 1931, was responsible for the

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## Benicàssim Honors Brigades with New Plaque

By Guillermo Casañ

Last July 23 a plaque was unveiled in Benicàssim's cemetery in honor of the "Internationales" buried there. The ceremony was organized by the "Associació González Chermá" and

unteers and relatives have visited it in the recent past: brigadistas like Ernst Kuntschic, Gerhard Hoffmann, Len Levenson (with Robert Coale); medical personnel like doctor Josep M. Massons and nurses Josephine Hill, Pilar Pitarch,

*It is moving to see how the fight against fascism by the men and women of the International Brigades is still valued and admired despite the passing years.*

the townhall. About 50 people, young and old, attended the event, surrounded by republican flags. Among them was Rosa Langer, daughter of French brigadist Marcel Langer. As a continuation of the homage, a talk titled "Benicàssim, Images from the I.B. Hospital" was given by Guillermo Casañ at Villa Elisa, a place which holds a plaque in honor of the I.B. hospital. The plaque was unveiled during the 1986 homage.

The hospital in this Mediterranean village was one of the biggest I.B. hospitals. Many vol-

Encarna Mus, Mercedes Ferrara, Carolina Klein and Rosita Cremón; and relatives of Dr. Gunter Bodek and Dr. Desider Tallenberg, both directors of the hospital. Along with these visits, lectures have been organized. Austrian vet Hans Landauer, for example, has given talks on I.B. history in prestigious centers of the area.

It is moving to see how the fight against fascism by the men and women of the International Brigades is still valued and admired despite the passing years. ▀



# Abe Osheroff: Plenty of Steam in the Kettle



By Mark Jenkins

When Robyn Hunt, a professor in the School of Drama, was asked by the administration of the University of Washington to give the keynote speech in September at the Freshman Convocation (the first “official” welcome to new students and their families), she turned to 89-year-old Abe Osheroff, SCW vet and lifetime activist, who lives in Seattle.

Osheroff is known to many on campus, where he has lectured, taught history, spoken at rallies and, as he puts it, is “still out there recruiting the young for the good fight for peace and justice” every chance he gets.

Professor Hunt, who is a recipient of one of the UW’s coveted Distinguished Teacher Awards, speaks of having been inspired by witnessing a warm but provocative speech Abe gave to a small group of students a couple of years ago. For the theme of her speech, she borrowed

Abe’s challenge to “live an authentic life.” She says, “I was so impressed with his words and his thoughts that when I was called to do this speech, I thought that’s what I can offer.” She credits Abe with a fine definition of authenticity: “When what you say, what you think and what you do are in harmony.” A meaningful life is formed by “meaningful work and love.”

Her presentation challenged students to “listen to your convictions” and to “make the courageous choice. . . standing up for personal beliefs.” She went on to say, “Every time you take the easy way, you sacrifice a bit of your integrity.” The speech received stunning responses from students, parents, and university colleagues. She has had many requests for the transcript and was asked to repeat the speech a few days later to an alumni association meeting.

As a UW student who fell under Abe’s spell some years ago put it, “The old rusty kettle still has plenty of steam.” ❏

## Argentina

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organization of humanitarian aid to the Spanish Republic in Mar del Plata. The struggle and solidarity of the citizens and workers of Mar del Plata is not remembered by history, and in some cases has been silenced by various administrations. (In 1936, for instance, our city was governed by General A. P. Justo, who took power through electoral fraud.)

Today our group is studying Argentinean participation, individual and collective, in the Spanish Civil War. It is a difficult task, as we encounter obstacles such as tracing the whereabouts of Argentinean volunteers who went to fight fascism in Spain, but we will soon bring it to a successful conclusion.

Our desire is to take a leading role not just in remembering what the Spanish Civil War meant, but in reevaluating such critically important phenomena as the will of a people to choose their own destiny and respect for democratic institutions, as was played out on the battlefields of Spain in 1936. ❏

## Dispatch

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Republican flag, so that we could say that Monarchy and Republic walk hand-in-hand in the reign of King Juan Carlos I,” said Pasqual Maragall, president of the Catalan Generalitat.

Clearly things are changing in Spain. But there are still historical debts of recognition that remain unpaid. In fact, no one has yet demanded, though it seems that for the first time conditions are ripe for it, that the Republican tricolor fly, next year if possible, next to the Lincoln Brigade in the Columbus Day parade, and that next to the survivors of those men and women who gave their lives for the Spanish Republic, the

American flag might also fly, as an expression of historical gratitude.

For many, many Spaniards it is also vitally important that someone finally make a fundamental official distinction: George W. Bush’s flag is not the same as the flag of brotherhood under which the Lincoln Brigade fought in Spain. That flag, a symbol of eternal solidarity, should be present in all future parades as homage to the American people who, regardless of who might be in power in their country, have always shown solidarity with their Spanish brothers and sisters. ❏

# ALBA Launches New Website Program: *An Introduction to the Spanish Civil War*

ALBA has just added another teaching program to its website. Written by Richard Baxell, London-based author of *British Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War*, the new program serves as an introduction to the major issues of the Spanish Civil War (see table of contents, right). Using links to other websites, this teaching package will guide students to the questions and answers of key topics.

The new educational package joins ALBA's other teaching programs on the site. There programs can be found by going to [www.alba-valb.org](http://www.alba-valb.org) and clicking on "education." We offer a sample below.

## **The Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939: An Overview for Students and Educators**

By Richard Baxell

*"It was in Spain that [my generation] learned that one can be right and yet be beaten, that force can vanquish spirit, that there are times when courage is not its own recompense. It is this, doubtless, which explains why so many, the world over, feel the Spanish drama as a personal tragedy."* Albert Camus.

### **SPAIN IN 1931**

Spain in 1931 was a country riven by inequalities. Still predominantly an agrarian country, traditional divisions endured between wealthy landowners, doggedly preserving their position, and a huge number of landless labourers and poverty-stricken smallholders, desperate to lift themselves from an existence of near-starvation. One of the largest landowners was the Catholic Church who, in addition to any theological motivations, were thus determined to maintain the status quo. Opposing the Church was the largest Anarchist movement in Europe, with a history of incendiary anti-clericalism. 'Spaniards' it was said, 'followed their priests either with a candle or a club'.

In the very few areas witnessing industrial change—chiefly Catalonia and the Basque regions—corresponding social and political change was largely absent. Aspirations by these regions for some degree of autonomy were bitterly opposed by the Spanish army who, fighting in Morocco to regain an empire which had been lost with the catastrophic defeat to the United States in 1898, strongly resisted any attempts to break up Spain. Large, powerful and extremely top-heavy in officers, the Spanish army had a tradition of involvement in politics; Primo de Rivera's military dictatorship had ruled Spain as recently as the 1920s. The dictatorship's legacy was a huge budget deficit at a time when the world was already sinking into economic depression, and its collapse spelled the end for the Spanish monarchy.

In April 1931, municipal elections were taken to be a plebiscite on the monarchy and the result was an overwhelmingly hostile vote against it. The King, Alfonso XIII, realising that he had lost not just the support of the populace but, crucially, the support of the military, fled Spain. Thus, on 12 April 1931, Spain's Second Republic, *la niña bonita*, was born.

*From the first part of **The Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939: An Overview for Students and Educators**. For the entire module go to: <http://www.alba-valb.org/curriculum/index.php?module=5>*

## **For Your Liberty & Ours**

### **Introduction to the Spanish Civil War**

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# Negrín

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Maria Remarque's best-selling novel about the Great War, *All Quiet on the Western Front*. (One of Negrín's associates in the publishing venture was Julio Alvarez del Vayo, future Republican foreign minister and future foreign affairs editor of *The Nation*.)

As a student, Negrín had been sympathetic to the demands for parliamentary democracy, and the emphasis on social services, of the German Social Democratic Party. When King Alfonso XIII sponsored a large expansion of the University of Madrid in 1927, Negrín, as a known republican, was not named to the planning committee. But he was a good friend of His Majesty's dentist, Dr. Florestan Aguilar, and via this friendship his suggestions were transmitted to the planners. In 1931, shortly after Spain became a republic, Negrín became the chairman of the construction committee of the University City, working with many of the same colleagues with whom he had labored unofficially during the previous four years.

Having joined the Socialist Party in 1929, Negrín served the party in three capacities during the years 1931-36. He was chosen as a Socialist deputy from the Canary Islands in all three of the republican parliamentary elections; he served on several Cortes committees dealing with financial questions and represented Spain at the International Labor Office in Geneva, where his knowledge of foreign languages was very useful; and in Madrid, as one of the relatively few persons who owned an automobile in those years, he occasionally chauffeured Largo Caballero and other Socialist colleagues when they were about to be hassled by the police at political meetings.

Negrín was a voracious reader, and his reading had included Marx and Engels, but he was not a Marxist. He had joined the Socialist Party in the belief that the party was the only

one whose program and organizational structure would make possible a real economic and political transformation of a Spain that had barely begun to develop modern industries, a professional middle class, responsible labor unions, and an intellectual life not completely dominated by the Catholic Church.

Juan Negrín's role during the Civil War (July 1936-March 1939) reflected the tensions of three competing ideologies within Republican Spain: 1) capitalist democracy, represented by a number of numerically small republican parties composed mostly of professionals and intellectuals; 2) monarchist-military reaction, looking to European fascism as a model and as a source of military aid, and backed by the majority of the upper clergy, the landed and industrial aristocracies, and much of the professional military; and 3) the large socialist and anarchist working classes and poor peasants, who followed the leadership of the two large, competing labor federations, the Socialist UGT and the anarcho-syndicalist CNT.

In an effort to prevent fascism from conquering Europe according to plans loudly announced by the Nazis, the Soviet Union proposed two new policies in 1935: 1) "collective security" through a mutual defense treaty to be signed by England, France, and Soviet Russia; and 2) a "Popular Front" policy to unite the anti-fascist parliamentary parties with the leftwing labor unions to protect political liberty in each individual country. Spain was the first country to elect a "Popular Front" government, in February 1936, and France was the second to do so, in May 1936.

In July 1936, when a large part of the Spanish military rose against the Popular Front government, Spaniards of both the democratic capitalist persuasion (Republicans) and of the Socialist, Communist, and

anarcho-syndicalist persuasion—in short, all those who had voted for the Popular Front, naturally expected that France, which also had a Popular Front government, and hopefully also England, as the longest established democratic power, would aid the Spanish Republic in its self-defense against a military revolt rapidly and copiously aided by Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany.

But that is not what happened. The French would have liked to aid the Republic, but were quickly warned by the British government not to intervene in the Spanish conflict. Britain had already shown its preference for appeasement of the fascist powers rather than collective security along the lines proposed by Soviet Russia. Under British leadership and domination, from August 1936, a policy of "Non-Intervention" effectively prevented the Republic from buying arms in the democratic world while openly permitting Italy and Germany to supply the forces of General Franco. Many of the banks and important industries in the democratic capitalist countries also supported Franco quietly while completely boycotting the Republic.

Juan Negrín was active in the Republican wartime government from beginning to end. In the first terrible weeks, when many supporters of the Republic were killing hated employers, Falangists, Civil Guards, and priests, Negrín joined Indalecio Prieto and other Popular Front leaders in denouncing these "paseos" and helping to hide, or get out of the country, colleagues and students who felt threatened by their conservative and/or wealthy family origins. He then served as Finance Minister under Largo Caballero (September 1936-May 1937). One of his principal accomplishments was the reconstitution of the Carabineros, the corps of frontier police. Establishing control of the Pyrenean

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# Negrín

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frontier enabled him both to protect persons fleeing from political persecution within the republican zone and to restore the collection of customs duties at the frontier, a very important and traditional source of government revenue that the anarchists had been taking over as a species of collectivist enterprise of their own.

One of the painful ironies of Popular Front politics was the irreconcilable split between the followers of the parliamentary Socialist and self-made newspaper executive Indalecio Prieto and the historic head of the Socialist Labor Federation (UGT) Francisco Largo Caballero. Caballero had vetoed the naming of Prieto as Prime Minister in May 1936, a move that many historians (not including me) think might have avoided the Civil War. Months later, when the failures of Largo Caballero as an administrator made it necessary to replace him in May 1937, President Azaña nominated Juan Negrín in order both to avoid another split in Socialist ranks and to retain the sterling services of Prieto as Minister of Defense.

Under Negrín the now disciplined army and the air force (which had remained loyal from the start) gave excellent accounts of themselves in battle (Brunete, Belchite, Teruel, the Ebro) but could not win strategic victories because of Franco's constant superiority in arms supplied by Germany and Italy. Democratic police and judicial authority were slowly restored, but Stalin, without consultation or concern for the purposes of the Republican government, established a parallel secret police and prison system. The kidnapping and torture death of Andres Nin, and of numerous less famous Trotskyites, anarchists, and dissident communists, became an international scandal.

Since these things occurred "on Negrín's watch," they have been

blamed on him, by other socialists and republicans at the time, and by most historians since. But what were the alternatives for Negrín? The democracies had turned their backs on the Republic. He could either tolerate Stalinist abuses or surrender the Republic to the tender mercies of General Franco. What was he weighing in the balance? The crimes of two to three hundred Stalinist agents, as against the reconstruction of the democratic republic and the continuance of its military defense until the democracies would wake up to the follies of appeasement and aid the republic—thereby also freeing it from total dependence on the Soviet Union. I sometimes imagine to myself the shame felt by British and French journalists and diplomats who asked Negrín why he worked so closely with the Soviets and received the reply that he would much prefer to buy French and British arms if those countries would sell to Republican Spain.

Negrín has also been widely blamed by his contemporaries for insisting on continued resistance when the population was close to starving and the Munich Pact (October 1, 1938) had made it crystal clear that the democracies would not change their appeasement policy. In the last months of the war, when many loyal officers and many republican and socialist political figures were dreaming of some kind of Anglo-French "mediation" that would soften Franco's terms, Negrín claimed that his policy of resistance was the only one that might force Franco to make concessions, and that all he was seeking were guarantees against massive postwar reprisals against the population of the republican zone. When his own officers revolted in March 1939, he was passive; he did not create a civil war within the remaining republican territory. But his prediction was unhappily fulfilled. There was no

mediation, and Franco accepted only unconditional surrender, followed by hundreds of thousands of exiles, imprisonments, and deaths.

I conclude with a brief mention of two other important points about Negrín. From his education and his knowledge of languages and of modern capitalist enterprise, Negrín was the most "European" of the Republican leaders. He spoke to French, English, and American journalists and diplomats in their own language. He appreciated the truly international outlook of the International Brigaders and joined La Pasionaria in her historic invitation to the veterans to return to Spain one day when it was once again a free country. Too many historians have written about the "betrayal" of Spain as though it was the work of Stalin (who in fact continued to supply arms until early 1939) and Negrín, as an "agent" of Stalin. The real betrayal, without quote marks, was the betrayal by the democratic powers, mistakenly decided upon in July 1936 and foolishly maintained, not only until Franco's victory, but into the postwar era until the dictator's death in 1975.

The other point is Negrín's strict separation between political disagreements and personal attitude towards colleagues. In 1936-37, Negrín publicly considered Prime Ministers Casares Quiroga and Largo Caballero completely unqualified for their jobs, and in the course of 1938 he became increasingly estranged from President Manuel Azaña. But when the Nazis were approaching Paris in June 1940, Negrín offered passage to England, on a small Greek freighter he had rented, to Caballero and Azaña (which neither accepted, for reasons having nothing to do with Negrín), and in his London home during World War II, there was a room always for Casares Quiroga, physically ill and practically penniless. ■



PHOTO BY STEPHANIE MOHAN

## ANTHONY TONEY (1913-2004)

Anthony Toney, a noted New York painter whose career spanned 70 years, died on September 10 in Marin County, California, at the age of 91. In 1997, Mr. Toney ended his 40-year teaching career with the New School of Social Research in New York City and moved to Fairfax, California, to be near his family.

Although hampered by severe memory loss, Toney became a fixture in the small town of Fairfax. He was embraced by the locals and could be seen roaming the streets, wearing his trademark beret and carrying his sketchbook. He volunteered once a week at a local elementary school, wowing the kids with his artistry as he painted their portraits.

Until his death, Toney continued to be a creative force. Memory loss no longer allowed him to paint in the semi-abstract style that had marked his long and prolific career. But his unending drive to paint and draw each day of his life, as well as the extraordinary legacy of eight decades of paintings, was an inspiration to all those who came in contact with him or his work. In 2003, the College of Marin hosted a large retrospective of his work, as had City College of San Francisco in 1998.

In the early sixties, the artist Herzl

Emanuel published an essay, "The Art of Anthony Toney," in which he noted, "For him the act of painting is no mere practice of a time-honored profession. It is an urgent, continuous life-sustaining process whereby he perpetually loses and rediscovers his own identity."

At the height of his career, Toney exhibited regularly at the ACA gallery in New York, taught classes throughout the New York area, published two books on painting and drawing, and completed several large murals for Syracuse University.

Born in 1913 to Syrian immigrants in Gloversville, New York, young Anthony helped his father run a small grocery. At first planning to go to trade school after high school graduation, Toney, the class valedictorian, received the school's math prize and instead enrolled at Syracuse University. He graduated with a BFA in 1934.

Syracuse University awarded him a stipend to study in Paris. But he first returned to Gloversville in the depth of the Great Depression and painted murals under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration (WPA). He went to Paris in 1937 and studied at L'Ecole Superieur des Beaux Arts and L'Academie de la Grande Chaumiere. "I walked all over Paris, day and night. Even saw Picasso sitting in a cafe at Montparnasse one day," he fondly remembered.

When the Spanish Civil War began, Toney headed for Spain and joined the Lincoln Brigade. Severely wounded at Gandesa, he eventually returned home in 1939 and resumed his artistic career in New York. He worked again for the WPA and presented his first one-man show at the Wakefield Gallery (NYC) in 1941.

During World War II, Toney served in the South Pacific as a flight engineer with a troop carrier squadron. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

In 1947, he married Edna

Greenfield, an actress and playwright. On the GI bill, he pursued graduate studies at Teacher's College, Columbia University, and received a doctorate in fine arts and education in 1955. Three years earlier, Toney had begun his 43-year association with the New School of Social Research in Manhattan. He was also a summer-time artistic director of Festival House in the Berkshires, which attracted such luminaries as Anton Refregier and Jacob Lawrence as artists in residence and teachers.

Toney saw his role as an artist very clearly: "I find positiveness in depicting groups of people, suggesting the capability of individuals to discuss differences, to share ideas and to work together, which may be decisive for their survival. I want my paintings to inspire a sense of optimism in the face of the seriousness of the human predicament."

### Veterans Who Died in 2004

Al Amery  
Anna Goldman  
Ben Holzman  
Robert Nagle  
Frank Richards  
Irene Goldin Spiegel  
Anthony Toney

He remained a political activist throughout his life, opposing the Vietnam War, the nuclear arms race, and repression at home and abroad. His paintings often reflected his struggles for a saner world.

Mr. Toney summarized his views on art in the book *Creative Painting and Drawing* (1968) and in an updated version in 1978 titled *Painting and Drawing*.

Edna Toney died in 1993. Four years later, plagued by worsening memory loss, Toney relocated to Fairfax, California. He is survived by a sister and two daughters.

—Anita Toney

## Life of a Revolutionary

**Professional Revolutionary: The Life of Saul Wellman**, a film by Judith Montell and Ronald Aronson

### By Martha Olson Jarocki

The sweep of history has such a strong presence in this extraordinary film that it nearly overtakes the film's central character, Saul Wellman, no shrinking violet himself. This is a film to watch with a teenager, somebody who doesn't know much about the last 70 years of U.S. history, and certainly doesn't know how much he/she has been shaped by it.

Saul Wellman, veteran of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, longtime American Communist Party organizer and political activist in Detroit, was at the center of many of the landmark events and movements of the 20th century.

The second major theme of this documentary about Wellman's life is that he, like a lot of veterans from Spain, understood the important role people play in making history. Wellman mentored more than one generation of Detroit political activists, now scattered around the county but still carrying the torch. One of them, Jim Jacobs, influenced by Wellman and now an educator in Detroit, says, "What Saul is a master at is taking the moment and placing it within a historical context. You feel that suddenly your individual issue is part of this huge river of events. And there's a progression that goes on, and you're part of this larger movement. That somehow it does make a difference to almost the entire world."

Filmmaker Judith Montell lets Wellman's story unfold with precision, using archival footage and

Martha Olson Jarocki, vice chair of the Bay Area Post, is the daughter of vet Leonard Olson.

extensive interviews with Wellman before he died in 2003, as well as with his early cohorts in the Young Communist League (YCL), such as Lou Gordon and Abe Smorodin.

Wellman's story begins with activities in the YCL in the early 1930s. The vigor and intensity of the fights against mass evictions and the campaigns for unemployment relief, the dances and parties and joys that drew young people to the movement, all come through. There's a remarkable unemployment demonstration in New York's Union Square that shaped Wellman's life, getting him expelled from the academic high school his parents wanted him to attend. He was then sent to a vocational high school, where he met "working people."

The sequences in Spain are beautifully told. Wellman became commissar of the MacKenzie-Papineau Battalion, stepping in when the previous commissar was killed in battle on the Aragon front. Wellman's explanation of the word "comrade" illustrates the film's storytelling style, a deft combination of the personal and political. Wellman says, "We were an army of comrades—comrades was a unifying word, a special word, and it helped people overcome weaknesses or difficulties or hesitations. These were tense moments, because you're facing death all the time. I could walk up to a group of guys in which I could see the element of fear manifested strongly, and on occasion I could say to them, 'Comrades,' and found the use of that word very calming."

After Spain, Wellman worked for the Communist Party, volunteered and fought as a paratrooper in World War II, and returned to Detroit with his wife Peggy and two children to work for the Party in the auto industry. The film's treatment of Wellman's indictment under the Smith Act is also touched with the personal and political, as he leaves his family to go



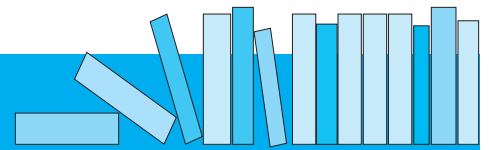
Saul Wellman as a commissar in Spain

underground and later serves time in jail with other Party leadership. Events are told from his point of view, but also from the point of view of his children. An emotional sequence on the Khrushchev revelations in 1956, described by Dorothy Healey, marks a new period in Wellman's life in which he left the Party and began work for an industrial-scaled printing outfit in Detroit.

It is the film's portrayal of Wellman during the 1960s through the 1980s, in which he engaged in many political struggles, or actually organized others to do political work, that I personally found the most gratifying. Wellman, as described by the people he mentored in Detroit, was the supreme political organizer, instigator, and teacher—a role played by many veterans from Spain. He coached, cajoled, pushed and stepped

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## Soldiers' Story

***Soldiers of Salamis***. By Javier Cercas (translation by Anne McLean). Bloomsbury, 208 pp., \$23.95

By Charles Oberndorf

"It was summer of 1994, more than six years ago now, when I first heard about Rafael Sánchez Mazas facing the firing squad." Thus are the opening words of a novel by a relatively unknown writer that became one of the most important Spanish novels published in the last 10 years. It has sold over 400,000 copies worldwide, been praised by Mario Vargas Llosa and Susan Sontag, and been garlanded with numerous prizes, including the British newspaper Independent Prize for Best Foreign Fiction, as well as the Valle Inclán prize for the best translation of a work originally written in Spanish.

It's hard to call *Soldiers of Salamis* a novel; Javier Cercas, its author, refers to it as a true tale. There are actually several tales. The first section, or tale, follows the efforts of the narrator, who is called Javier and shares the same biographical background as the author, to verify a story he has heard. Rafael Sánchez Mazas, occasional novelist and leading propagandist for the Falange, faced a Republican firing squad in 1939 just as the Nationalists were about to take control of Cataluña. Through a stroke of luck, Sánchez Mazas was able to flee the soldiers who held him captive. A search party set off to track him down, and in the dense forest, one Republican soldier did find the hiding fugitive. But rather than capturing

Charles Oberndorf is the author of three novels and teaches English at University School in Cleveland, Ohio.

Sánchez Mazas, the soldier announced to his compatriots that there was no one there in the brush and left Sánchez Mazas to his fate.

This anecdote fascinates the narrator, who first tracks down Sánchez Mazas' son, a novelist of some importance in the 1960's, then the surviving people of the woods who had offered refuge to the fleeing fascist. This section has the feel of well-told investigative journalism (and Cercas worked as a journalist before trying his hand at fiction). Cercas has a good journalist's eye for character and place.

The second tale starts with Sánchez Mazas in a position of power in the new government when several of those who helped him have been arrested. After a few dramatically told

again. The full-blooded scene of Sánchez Mazas facing the firing squad is dramatic and quite suspenseful, even though the entire outcome of the firing squad was narrated at the beginning of the novel.

*Soldiers of Salamis* turns into a true novel in the third section, when the narrator realizes he must try to find, if it's possible, the Republican soldier who spared Sánchez Mazas' life. Every moment in this section feels pitch perfect, perhaps too perfect, too novelistic in a novel where everything else has the pace and feel of everyday life. Most readers won't find this to be a problem; they will only be aware that the world has disappeared while they're immersed in the heart of the novel. We are no longer concerned with the war itself, but with the way the life we lead seems to have no relationship to the momentous choices we made in our youths.

At this point, we can see why the

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*The full-blooded scene of Sánchez Mazas facing the firing squad is dramatic and quite suspenseful, even though the entire outcome of the firing squad was narrated at the beginning of the novel.*

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moments, this section becomes a history of our protagonist and feels less like a novel and more like an engaging historical essay, the kind of thoughtful journalism found in Sunday magazines of major newspapers. In the end, I'm not sure we know exactly what drives Sánchez Mazas, what really attracted him to the kind of violence the Falangist movement dreamed of. Cercas has a theory about why Sánchez Mazas became a fascist, but his reasoning sounds more like Cercas's historical interpretation rather than Sánchez Mazas' very human motivation.

However, at the end of the section, Cercas becomes a novelist once

novel has been so popular in Spain. Unlike much popular film about the Civil War, Cercas' view isn't, as the Spaniards like to say, Manichean. There isn't a clear division of good and evil, and this mirrors the desire of Spanish society to remember the war but to move away from the finger pointing. The reader can empathize with Sánchez Mazas (though the novel de-emphasizes the kinds of things he wrote in his pamphlets). The novel can just as easily remind us of the brutal natures on both sides of the war. The last minute firing squad organized by fleeing Republicans has

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## Head-less in the Clouds

By Fredda Weiss

*Head in the Clouds* is a film that uses our fascination with the middle decades of the 20th century (the roaring twenties, the turbulent thirties, and the war-torn forties) to weave a story that has very little to do with the time or the place. It's a sprawling soap opera, set in England, Paris and Spain, mainly between 1936 and 1945. To some extent, the lush photography, sumptuous costumes, and outstanding make-up are the most memorable elements of the film.

Charlize Theron plays Gilda Blesse, the self-involved, sybaritic daughter of a fascistic French father (Steven Berkoff). She navigates the world as a sexually promiscuous, pseudo-bohemian dilettante. Her life is filled with parties and debauchery, and she seems to fascinate everyone—including Guy, a student who takes her into his bed for an innocent night.

What follows is a tediously episodic story, told through correspondence, as Gilda circumnavigates the globe. Finally landing in Paris, she miraculously becomes a model, a some-time actress, and a very sought-after photographer. She asks Guy, to whom she has been writing from exotic places, to join her, and he (inexplicably) rushes to Paris and, of course, becomes her lover. But she's already involved with Mimi (Penelope Cruz), a Spanish dancer who has escaped to Paris after having been interrogated and tortured by the fascists. The three live together, sleep together, and have relatively carefree lives until Mimi, who has been studying nursing, decides that she must return to Spain and help her Spanish countrymen fight the fascists.

Guy, who has demonstrated some very weak political opinions about the Spanish Civil War, decides that he must go with her. The political commitment that serves as their motivating factor is so superficially

expressed that we can hardly blame Gilda for her lack of understanding and her fury at being abandoned.

Director John Duigan is known for developing interesting characters, but he has missed entirely with Guy, Gilda, and Mimi. Theron is believable in the beginning, but her motivations become as vague as those of the other two in very short order. When Guy and Mimi manage to meet at Teruel and have a "moment" of their own, the film begins to disintegrate into sentimental sop. The film takes a leap from that point, as we see Guy, who has returned to Paris as a member of

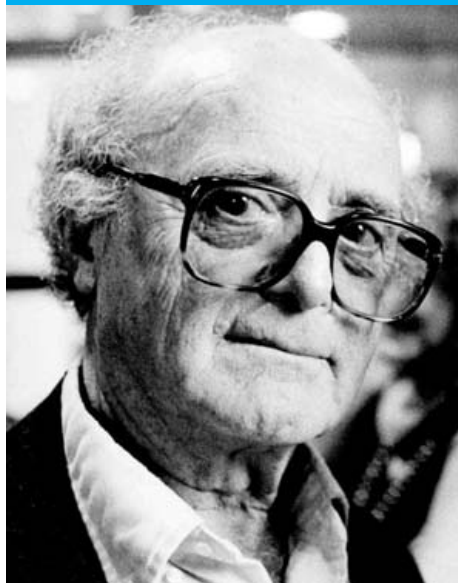
British intelligence, observing Gilda carousing with a group of Nazi officers. The rest of the film is a morality play of sorts. Why Guy remains completely devoted to her, at this point, is the true mystery of the film. However, there is a twist at the end, which shall remain unrevealed here—just in case you can't resist the price of a ticket.

For this reviewer, *Head In The Clouds* is a sad waste of a talented cast and will enlighten nobody as to the importance of the Spanish Civil War, the complicated issues of the time, and the impact that a mere three years had on the history of the 20th century. ❏

Fredda Weiss, Vice-Chair of ALBA, is a film producer.

## Revolutionary

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Saul Wellman at a vet reunion, 1988. Photo by Richard Bermack

back at the right times. The film makes clear that Detroit politics still bear the fruit of his teaching.

As the film comes to an end, a sequence set during the 1996 Homenaje to the International Brigade in Spain is also moving. Wellman found himself the sole brigadista to visit the town of Alicante, where a large and emotional crowd warmly

greeted him. It was an experience shared by many in the International Brigade during that visit of 1996. Wellman said of those events, "It was the first time in 60 years this old, hard-bitten revolutionary was on the verge of tears. What impressed me and my comrades more than anything was to see thousands of young people turn out to greet us. And they greeted us with one word, 'gracias.'"

To Judith Montell, who has made several fine films about the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and has a feel for the nuance of lives lived in that community, and to Ronald Aronson, Professor of Humanities at Wayne State University and friend and political protégé of Wellman, who produced this documentary through several years of labor, all I can say is a heartfelt "gracias."

*Professional Revolutionary: The Life of Saul Wellman*, 65 minutes, produced by Judith Montell and Ronald Aronson, Democratic Values Project, 5700 Cass Avenue, Room 2426, Detroit, MI 48202. See the website at [www.professionalrevolutionary.org](http://www.professionalrevolutionary.org). Copies (videotape or DVD) available for \$30 (including shipping). ❏

# Letters

Continued from page 2

The king is the past. The Constitution was not approved by the large majority of the Basque people.

The king can neither understand the republican principles of a democracy nor the will of the Basque people for self-determination, another democratic right.

I think that this kind of article, as Mr. Paul Preston has written, does not represent the legacy of the volunteers of Liberty.

I can't write more about King Juan Carlos and his family. I can face prison for my criticism, another example of the superficial democracy.

This is the real Spain: One King (appointed by Franco, the friend of Hitler and Mussolini), One Nation (based on Madrid-Castile false and exaggerated history), One Language (Spanish-Castilian or Spanish, sidelining Catalan and Basque languages), and avoiding speaking about the last civil war, but the Valley of the Fallen and other numerous monuments to the Francoists' so-called "heroes" remain.

J. V.  
Economist and businessman

Dear Editor,

I just read Megan Trice's superb award-winning essay, "The Lincoln Brigade Sisterhood: U.S. Women's Involvement in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939." The award was well deserved.

However, the essay gave rather short-shrift to one of America's pioneer women journalists, Milly Bennett (real name, Mildred Bremler), and I thought your readers might be interested in learning more about her.

Bennett had taken part in the Chinese revolution in 1926-1927. She had lived in Moscow from 1931-1936, mostly working for the English language *Moscow News*, while stringing for the *New York Times* and *Time* magazine, among others. In 1936 she went off to Spain, both for political reasons and in pursuit of a former lover,

Wallace Burton, who was serving in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade.

Burton was soon killed in action, but Bennett remained in Spain reporting for the London *Times*, Associated Press and United Press. She also worked as a press officer for the Minister of State of the Spanish Popular Front government. A U.S. State Department memo cited a rumor that she was "the Spanish Government's best spy."

While in Spain she met another Abraham Lincoln Brigadista, Hans Amlie, and they were married there in 1937. Upon their return to the United States on 1 January 1938 (Amlie had been twice wounded) they spent several months traveling around the country raising money and support for the Spanish cause. Amlie died in 1949 and Bennett in 1960.

What's left of her papers, and momentos from Spain, such as her press pass, are at the Hoover Institution Archives in Palo Alto, CA. Your readers might be interested in an autobiography of her early life and China years, which I edited and annotated: *On Her Own. Journalistic Adventures from San Francisco to the Chinese Revolution, 1917-1927* (M.E. Sharpe, Inc.).

## Soldiers' Story

Continued from page 18

the feel of vengeance rather than justice. Yet, in its sly way, the novel reminds us what kind of person in that terrible war could be heroic.

In this way, the ending of *Soldiers of Salamis* is sentimental. The Falange saw themselves as soldiers who were there to save civilization from the forces of 20th century change. Seeking violence and confrontation, they helped drive Spain into a terrible war, and they supported a dictatorship that drove Spanish civilization into the ground. While Cercas deplors this cult of the soldier, he ends the novel

Writing in 1939, she dedicated her proposed autobiography like this:

For my husband Hans Amlie, who fought in Spain against the brutalitarian forces of Europe and for the liberty of the Spanish people and is home with me—and for my friends Robert Hale Merriman, Harry Hynes, Wallace F. Burton, Philip Detro, Dave Doran, and two thousand more Americans who fought in Spain for the liberty of the Spanish people and will never come home.

Sincerely,  
A. Tom Grunfeld  
SUNY Distinguished Teaching  
Professor  
Empire State College - SUNY

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with a hymn to the right kind of soldier, the kind that actually tries to save civilization. While it's appropriate and necessary to salute the men and women who sacrificed their lives (and those who survive a war, in a sense, sacrificed a part of their lives) for the sake of others, it's sentimental and dangerous to make a cult of any kind of warrior.

However, even with this strong conviction, when I read this fine novel for the second time, I discovered the ending to be twice as moving. ■



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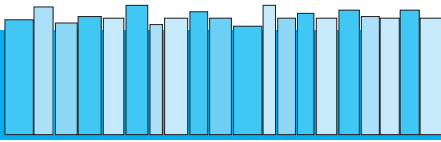
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Julia Newman

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**The Good Fight**

Sills/Dore/Bruckner

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Judith Montell

**Professional Revolutionary: Life of Saul Wellman**

Judith Montell (reviewed on page 17)

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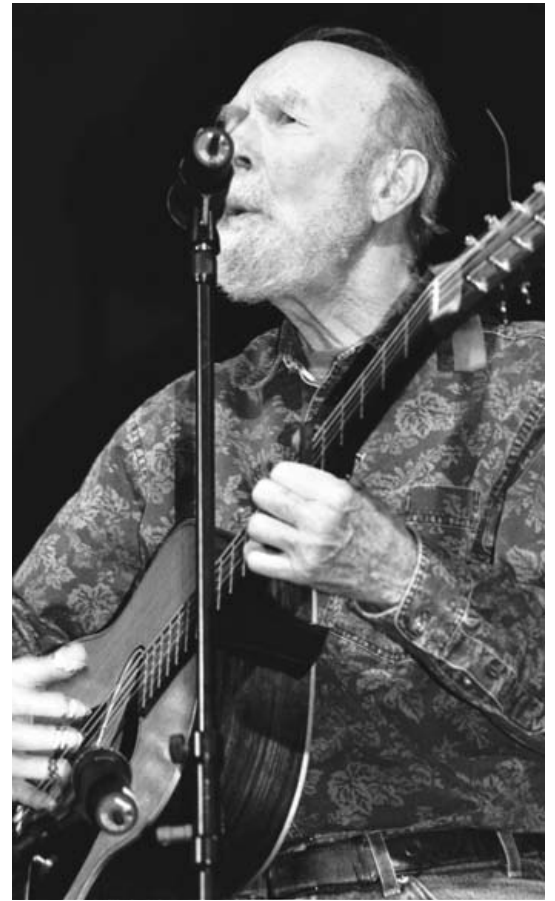


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**April 29, 2005: N.Y. ALBA-  
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Pete Seeger, photo by Richard Bermack

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