

The Battle Lost, the War Won

The Enduring Success of the Popular Front Narrative of the
Spanish Civil War

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1. Glossary of Terms

ALB/VALB- (Veterans of) The Abraham Lincoln Brigade. The American volunteers of the International Brigades, some 3800 or so in total, who served in the army of the Spanish Republic. Half were casualties by the end of the war, and during the Cold War the group was listed as a subversive communist front organization. During the war there was not in fact a brigade, but several battalions which were collectively referred to as such.

FAI/CNT- The anarchist party and union of Spain, this secretive organization had a membership of roughly one million and was aligned with the Republic at the start of the conflict. In 1937 the Republic began a crackdown in Barcelona, one of the centers of anarchist organization, to reign in the attempts of this group at social revolution.

JAFRC- Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee. A group formed to support the 200,000 or so refugees of the war who had fled to France and other countries. Membership included a number of protestant clerics and physicians. Persecuted in the late 40s and 50s by the US government, its leaders were jailed on charges of communism and contempt of congress.

PCE- Partido Comunista Español, or Spanish Communist Party. Initially rather small, the strong discipline and effectiveness of the group as well as the talent of its great orator, La Pasionaria, led the group to blossom in size over the course of the war.

Popular Front- A political umbrella organization of leftist parties which cooperated to fight fascism. Popular Fronts were endorsed and used by the Soviet Union in many democratic countries, and legitimated communist parties by linking them to other, less suspect, parties.

POUM- Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista. A small, anti-Soviet party led by Andreu Nin, former secretariat of Leon Trotsky. George Orwell served in the militia wing of the group. In 1937, under Soviet pressure, the Spanish government falsely accused the group of being a fifth column for the rebels, and broke up the group by force. Nin was killed by a Soviet assassination squad during the crackdown.

Rebels/Insurgents- A coalition of generals supported by the aristocracy, clergy, and nobility which overthrew the Second Spanish Republic. Gradually came to be referred to as the Nationalists. General Francisco Franco ultimately ascended to the position of *Caudillo*, or dictator, within the group.

Republic- The Second Spanish Republic. Created in 1931 by peaceful decree of the *Cortes*, or parliament, of the Spanish monarchy. Governed by the Popular Front until its destruction in 1939.

SACB- Subversive Activities Control Board. A United States government body created by the McCarran Act, this group and the Attorney General's list of subversive organizations were the primary tools for government persecution of anti-Franco groups and individuals.

UGT- Unión General de Trabajadores, the socialist workers union of Spain. At the time of the revolution it claimed a membership of approximately one million. Politically supportive of the Republic, its members formed a major part of the workers militias which checked the Rebels.

2. Introduction

The great enemy of truth is very often not the lie-deliberate, contrived, and dishonest-but the myth-persistent, persuasive, and unrealistic. -John F. Kennedy¹

On 7 December, 1941 the United States was forced into war with the Axis nation of Japan and, three days later, Germany and Italy. The titanic struggle that was the Second World War has often been framed as a conflict between good and evil, between democracy and fascism. This narrative of the war has not gone unchallenged, particularly by those who note the important role of the Soviet Union in defeating the Axis. The fact that the USSR lost forty times more people than the U.S. in a war popularly considered a defense of western democracy and morality is more than a little ironic when viewed through this conventional narrative. Such claims form an essential element in maintaining support for foreign policies, particularly in a war as herculean as World War II which required enormous increases in government spending and significant sacrifices on the home front. The construction of a narrative which identifies one's own side as the heroic protagonist or victimized party is vital to a state's foreign policy. The American narrative of World War Two is extremely positive: the country went to war in self-defense after an unprovoked act of aggression, and the enemies were arguably the most evil states ever to exist, with the possible exception of the Soviet Union, which the USA allied with to defeat it. Foreign policy typically ranks fairly low on public priorities in the USA, and domestic population tends to generally only take interest in international affairs when their state is involved. They become dissatisfied with foreign policy when they perceive that costs outweigh benefits or the actions of the state are morally unacceptable, and in

¹ DePalma, Anthony. The Man Who Invented Fidel. Perseus Books: New York City, 2006. Opening Page

democracies such dissatisfaction can spell the end of a government that fails to respond. Thus the state takes an active interest in shaping and disseminating narratives which are amenable to their goals. Public awareness and attitudes towards foreign affairs are shaped by state involvement.

Before World War II another conflict had inflamed the minds of millions of Americans: the Spanish Civil War. The Spanish struggle shares many similarities with and has been called a prelude to World War II. There is a notable difference between the two wars though: the government of the United States took no side and played little role in shaping the narrative of the Spanish Civil War. In 1936 when the civil war began in the form of a failed coup d'état, the U.S. refused to sell arms to the Spanish Republic, the only time in U.S. history that weapons sales to a recognized, democratic state have been banned. The policy objective supporters of both sides sought to influence was the embargo on the sale of arms, a key factor in the war. The Spanish Republic's inability to obtain aircraft, tanks, or munitions from the western democracies is credited as one of the primary causes of its defeat. This policy of neutrality would prove contentious and was challenged by the American political left, now united by the communist created Popular Front. Polls can help us tell the story: In February of 1937, support for the loyalists was at twenty two percent and the rebels at twelve percent. By 1938 the numbers had changed dramatically: support for the rebels (now referred to as Franco) was at twenty four percent, but seventy two percent now sided with the loyalists (now referred to as the Republic).² From these numbers it is clear that sympathy for the beleaguered Spanish Republic was a phenomenon not confined to the fringes of American politics but rather a

² George Gallup, *The Gallup Poll 1935-1971* (New York: Random House, 1972). 49 and 75.

hallmark of many Americans' foreign policy beliefs. A pro-Republican narrative became widespread without the government's involvement, in spite of the prevailing mood of isolationism. A second element makes the Spanish Civil War unique among foreign wars that did not involve America: in spite of the passage of time the war and the American perspective on it have retained a place in American history greater than would be expected of a foreign civil war. The tragedy of the Spanish Republic and its valiant resistance to the onslaught of fascism were resurrected as a parable for the New Left in its resistance to the Vietnam War.

The question arises then: How did the Spanish Republic gain such a large base of support in the United States? Several factors explain this development, all of which share a core attribute: they project the goals and beliefs of the observers of the war, not the realities of the complex struggle then unfolding in Spain. The degree to which these false understandings of the conflict took hold is a result of subtle and effective propaganda efforts to spread a sympathetic narrative, a campaign in which supporters of the Republic proved highly effective. To many Americans, the Spanish Republic appeared a sister in democracy, and thus deserved aid in fending off a military insurgency. Supporters of Franco viewed him as the only defense against godless communism in one of the bastions of the Catholic faith. The Catholic narrative was grounded in anticommunism, and represented the war as a struggle between Spain, championed by Franco, and International Communism. The central tenet of support for the Republic was the perception which underlies comparisons of the war to World War II: that it was a struggle of democracy against fascism. This is perhaps the greatest myth of that thoroughly propagandized struggle, and came about primarily because the agitators on both sides

never missed an opportunity to label the other either communist or fascist. None of these claims should be accepted at face value, and must be interrogated. Regardless of their essential validity, these positions were held by large segments of the American population, and proved to be resilient myths.

The Americans who came to side with either group from February 1937 to 1938 chose to believe radically different narratives which offered almost completely separate versions of events. In support of the rebels were Catholics, isolationists, and conservatives. The supporters of the Republic were America's public intellectuals, trade unions, and the majority of the political left including liberals, socialists, and the small American Communist Party. The narratives of the right came mainly from pulpits across America, but the left had a larger and more diverse group of propagandists at work. While the pro-Franco narrative was formulated by native-born Americans, the narrative which supported the Spanish Republic was influenced by and for the benefit of a foreign state: the USSR.

The Spanish Civil War represents the zenith of Soviet propaganda powers, a time when it was able to influence the opinions of the largest number of Americans because it acted not alone but in tandem with much larger groups, and was able to mask its national interests in a nobility and morality which appeared plausible to Americans. This influence was created and exerted through the Popular Front, an umbrella organization of forces opposing fascism. Popular Front governments came to power in both Spain and France in this era, and in Europe and America the movement justified the actions of the Soviet Union in the name of anti-fascism. The Popular Front allowed these rationalizations to gain a greater degree of traction among people otherwise wary of the

threat of communism. The propaganda efforts of the USSR went well beyond a political movement: the convictions of Popular Front members helped advance Soviet interests because a great number of writers, poets, journalists, filmmakers, and artists were swayed by its logic. Because of its predominance on the left there was little to no real space for a perspective which criticized the Soviet Union but supported the Republic. This false narrative of the war remained long after its original purpose became irrelevant because the only major American reassessment of the war came from an unreliable, conservative angle: the House Un-American Activities Commission, during the Cold War. The left rejected this because it came cloaked in the paranoia of anticommunism, leaving the myth of the Spanish Civil War intact for those who discounted anticommunism on account of McCarthyism.

While the misperceptions held by supporters of Franco and the Republic have been discussed in the past, there is an important gap in the historiography which this SIP humbly hopes to fill. The history of the Abraham Lincoln Brigades, that is to say the American volunteers who fought in Spain, has already been chronicled numerous times, not least by members of the brigades themselves, many of whom became talented historians and writers. This work seeks to identify and follow the narrative of the war in the American consciousness from its bifurcation at the start of the conflict to the present consensus. Also addressed is the question of how factual this narrative is, and how much is bound up in the myth and romanticism of the struggle.

Our American understanding of the conflict has gone through several stages. For the duration of the war, the Popular Front garnered wide support and was successful in persuading many Americans that the Republic was a democracy fighting a fascist enemy.

At the same time American Catholics and conservative elements of society propagated their own interpretation, that the Spanish Republic was red through and through, and that its goal was the destruction of Christianity. The Italian intervention in the fight fit into this narrative that Franco was a crusading defender, but the Nazi and Moorish soldiers he relied upon had little in common with the holy church. Both of these depictions simplified and distorted an extremely complex affair and were fundamentally incompatible with the opposing viewpoint.

The clash of narratives entered a new stage in the late 1940s. At that point opinions about the Spanish Civil War and the Americans who fought in it became tied up in, and subject to, larger concerns of Cold War policy for decades. Rehabilitation of the leftist narrative was not fully possible until anticommunism became discredited in the 1970s by the Vietnam War, the Cold War revisionist school of history, and the rejuvenation of the American political left. The left, having rejected the conservative interpretation of a foreign conflict now thirty years passed and not particularly significant to most Americans, re-affirmed its old, more readily digested Soviet manipulated narrative of the conflict. The last changes to the narrative of the war came with the end of the Cold War, when Soviet archives became open to Western Scholars and a more accurate understanding of the conflict became possible. The data gained from Soviet archives has played a smaller role in shaping the American narrative than the intense culture war which raged around its legacy.

While analysis of larger trends in the history of the Spanish Civil War narratives are a fruitful and productive field of inquiry, examining things from the perspective of the individual can foster a better connection and understanding of the content. To that end the

story of one veteran of the brigades, Alvah Bessie, will be followed in particular detail. In 1938, at the age of thirty four, Bessie left New York on a ship bound for Le Havre, France.³ His service in the International Brigades would shape the course of the rest of his life, ending his career as a screenwriter in Hollywood and forcing him to take poor jobs to get by. A prolific writer, he kept diaries of his war experiences and authored a number of novels and nonfiction works. While his personal experience is unique, it reflects the treatment of many members of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade.

From the start of the war it has been possible for individuals to discover most facts of the conflict, but not easily or particularly quickly. The problem has been that the realities of the war were untidy, and most forms of media needed a simple story to make the conflict explicable. Much of the coverage and analysis of the war was done by committed partisans of Franco or the Republic who sought to discredit the opposition or defend their own faction. The war is no longer a political issue for the United States and, in the present day, awareness of the conflict comes mainly from the cultural artifacts it produced. These were overwhelmingly pro-Republican. The lasting contributions to culture which arose from the war, from *Guernica* to *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, were not created to tell the whole convoluted tale, but to foster support for and commemorate the tragedy of the Republic. Their influence therefore is to make people sympathetic to the Republican cause. These two simple narratives were both widespread and easily comprehended, and as a result the distortions of wartime propaganda have lingered far beyond the usual lifetime of such convenient fictions.

³ Alvah Bessie, *Spain Again* (San Francisco: Chandler and Sharp, 1975). 5.

3. Historiography

Research for this SIP required primary and secondary material from a number of distinct fields. In understanding the political situation and issues of Spain in the first half of the twentieth century, Franz Borkenau's writings are an invaluable primary source of objective analysis grounded in his personal experience gained in the war. Hugh Thomas authored what must be considered the definitive overall history of the war. The role of the Soviet Union and its agents in the conflict is brilliantly analyzed in Stanley Payne's book on the subject. His tome exploring the underemphasized social struggles which lay at the war's heart was also essential in uncoupling the narrative myths from the realities of Spanish political developments. The history of the American volunteers in the International Brigades from their roots in American leftist politics to the Spanish battlefields and beyond the Cold War is thoroughly chronicled by Peter N. Carroll's work. The task of defining the leftist narrative of the war was simplified greatly by Peter Monteath's *Writing the Good Fight*. Stephen Koch's *Double Lives* was essential to tracing the role of the Soviet Union in shaping the narrative. Richard Gid Powers has provided the definitive history of American anticommunism with his work *Not Without Honor*. The author feels particularly indebted to the Yale University Press, whose "Annals of Communism" series has translated and made accessible previously classified information from former Soviet archives. New York University's Tamiment Library and Robert R. Wagner Labor Archives were the source of the majority of primary source documents consulted, and particular thanks are owed for their preservation of the Cominterns International Brigade records.

4. The Soviet Leaders

Propaganda works best if it appears to come from an independent, credible source. The vast majority of the individuals who covered the war and presented the subject to Americans had no knowledge of Soviet propaganda or the part they played in it. The propagandists did not target the American public, but those who spoke to it. When talking about Soviet manipulators, then, it is not the journalists and authors who are the subject, rather the members of the Soviet apparatus, or *apparatchiks*, who are being discussed. The men at the top of the great variety of Russian organizations exercised an extraordinary amount of power, as the rigidly hierarchical structure of most Soviet operations demanded the same controlled, conspiratorial framework of its foreign arms as it did of government at home. Thus, there are a few figures who enjoyed outsized importance in shaping the narrative and deciding how exactly to present the case for the Spanish Republic. Some are more familiar than others: Joseph Stalin consolidated power via the mass executions and party purges collectively named the Great Purge, which coincided closely with the period of the Spanish Civil War. Below him was Georgi Dimitrov, a Bulgarian Communist who became Secretary General of the Communist International in 1935.⁴ The most intriguing Soviet operative and the figure directly in charge of propaganda operations (until his probable liquidation) was Willi Münzenberg, a German communist who created perhaps the finest foreign propaganda apparatus of the twentieth century. Münzenberg was found dead in mysterious circumstances in 1940, but Stalin's distrust had eroded his role in the propaganda campaign over the course of the war.⁵ In fact, the war was to be Münzenberg's only hope for surviving the Purge, because

⁴ Alexander Dallin, and F.I. Firsov. *Dimitrov and Stalin* (Binghamton, NY: Vail-Ballou Press, 2000). 4.

⁵ Stephen Koch, *Double Lives* (New York: Enigma Books, 1994). 3.

his contacts and propaganda network were essential for manipulating the Western democracies' view of the conflict.⁶ After 1937 he was cut out of power, escaping death only by his prominence in the public eye. His role in managing the narrative of the war mostly dissolved with the centralization of power in the Republic under the Communist Party, and the remaining elements were taken over by *Pravda* journalist Mikhail Koltsov. The most important steps were the early ones, because once the ball was set rolling in the right direction the party line became self-sustaining, thanks to the “independent” reporters the *apparat* had persuaded.

It is to these individuals that we should attribute a number of the falsehoods in the narrative propagated by hundreds of leftist writers, intellectuals, journalists, and pundits. They supplied the particular frame of reference which helped the Soviet cause. It is because of this that the various actors addressed in later chapters are not truly manufacturers of the narrative, but mouthpieces for it. Ernest Hemingway, André Malraux, the boys of the international brigades, and all the rest were manipulated with a stunning amount of subtlety into blurring any of the troubling questions which might otherwise have filtered out of Spain, and further buffering the Soviet Union against charges of manipulation.

Secondarily, several Soviet services played prominent parts in manipulating perception and actually governing Republican Spain. The distinction between branches is of less import due to the irrelevancy of specific posts or titles in Stalin's USSR. What truly mattered were loyalty to and the support of the dictator. Two Soviet organizations were at the fore of Russian machinations: the Comintern and the NKVD (a precursor to the KGB). The Communist International was supposedly independent but in fact

⁶ Ibid, 327.

answered to the USSR. It was the Comintern which recruited and organized the International Brigades, and the Comintern which commanded them. Stalin never fully trusted the organization, and midway through the war the leadership of the group was largely replaced with Stalin appointees from the Soviet secret services. The two most important “advisors” the USSR sent, J.K. Berzin and Vasily Orlov, were both NKVD operators. Their murder squads and ruthless crackdowns would go unreported during the war, either by suppression of information in Spain or denied by an antifascist press concerned with maintaining the Popular Front. Whichever branch they came from, Soviet leaders lived and died at the will of one man.

Stalin of course had the final say in all Soviet affairs. His goals in adopting the Popular Front, providing military support for Spain, and ultimately abandoning both are crucial for understanding what was true and false in the Soviet narrative. These are muddled waters in which we tread, for Stalin was cunning and operated on multiple levels. There are two basic perspectives on the Comrade’s goals in Spain. The first, supported by leftist and rightist scholars alike, is that Stalin did indeed wish for the victory of the Spanish Republic, a victory which would include a successful Communist revolution in Spain and an allied partner in the fight against Germany.⁷ Stanley Payne argues against the inclusion of Communist revolution as a near term goal of the USSR, noting that Stalin’s duplicity has often been exaggerated and the evidence does not reflect this claim. Instead, he proposes that Stalin’s main objective was the defeat and curbing of fascist expansionary activities and to persuade Western democracies of the feasibility of

⁷ Stanley Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, The Soviet Union, and Communism*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). 295.

fighting Germany.⁸ Stephen Koch presents a compelling alternate theory: rather than support the Spanish Republic in order to fight fascism, Stalin backed the Republic just enough to fuel the war for four years, instead of the few brief months everyone expected. He used the war as a political chip, generating support in reluctant western states (as Payne notes, “The left lost the military struggle but more often than not won the propaganda war”).⁹ At the same time he fleeced the Republic for its gold, the largest reserve on the planet, in exchange for which he provided weapons until all confidence in or use for the war dried up. This is especially curious, Koch notes, because by that point the Spanish Communist Party (the PCE) and Comintern effectively governed the Republic. Stalin’s true goal, according to Koch, was to bide his time until he could make a nonaggression pact with Nazi Germany. Stalin used the Spanish Civil War the same way he used the Popular Front: to cover up the misdeeds of the Soviet Union while garnering support for it in the West, under the all-justifying aegis of antifascism. Koch’s argument has little in the way of direct evidence; if it did it would be a radical challenge to the historiography of the war. Given Stalin’s Russocentric geopolitical thinking and his readiness to sacrifice communists the world over for political gain, it is highly persuasive.

Dimitrov was something of a hero by the time he became General Secretary of the Comintern. He had first gained the attention of the American press in the aftermath of the Reichstag Fire in Berlin in 1933, when he was imprisoned and charged with playing a role in the affair. Dimitrov’s cool demeanor and powerful defense made fools of Goebbels and the prosecution during his trial.¹⁰ With his newly acquired credentials as a brilliant communist who had narrowly escaped the maw of Nazi Germany, Dimitrov was

⁸ Ibid, 295.

⁹ Ibid, 291.

¹⁰ Stanley Payne, 61.

“elected” leader of the Comintern. The main theme of Dimitrov’s period of chairmanship was antifascism, especially channeled through the political movement known by that same name.

Antifascism was not invented by the USSR. It was a legitimate and morally based choice of millions of Americans and people the world over. It must be understood that Soviet propaganda was good, but not so good as to incite a grassroots international movement. It had already failed at that in Germany. What it could do was take these powerful stances and co-opt them, by using a network of influential reporters and intellectuals (most of whom were unaware of their part in communist machinations) to align the just cause with a Soviet policy goal.¹¹ Spain is just such an example.

The Comintern sought to aggregate antifascist sentiment into support for a movement it would exercise some control over. Dimitrov was one of the primary architects of this plan, and he launched it with a speech at the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern in July of 1935.¹² It was Dimitrov who fought for the adoption of Popular Front tactics, persuaded Stalin, and maintained the increasingly fictitious line that the Republic was just such a Popular Front. As such, his contributions to the American perception are significant; he insisted for example, that the International Brigades were a group diverse in political perspectives, rather than a commissar led, communist dominated fighting force. This picture of the brigades, inaccurate according to an overwhelming variety of sources, was repeated frequently in descriptions of the units. Dimitrov was the public face of Soviet foreign policy, and as such it was his job to present the Soviets’ case directly to the citizens of the West.

¹¹ Koch, Stephen. *Double Lives*. Page 15.

¹² Payne, Stanley. Page 66.

Stalin and Dimitrov were too high up to directly manage the campaigns and agents of the propaganda apparatus. That task fell to a now forgotten figure of the interwar period: Willi Münzenberg, glamorous millionaire and *apparatchik* commander of the leftist press. Münzenberg was described as “undoubtedly the leading propagandist of the Spanish Civil War.”¹³ Münzenberg operated in the Comintern and Red Aid organizations, but his agents (many of whom were covert and undiscovered for decades) could be found in every country working as journalists, intellectuals, mistresses, and friends to the influential voices of Europe and America. By means of his network of “Münzenberg men,” Münzenberg coordinated committees of prominent thinkers, public speakers, and famous authors and moralists of the day to make the Soviets appear in a positive light. Münzenberg played the most important role in the Soviet Union when it came to the task of shaping the American narrative. Men such as Mikhail Koltsov, a friend to Hemingway during the war who was influential enough to merit immortalizing in his novel, were directed and commanded to varying degrees by Münzenberg. The role of this single man in sustaining the fiction of Republican Spain must be appreciated if we are to chart how constructed an image it is. Münzenberg operated out of Paris, and much of his work emanated from there, but his agents were across the Atlantic in Hollywood and New York, manipulating and flattering the public intellectuals of the time.

The role of the Communist Party of the United States is an interesting one. The CPUSA had an outsized voice in American journalism, mostly due to the connection Americans made between it and the Soviet Union. At the head of the Party during these years was Earl Browder, a leonine public champion of Communism abroad who

¹³ Payne, Stanley. Page 345.

organized relentlessly for Spain, and visited the country during the war.¹⁴ In his own words:

I appeal to the working class leaders and parties in the United States, to the trade unions, to Progressives everywhere, to join us in united action to help save Spanish democracy. I appeal to the Socialist Party as well as to the Right-wing Socialist leaders in New York, Connecticut, and elsewhere to work out an independent program of action against the Spanish fascists.¹⁵

Browder and the CPUSA incorporated the Soviet narrative into their own anti-embargo campaigns, using the same distortions about the nature of the Republic and the overall conflict. Browder helped in other ways as well; documents from Soviet archives now list him as having recruited more than a dozen agents for the Soviet Union.¹⁶

All of these figures are essential for understanding how the pro-Republican falsehoods of the Spanish Civil War came into being, and what purposes they were created for. Dimitrov, Münzenberg, and Browder inserted arguments into the broader narrative of the left which portrayed the Soviet Union as a defender of democracy. One International Brigade recruit recalled the Comintern representative's speech to the departing soldiers. "We were going to fight for the bourgeois democracy, at which point he winked, with the understanding we were going to fight for the Communist Party."¹⁷ Whether the Communist Party's participation in the Popular Front itself was a lie depends on what we believe about the great puppet masters' own intentions on these two subjects.

¹⁴ Stephen Koch, *Double Lives*. 74.

¹⁵ F. Jay Taylor, *The United States and the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Bookman Associates 1956). 134.

¹⁶ Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes, & Fridrikh Igorevich Firsov. *The Secret World of American Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995)..234.

¹⁷ Peter Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994). 68.

5. Painting a Picture: The Backdrop, Spanish Civil War, and Its Narratives

The complexities of the Spanish Civil War made it difficult to understand for observers within the country. For the millions of Americans at home it was only harder. News from Spain in the months leading up to the revolt was alarming, and once the conflict began, directly contradictory as well. The Spanish political, social, and economic sectors were stunningly backwards, the result of a complete failure of Spanish government to effect reform. Spanish history leading up to the Civil War makes the causes of the conflict perfectly clear, and the reasons differ greatly from those fashioned by the American narratives. The Spanish government was a precarious alliance of different parties from the center to the far-left of the political spectrum. The Nationalist rebels after July 1936 were equally mixed, with support from the right instead. The addition of support from foreign governments, which only further complicated the real war, actually made a simplified understanding of the war possible. Over the four years of war the makeup of the two sides would change drastically. In America, two groups mustered in favor of the Republic and the Rebels. The Popular Front, a broad coalition of the political left united by antifascism, supported the Republic. More than three thousand Americans volunteered to fight for the Republic in the International Brigades. The Rebels were strongly supported by America's Catholic population, and would also benefit from the predominant support for nonintervention in foreign conflicts.

Spain's historical development was unlike that of any other European nation. While it had created one of the most liberal constitutions in the world in 1812, it was never put into effect and was abolished by 1814, with the restoration of the Bourbon monarchs. Neither the constitution nor the next century of political development

addressed the most important issues in the country: agrarian reform and the position of the church in Spain.¹⁸ Spain's economy was structured along semi-feudal lines, with the majority of the population living in poverty on enormous estates owned by absentee aristocrats. The industrial revolution had little impact on the closed Spanish economy, and outside of the culturally independent regions of Catalonia and the Basque country the populations remained overwhelmingly agrarian, bound to their masters' lands as de facto serfs.¹⁹ The Church lost its land holdings in the nineteenth century and was given economic compensation which made it "the largest capitalist in Spain."²⁰ Thus the nobility and clergy maintained enormous wealth and power. When republican or constitutional monarchies held elections the nobility were able to pressure their peasants to vote for conservative candidates.²¹ The enormous wealth of the Church is crucial for understanding anti-clerical sentiment in the civil war because "Never would the masses have been driven away from a Church fixed upon the land; they were easily led to abandon a Church which was the richest shareholder in the country." Spanish attacks on religion came in the main not from a fanatical communist atheism (which American Catholics argued), but from the role the Catholic institution played in a savagely inequitable economy. The anticlerical sentiments which stemmed from this had existed long before the civil war, and were channeled through far left anarchist groups, associations which the communists sought to destroy by any means possible. Socio-economic issues were at the heart of the war, but structured in a way which both narratives found unpalatable and difficult to present. The Catholic supporters of Franco

¹⁸ Franz Borkenau, *The Spanish Cockpit* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan, 1963). 7.

¹⁹ Ibid, 14.

²⁰ Ibid, 9.

²¹ Ibid, 46.

cried “Communism,” but the reality of the Church’s opulence and the misery of the Spanish people under the old order did not argue in Franco’s favor. Similarly, the leftist narrative chose not to emphasize the underlying problems, because while the inequity was terrible to note it would open the Republic to charges of Communism.

Spanish government in the decades leading up to the Spanish Republic and the war was characterized by regime change and impotence. At the turn of the century, Spain was a constitutional monarchy within which the upper echelons of the country had been united by fear of popular uprisings, and the government’s priority was the maintenance of the status quo.²² Foreign policy led to the destabilizing of the monarchy when a succession of disastrous defeats provoked the emergence of the mass movements which would shape the Spanish Civil War. Nationalism is a major force of legitimacy for non-democratic regimes, and in Spain national pride was closely tied to the legacy of the Spanish colonial empire. The attempt to maintain and build upon this past was frustrated whenever acted upon. The first of these incidents was the Spanish American War of 1898, a national humiliation which cost Spain the Philippines, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. The loss of Cuba hit hardest, as it was firmly integrated into the Spanish economy. Barcelona, one of the two industrial centers of Spain was home to a succession of general strikes in the decade following, culminating in a Catalanian revolt put down only by military force.²³ “Political assassinations became a regular feature of politics,” and would remain so through to the Civil War.²⁴ Spain abstained from World War I but internal dissension only continued to build, culminating in a three day general strike in 1917

²² Borkenau, Franz. 25.

²³ Ibid, 29.

²⁴ Ibid, 29.

which ended with the coda of virtually all Spanish strikes, “drowned in blood.”²⁵ From this point onwards the lower classes of Spain began the process of mass organization that gave parties actual power. The final blow to the authority of the monarchy came from the Moroccan colony in 1921, when one of the worst disasters in Spanish military history occurred. In a decisive battle with the Moorish tribes the Spanish Army lost ten thousand soldiers and the last vestiges of national military prestige.²⁶ After two years of even more complex political infighting the General Miguel Primo de Rivera seized power with the blessing of King Alfonso XIII.²⁷

The Primo dictatorship was the first progressive government and was welcomed as a potential savior by large segments of the population. For six years the dictator attempted to bring modernization to Spain, tame Morocco, and resolve the social problems which caused the strikes, violent suppressions, and waves of assassinations. Primo made impressive strides in all of these goals, but could only go so far.²⁸ Spain had too many different factions for him to balance them all indefinitely. As a military dictator he was beholden to the military and Church for support, but his progressive goals drew the most support from the Spanish bourgeoisie and intelligentsia. The military was strongly anti-Catalan, and the bourgeoisie and intelligentsia of Spain came predominantly from Catalonia. Primo de Rivera’s hand was forced, and yet another war on Catalonian culture began. Moreover, after banning all political organizations (in an attempt to halt assassinations and intrigues) but the socialist union (the UGT), and thus incensing the whole of the political spectrum, Primo attempted land reforms which turned the

²⁵ Ibid, 32.

²⁶ Ibid, 39.

²⁷ Ibid, 40.

²⁸ Ibid, 40-43 Morocco was broken, mandatory collective bargaining introduced, and loans were secured to construct the first modern roads and infrastructure developments in Spain

aristocracy against him. The aristocracy had connections to the elite in the Church and military, and once Primo lost the confidence of those institutions he resigned.²⁹ The line drawn between the different groups in this struggle is helpful for understanding the Spanish Civil War, because it was the same line along which the war was divided. Primo could not effect significant change because his power base, the army and Church, were the beneficiaries of the established system and full of aristocrats, the wealthiest of the power groups. Franco had the same support but was not interested in modern reform of any kind, including the policies of a fascist government, and was thus able to rule. With Primo's departure and no other leader stepping forward, the Republic slouched into existence. No group cared to defend the monarchy, and in elections held in 1931 the "pact of San Sebastian," a collection of Catalan nationalist, republican, and socialist parties won decisively.³⁰ The king abdicated and on April 14, 1931, the Second Spanish Republic was born.³¹ The forces of conservatism already existed, and had frustrated all prior attempts at reform. The five years of prewar Republican government would witness the rise of radicals and revolutionaries to challenge the conservative elite.

It is difficult to comprehend how backward and in need of modernization Spain was by the time of the Republic. Its civic culture, literacy rate, and economic development in 1930 were comparable to that of England in the 1840s and 50s.³² The three successive governments elected in the span of the Second Republic would prove too weak, opposed to reform, and finally too revolutionary for the military to bear. The first election took place in unusual circumstances: all organizations but the socialist UGT

²⁹ Ibid, 45.

³⁰ Ibid, 46.

³¹ Ibid, 46.

³² Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Revolution* (New York: Norton, 1970). 84.

union had been banned since Primo came to power close to a decade earlier and the majority of political leaders had been in exile for the duration. The result of the election was a republican-socialist coalition headed by Manuel Azaña's (leftist) Republican Action party.³³ Republican leadership fixated on circumscribing the power of the Church; some laws were changed to benefit labor, and the most pressing issue of the day, agrarian reform, was treated with a badly botched law.³⁴ The lasting impact of the first government was to give the parties of Spanish politics a chance to form and grow while giving them reasons to bitterly oppose one another, all without resolving the same basic issues. The 1933 elections swung control of government into the hands of a minority government of the (moderate) Radical Republican party dependent on CEDA, the Catholic conservative party. This government was reactionary in character and its legislative actions consisted of granting amnesty to rightists who had rebelled in 1932, revising the constitution to enshrine the rights of the church, and completely repealing the legislation of the prior government.³⁵ The defining event of its administration was an enormous revolt in 1934 led by socialists and communists in the northern mining region of Asturias, resulting in thousands of deaths and the imprisonment of more than thirty thousand miners. The revolt was put down by Moorish troops and foreign legionnaires, inciting nationalist outrage across the country, and brought Dolores Ibarruri, the great communist orator of the Civil War, to the national stage.³⁶ The Asturias revolt presaged

³³ Ibid, 93

³⁴ Ibid, 96-8. The land reform law eventually passed changed nothing for the more than million landless peasants toiling on *latifundia*, enormous estates of the nobility. This group constituted five percent of Spain's population at the time and was most in need of reforms.

³⁵ Stanley G. Payne. 131-3.

³⁶ Franz Borkenau. 57. Ibarruri, also known as La Pasionaria, was one of the most famous figures of the Spanish Civil War. Her speeches to the Spanish people inspired resistance to Franco and helped grow the PCE into a major party by the end of the war. In a speech to the departing International Brigades she "You can go proudly. You are history. You are legend."

many elements of the war, radicalized the large socialist bloc, and spurred recruitment into the Spanish Communist Party. The next election was a close race between the Popular Front and the National Front. The former was made up of the Spanish left minus the abstaining anarchist group. The latter “was the political front for all the forces of old Spain, the Army, as well as the church and the bourgeoisie.”³⁷ The Popular Front won, and the military immediately began plotting its overthrow. On July 17th, 1936, the coup d’etat attempt began. The generals thought it would be an easy and fast blow, but when the Republic was threatened with armed overthrow by the forces of the Spanish elite, the mass parties and unions of the lower classes took up arms and fought.³⁸

On the Republican side the political parties and trade unions which formed the government and, in the early stages, the army of the Republic were barely held together, and only out of the necessity of the shared fight against the rebels. The groups which joined with Franco’s army were united by the same reason. In both cases the parties which American narratives would attribute authority to, the fascists and the communists, were bit players at the start of the war.

The two sides created narratives which explained and justified their stance on the war, neither of which was grounded in the truth. The government of Spain now under attack was a democratically elected one, but reports of church burnings and the massacres of priests shocked many Americans. The divide between the interpretations of the war can be characterized by these two elements. The leftist narrative of the war focused on the assault on democratic institutions by fascist insurrectionaries. The Spanish people were the latest victims of Fascist aggression, and Franco was the Spanish Mussolini. This

³⁷ Hugh Thomas. 6.

³⁸ Borkenau, Franz, pp62.

element of the narrative was commonly repeated and widely believed because a cursory examination of the facts would seem to yield this observation. “Franco himself identified with international fascism,” and the *carte blanche* extension of military equipment and, in Italy’s case, four divisions of its army seemed to suggest that the Axis viewed him as one of their own. This belief ignores the fact that foreign intervention in Spain was a proxy war between the totalitarian dictators. It is the equivalent of believing that U.S. support for a Latin American government in the 1970s meant that the latter government was democratic. The same is true for the Catholic narrative’s accusation that the Republic was communist.

“One of the functions communist writers received was to create the impression in the world outside Spain that no radical and widespread social revolution was taking place.”³⁹ This is one of the most striking historical ironies in a war rich in paradoxes. The Soviet Union, accused of being the bringer of revolution to the Spanish people, in fact acted consistently to suppress any signs of revolution, even running propaganda campaigns about respecting the rights of small landholders. There was indeed a revolution occurring in Spain, but it was under the auspices not of the communists but of the unique CNT anarchist movement. In fact, the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) forced the reintroduction of the free market in Barcelona.⁴⁰

The conservative, Catholic dominated narrative viewed the revolt as a justified defense against an international communist invasion of the heart of Christianity. Spain had remained a Catholic bastion for centuries, devoid of Jews, Muslims, and Protestants by the infamous Inquisition and Counter-Reformation. The two narratives each fixed

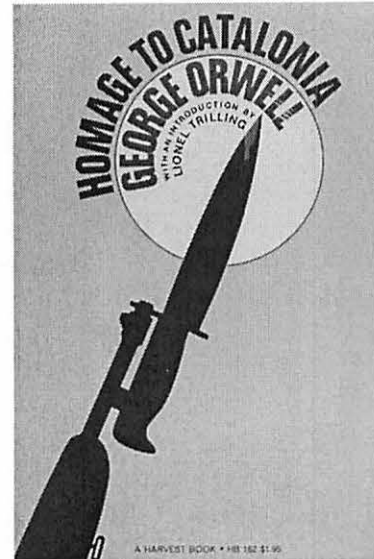
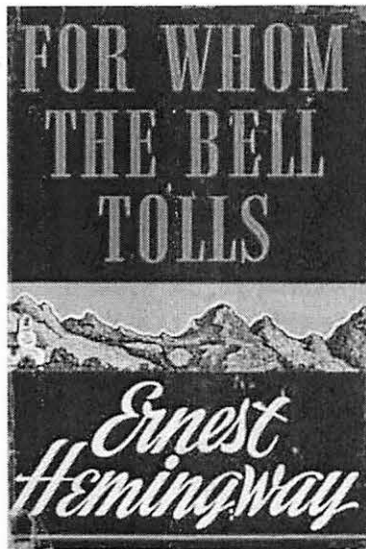
³⁹ Peter Monteath. 133.

⁴⁰ Franz Borkenau. 120.

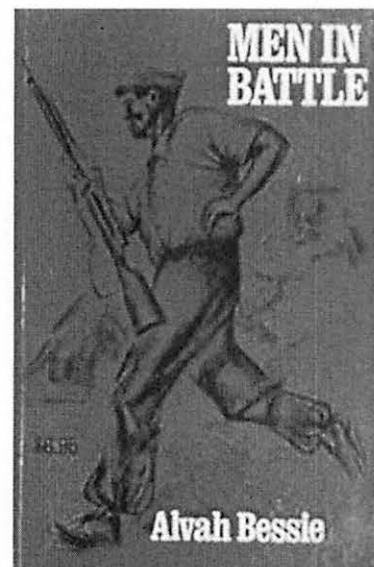
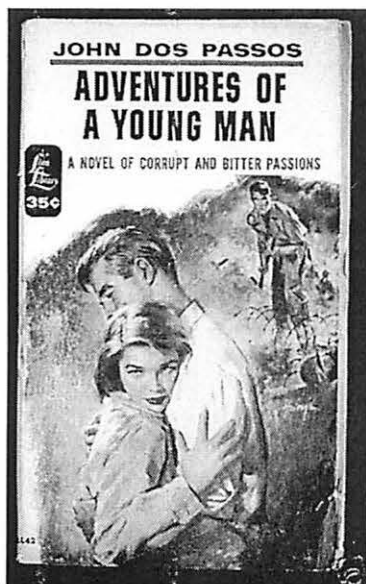
upon one of the forms of totalitarianism as being the root cause of the war. The Popular Front narrative would therefore later use World War II as a point of comparison, arguing that the Spanish fight was the same fight of democracy against fascism. The Catholic anticommunist interpretation would latch onto the Cold War as its point of comparison instead, with Franco as a defender of Western society and the Republic as a communist state.

The Catholic narrative held that Franco was defending, not attacking Spain, because the Spanish government was unrepresentative of Spain. They pointed out the fact that his was a legitimate revolt against a foreign conspiracy seeking to destroy the true Spain. The title used for Franco and his faction –the Nationalists-- epitomized this depiction. This claim on the part of the Catholic narrative seems dubious at best, given that Franco's army was made up of Moorish recruits, Foreign Legionnaires, and 100,000 "volunteers" from Italy.

The Spanish Civil War developed very clearly from socioeconomic causes irreconcilable in a peaceful fashion. Both narratives focused on demonizing the enemy with the bogey from the opposite side of the political spectrum. The harsh lines drawn between the two sides and the feeling of dire urgency the war provoked left a host of cultural works which replicate these divisions in the minds of their audience.



6. Literature Of The War: Propaganda's Lingering Influence



Dos Passos Cover: <http://cdn1.iofferphoto.com/img/item/127/761/007/ojMQ.jpg> (October 31st, 2011)
 Hemingway Cover: <http://www.coverbrowser.com/image/greatest-novels-of-all-time/132-1.jpg> (October 31st, 2011)
 Orwell Cover: <http://covers.openlibrary.org/w/id/6617464-L.jpg>, (October 31st, 2011)
 Bessie Cover: <http://covers.openlibrary.org/b/olid/OL5199794M-M.jpg> (October 31st, 2011)

Of the four books shown above, most Americans will recognize only one, or at most two. Most of the literature written about the war has faded from the canon of commonly read and discussed books, leaving only a few stray champions to tell the story of the war. *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is of course the most famous, and sits upon many a list of the finest books of the twentieth century. George Orwell's masterful recreation of his experiences in the war, *Homage to Catalonia*, is a somewhat distant second, moderately well-read but certainly not as prominent as a work by the great Hemingway. The last two books were written by authors who were high profile in their time, but whose influence declined and whose works are no longer in the mainstream. The majority of Spanish Civil War writing is in this camp, and thus has exercised less influence on the narrative in recent years than Hemingway and Orwell. The stories and perspectives of those forgotten authors, mostly partisans of the Republic and the USSR narrative, are addressed at less length as a result of their diminished influence.

The Spanish Civil War inspired a vast amount of creative output, in both prose and poetry. Some have even gone so far as to call it a "poet's war."⁴¹ Though it inspired a more than normal number of poets, the war could just as easily be called a writer's or a journalist's war. But literature is a unique category, separate from the other forms of media because of the ability of some works of rare quality to remain, unadulterated and broadcasting the same message, far beyond the period in which they were made. Films from the war did not demonstrate this effect, nor did journalism, nor radio broadcasts. The timelessness of literature has helped the USSR's version of the narrative, a black and white portrait of good versus evil, the republic against the fascists, to remain. In fact we

⁴¹ Peter Monteath, *Writing the Good Fight* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1994). 125.

can attribute it to a single work which has retained enormous popularity through the years, and which paradoxically was far from the most extreme propaganda of the war. First we must speak to the greater mass of writing from the war, the majority of which was political.

The war and the Popular Front which supported the Republic could count on the intellectual community of the 1930s, which leaned to the left of the political spectrum.⁴²

One author effectively captured the position of many of these writers towards the conflict:

Instead of Spanish problems...it was transformed by European and American writers- more so as a result of German, Italian, and Russian intervention-into a decisive struggle among the rival ideologies of the time: between fascism and liberalism, totalitarianism and a republican form of government, Christianity and communism. Such classifications resulted in both complicating and oversimplifying the issues of the war: the former in the sense of often imposing an alien set of ideologies upon what began as a civil struggle, and the latter by employing familiar terms, which each believed he understood, to clarify complex problems which actually very few fully comprehended.⁴³

This confusion is at the heart of understanding why it is that the American consensus on the Spanish Civil War is so far from the reality: from the outset the country got no clear picture of the realities of the war, and as time went on the primary source for learning about the conflict (writings on the subject) remained defined in terms which did not match the truth. The two most active groups in shaping the narrative, the intellectual left and the Catholic right, defined the war as democracy versus fascism and Catholicism versus godless communism. Both sides presented only partial pictures (which incidentally were both somewhat correct) and the truth never had a chance to emerge.

⁴² Benson, *Writers in Arms* (New York: NYU Press, 1967). 3.

⁴³ *Ibid*, Page 5.

The definition of the conflict based on the perspective of the social group responding to it is prolific in this conflict in particular. For example, in the case of African-Americans, the war was a chance to fight the racist fascist countries that championed new colonialism. The slogan for African-American volunteers in the International Brigades, “this ain’t Ethiopia, but it’ll do,” became the title for a book on their participation and perfectly captures this situation.⁴⁴ The impact of this self-oriented definition of the war was to increase the zeal of those involved, because in a real sense each was fighting for his or her own cause. While the established intellectual community reacted to the war with outpourings of writing in journals and magazines, the war also made authors of many of the men involved.

The American wing of the International Brigades hosted authors and poets who got their start writing short poems or articles for the *Volunteer For Liberty*, the brigade newspaper. Their contributions on the subject were collected in several volumes and printed after the war. The dedication to one of them, *The Heart of Spain*, is indicative of the obfuscating perspective of writers on the topic. “Their sacrifice to the preservation of American democracy has received no official citation,” it reads in part.⁴⁵ The association of the defense of American democracy with the Spanish conflict is an important part of the Russian narrative on the war. The logic of “fighting them there so we don’t have to here” has been employed numerous times in U.S. history, in World War II, Vietnam, and the War on Terror, and rarely in an un-problematic fashion. In Spain’s case the argument could only be accepted if it was also assumed that the republic was democratic and that

⁴⁴ Danny Duncan Collum ed., *African Americans in the Spanish Civil War: This Ain’t Ethiopia, But It’ll Do* (Waltham, MA: MacMillan, 1992).

⁴⁵ Ed. Bessie, Alvah, *The Heart of Spain* (New York: VALB, 1952). Dedication Page.

Franco would threaten America. Neither of these statements could be considered reflective of the reality of the Spanish Republic that fought the military insurgency for three years. The writings of the veterans revolved around the American Brigades, their experiences, the rightness of the cause, and the necessity of aiding Spain. None of these works question the benevolence of the Soviet Union in the conflict, as might be expected from a group which was directed by both military commanders and communist commissars. The portrayal of the International Brigades is problematic, but that is for another chapter. While the works of these men contributed to the Soviet supported narrative their voices were never as loud as the intellectuals of the conflict, and with the start of the Cold War they were branded as communists and marginalized.

What was the literary counter-narrative to this? The American Fascist Party, or Bund, supported nonintervention but was a fairly small fish in the pond of American politics. The real moral muscle on the opposing side came from the Catholics, who saw in the Republic the destruction of Spanish Catholicism and the fall of the mother church. The concerns of American Catholics were legitimate: the months following the election of the Azaña government saw a nationwide attack on churches, partly as a result of the freeing of prisoners held for years after the Asturian mining revolt.⁴⁶ Conservative newspapers also exaggerated this, fueling panic in the greater Catholic community. In Spain, the main religious-oriented party, CEDA, was to join with the military in opposing the Republic. In the first days of the war churches were even used as sniping posts and monasteries as machine gun posts for falangist rebels, which somewhat explained why Republic-supporters then took to burning down holy places. This was all captured in

⁴⁶ Benson, 221. Credible reports range from 119 attacks on churches to 21 serious incidents as counted by the New York Times.

photographs and stories by the international press, inflaming Catholics more.⁴⁷ As a result of all of this Pope Pius XI supported Franco in his crusade against the communists of the Popular Front, and American Catholics followed suit. In some parts of America this meant that the anti-Republican narrative dominated; in my hometown of Boston, for example, the Irish Catholic community led by the aging Cardinal William O'Connell came down firmly on the side of Franco.⁴⁸ In terms of literary output this did not add up to much: while conservative Catholic Americans constituted a powerful political force, intellectually writers tended to side with the Republic. In a survey carried out in 1938 only one, a certain Gertrude Atherton, expressed opposition to the Republic out of 418 writers polled.⁴⁹ There are three books which stand out as being representative of the Catholic perspective: two novels by Helen Nicholson and Carlton Hayes' later memoir *Wartime Mission in Spain*. Nicholson happened to be traveling through Spain when the revolt began and wrote two books, *Death in the Morning* and *The Painted Bed*. The latter culminates in a Republican bombing that brings a vision of Christ on the Cross.⁵⁰ The most well-known work to give a positive review of Franco was Hayes' book, which was written after the period of his ambassadorship between 1942 and 1945. The majority of the work deals with his attempts to maintain Spanish neutrality and the duties of ambassadorship. When he does comment upon the war, it is to say that the struggle is in the past and that America need not meddle in Spain's internal affairs; that America should not meddle in its affairs. His observations on Franco are fairly limited to comments such as, "The general, I soon perceived, differed notably from the caricatures

⁴⁷ Benson, 209.

⁴⁸ Crosby, Donald. *Boston's Catholics in the Spanish Civil War*. The New England Quarterly, Vol. 44, No. 1 (Mar., 1971), pp. 82

⁴⁹ Peter Monteath. 40.

⁵⁰ Peter Monteath. 42.

of him current in the 'leftist' press of the United States."⁵¹ His treatment of the Civil War is light, but he primarily points out that whichever side had won would likely have radicalized and committed the atrocities that Franco's Spain had caused.⁵² He concludes that Spain's neutrality during the Second World War was essentially benevolent, that the Spanish Civil War pitted equal numbers of Spaniards against one another, and that Franco's regime is legitimate and beneficent.⁵³ He blames leftist and Soviet propaganda for the distortions in American perception, although his own perception of Spanish neutrality and Franco's legitimacy is far from the truth. He makes only passing mention of the hundreds of thousands of Spanish political prisoners, and as Meghan Moharter's SIP demonstrates his view of Spain as "benevolently" neutral is open to debate. Hayes was a prominent figure and his book played a significant role in maintaining a friendly foreign policy towards Spain which the majority of Americans did not seem to view as necessary: among American Catholics during the civil war, polls showed only thirty nine percent in favor of Franco.⁵⁴

Among the intellectuals, John Dos Passos's *Adventures of a Young Man* ranks as "probably the most bitter novel to emerge from the Spanish conflict."⁵⁵ Dos Passos, one of the literary greats of the early twentieth century, has slipped from the ranks of the most high-profile American authors. At the time, though, his works were at the forefront of modernism and praised by other American literati. Just before the war he made the cover of TIME magazine, one of the dominant periodicals of the era. In happier days

⁵¹ Hayes, Carlton. *Wartime Mission in Spain* (New York: MacMillan 1945). 24.

⁵² Ibid, 45.

⁵³ Ibid, 282 and 303.

⁵⁴ Monteath, 41.

⁵⁵ Benson, 13.

Hemingway had written to him, “you write so damn well it spooks me.”⁵⁶ He did not know it, but by the Spanish Civil War his greatest work lay behind him: the *U.S.A.* trilogy, a sprawling, three part epic of disjointed modernist uncertainty, remains his greatest literary legacy. The book he produced out of his experiences in the war is a testament to his own disillusionment with communism and the left, and the irreversible destruction of his friendship with Hemingway. The genesis of all this was a Soviet propaganda film directed by the crypto-communist Joris Ivens, a man who entranced and befriended Dos Passos. Unknown to Dos Passos, Ivens had denounced modernism and Dos Passos personally to save his own skin in the Soviet Union two years earlier.⁵⁷ In August of 1934 Karl Radek, the director of all Soviet culture, had declared modernism “bourgeois” and re-oriented Soviet culture towards Socialist Realism. He attacked two authors in his speech: James Joyce and John Dos Passos. Inside the USSR authors who worked in the modernist style either recanted or were executed. But John Dos Passos was not inside, and could still be of use to the Party which declared his works illegal.

While the USSR had rejected modernism and its sympathizers, the propagandists behind the Popular Front still found them to be pliable supporters, both out of their support for the cause and ignorance of the denunciations leveled against them. Dos Passos was targeted by the Comintern by their agent Ivens, whose charming mannerisms and modernist film-making credentials gave him an air of authenticity irresistible to the author. They collaborated in the making of a quick and easy low budget film, *Spain and the Fight for Freedom*, which has not survived to the present day.⁵⁸ The film was lauded

⁵⁶ Koch, Stephen. *The Breaking Point* (New York: Counterpoint, 2005). 47.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 48-50.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 55.

as a success, and the two eagerly made plans for another propaganda film on Spain. What Dos Passos did not know was that the Soviets did not want him anymore; he was an unreliable asset in their eyes. They hoped to use him to catch a much bigger fish: Ernest Hemingway. Dos Passos and his fellow high profile friend, Archibald MacLeish, were used as unknowing front-men to disguise a Soviet propaganda film and persuade Hemingway to lend his name to the project. From a Soviet perspective it worked perfectly: the movie was shot without using any of the input of the independent members of the production before they arrived in Spain, and came out with Hemingway's authoritative voice as the narrator and supposed production assistance.⁵⁹ For Dos Passos, the journey to Spain was a disastrous turning point that would lead to his abandonment of all leftist political convictions, shooting him so far in the opposite direction that he would one day vocally support Republican presidential candidate Barry Goldwater.

In Spain, Dos Passos would discover just how much respect for human rights the Soviets had, along with how much they valued independent thought and allies compared to obedience. The individual who led to all of this ugliness was a dear and true friend to Dos Passos, and had been for decades. Jose Robles and John Dos Passos met on a train in 1916, two affluent leftists out on their own in Spain.⁶⁰ Exiled during the Primo dictatorship that preceded the Republic, Robles had taught for years at Johns Hopkins until he felt called to defend his country from the Fascists. During first heady days of the siege of Madrid, Robles had served as an indispensable attaché and translator to the Russian general running the defense of the city. Unfortunately he was also a radical republican, who loudly espoused positions different from the Soviet "advisors" who

⁵⁹ Ibid, 62.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 2.

influenced the conflict immensely. His contributions meant nothing next to his convictions, and for them he paid the ultimate price. He was jailed, tortured, and executed without trial by an NKVD murder team based in Madrid. There was no need for Dos Passos to find out about this though; instead he would face friendly but oblique bureaucrats who told him that Robles was in prison as a fascist spy. When Dos Passos arrived in Spain he could not find Robles, only his widow, their children, and vague promises from government ministers. After months of unanswered questions the government had enough of his queries, and arranged to have Dos Passos informed of his friend's death in a fashion that would bolster Hemingway's credibility while tarnishing Dos Passos's. Hemingway's friendship was a finicky thing when it came to other writers: there is only room for one top writer, and he had grown jealous and bitter over Dos Passos's rising star. Along with this, Hemingway had a black and white view of war: he always had to have a good and bad side, and had no patience for those who worried about moral ambiguities and gray areas. It was shamefully easy to get him to tell Dos Passos of Robles's assassination in the most cruel and public of venues: at a reception, in full view of a collection of international dignitaries. Hemingway crushed Dos Passos and then essentially suggested that he was not trusted enough to be told by the official channels.⁶¹ Dos Passos left a few days later, and was trailed by fabrications of cowardice and ignominy heaped on him by his onetime friend. *Adventures of a Young Man* is in no small part a reflection of this shockingly disillusioning story. The main character, Glenn Spotswood, joins the Communist Party in America to fight for miners' rights, only to find the party is doing so for self-aggrandizing ends. Embittered, he joins the International Brigades to fight for the Republic, only to find that the party is once again involved for

⁶¹ Koch, Stephen. *Double Lives* (New York: Enigma Books, 1994). 314

political gain. He is then sent on a suicide mission, and dies in the fight.⁶² Bitter, yes, but Dos Passos's story rings with an honesty and accuracy sorely missing from the great war myth that Hemingway wrote, the myth that remains in America today.

This chapter is a progression of sorts, from least to most famous books on the war. All of the works discussed previously have their own unique qualities, virtues and vices that affected the depiction of the war when they were *en vogue*. The next two works are of a different order in that they are the rare breed of writing that retains its popularity even after their subject has fallen by the wayside. Because of this, whether for good or ill, they are central in understanding our present perspectives on the war. Even between these two we can draw a distinction in popularity: while George Orwell's *Homage To Catalonia* is a famous work, it unquestionably ranks as junior in fame to Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom The Bell Tolls*.⁶³ The lasting impact of the Soviet narrative benefits immensely from this, as Dos Passos and Orwell, the two authors below Hemingway, both delivered eye-opening accounts of a complex war that did not fit the propagandists' story.

Before comparing Hemingway and Orwell, several caveats must be made. There are important differences which explain some of the contrasts between Orwell's autobiographical reportage and Hemingway's war myth. The style of the books explains to a certain extent what separates the two: Orwell wrote a personal testimony, interspersed with analysis of the larger political situation. Hemingway's work was a historical novel, which did not aim to be factually accurate but rather sought to depict the

⁶² Benson, 13.

⁶³ Amazon book sales rankings

truth through an invented story. Orwell writes from the first person in his book, Hemingway chose to write with a third person narrator, the voice of God as it were. As such, it would be fair to expect more in the way of truth and accuracy from Hemingway. He does not live up to this standard.

Significantly, the two authors were in distinctly different phases of their writing careers. By 1936 Ernest Hemingway had secured his position as a great American writer: *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms*, along with his multitude of short stories, put him dead center in the public eye and made him an important target for the Soviet Union. Orwell, on the other hand, was no big fish, and his arrival in Barcelona was unsolicited by the Comintern. The passions which underlie his work on the war, *Homage to Catalonia*, are to a great degree the result of contingency: he arrived in Barcelona and his contact there, one George McNair, worked for a group affiliated with the POUM, took him to their headquarters and signed him up for the militia, apparently without Orwell's knowing that there was a distinction between the POUM and the International Brigades.⁶⁴ Had Orwell gotten into the Brigades, whose training consisted mainly of political indoctrination in the form of lectures, we may never have seen such works as *Animal Farm* or *1984*. Regardless, *Homage* could not have been the same work, given how much of his writing is derived from his experience as a "Trotskyite" in the eyes of the NKVD and his eyewitness experience of the crackdown in Barcelona in May of 1937. By virtue of this chance event, Orwell would craft what ranks as one of the most enduring and honest portrayals of the Spanish Civil War. Hemingway knew of these things and worse,

⁶⁴ Bowker, Gordon. *Inside George Orwell* (New York: MacMillan, 2003). Page 203.

it is true, but they were more distant crimes, not immediate events which threatened him in his role as a Comintern darling.

Given these caveats, what narrative does Orwell present? The passing of time and the opening of Soviet archives have shown that Orwell's account is startlingly accurate in its depiction of the events, especially since he drew only his own experiences and the contradictory reportage on the subject. This in fact only makes Hemingway's failures more inexcusable. *Homage to Catalonia* begins with a clear presentation of Barcelona several months into the conflict. Orwell sketches the outline of the revolution in that particular city, charting the revolution against capitalist society and the gradual return to it under the guiding hand of the communist controlled government. He describes life on the front lines and the terror of war without resorting to fiction. Orwell's account of his stay in a field hospital after a bullet pierced his neck humanizes the nurses and doctors, some of whom stole from him, without simplifying the people involved. The most intrigue-laden segment of the book revolves around the destruction of the Barcelona militias (of which Orwell was a member) in May of 1937. He writes from his subjective position as a man whose life is in danger, but his account stands accurate in the face later historical analysis. Again and again, Orwell returns to the humanity of the Spanish people using anecdotes such as an officer's offering a handshake to him in front of a crowd of informants at the height of the Barcelona terror. "It was like publicly shaking hands with the German during the Great War."⁶⁵ Orwell's narrative, while centered on his personal experience, reflects a multitude of the inconsistencies and betrayals by the Soviet Union and its agents that Soviet propaganda sought to cover up. Sadly, so strong

⁶⁵ Orwell, George. *Homage To Catalonia*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1952. Page 235.

was antifascist sentiment that Orwell was simply ignored in the main because of popular belief in the necessity of the Popular Front and the narrative of a friendly and supportive USSR.

And so we at last arrive at the most influential, most potent work to come out of the war. It is of the utmost importance that we understand that while the structure of the book supports the Soviet narrative, Hemingway is far from uncritical towards Communism. The Ernest Hemingway who wrote *For Whom the Bell Tolls* was not the same as the one who spat on Dos Passos and churned out propaganda in journalism, film, short stories, and a play over the course of the war. Hemingway was a devout partisan for the Communist Party during his time in Spain, but by the time he wrote *For Whom the Bell Tolls* he had entered a new phase in his writing. "Well, we've lost another war," he wrote to a friend in February of 1939.⁶⁶ The defeat of the Republic had demoralized him, and he came away from the war disgusted by politics. The content of the novel reflects these changes, and the body of the text focuses instead on the characters and their personal narrative in the conflict. Comparisons are often drawn between it and *War and Peace*; like Tolstoy's great work, it tells of a private drama set in the midst of war.⁶⁷ This novel is different from Hemingway's previous work for the Comintern; he was no longer a propagandist for them when he wrote it. As the most enduring literary work to come out of the war, *Tolls* is a crucial element in understanding why the simplified narrative of the Republic versus fascism has remained so potent today. He attacks the role of communists, depicts the savagery of the anarchists, and mocks the incompetence of the government, but he never questions the justness of the cause. He is disillusioned with the

⁶⁶ Ibid, 29.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 46.

particular method with which the struggle was conducted, but maintains the literary simplification of distinct good and evil sides. This plays into the broader framework of the Popular Front's narrative.

Given the fact that *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is a novel, Hemingway himself sets the standards for what we ought to expect from such a work:

A writer's job is to tell the truth. His standard of fidelity to the truth should be so high that his invention, out of his experience should produce a truer account than anything factual can be. For facts can be observed badly; but when a good writer is creating something, he has time and scope to make it of an absolute truth.⁶⁸

If that is the case, then his novel should go down as one of his least respectable works. In terms of sheer accuracy, he was mocked by his embittered paramour during the war for his antiquated translations of the Spanish language. Translation is not one of his truly significant mistakes in terms of accuracy. The *ad hominem* attacks on people he disliked or disagreed with call its veracity into question. Important errors can be found in his interpretation of the leadership of the war, whom he harshly critiques through the voice of the main character. Robert Jordan disparages many of the people Hemingway supported in the name of the Republic, and many of those he criticizes are unjustly attacked. The commanders Modesto, El Campesino, and Lister are all called out as amateurs only obeying orders of Soviet advisors. This critique, which falls so close to the truth of Soviet control of the government, is ill directed. All three men in fact had distinguished records and operated fairly independently. In a BBC documentary some years later, Lister responded by saying that Hemingway had only a superficial

⁶⁸ Josephs, Allen. *For Whom The Bell Tolls*, New York: Macmillan, 1994. Page 86

understanding of the war, based more on metaphor than reality.⁶⁹ He attacks La Pasionaria, the great orator of the war, as a hypocrite who shipped her son to the safety of the USSR. This discredited rumor was included with the rest out of his personal dislike of her. It wasn't true, but it reinforced Hemingway's narrative of Spain as betrayed by the whole of the high command. This laundry list of historical flaws and inaccuracies played a significant role in provoking the widespread criticism of the novel by Spaniards, who saw Hemingway as a foreign adventurer without a true appreciation for the events of the war. These criticisms actually go against the grain of the Popular Front narrative; it is the structure of the novel and its broader themes which support the Soviet version of events.

Hemingway is guilty of the same mistake as almost all of the other authors who dealt with the conflict: overlaying his own philosophical perspective onto the real conduct of the war. The focus within the novel is not the Spanish Civil War; the politics and saga of the war are buried in the larger narrative about an individual's heroism and masculinity which creates the image of a human hero, realistically rendered to make him believable. Hemingway's emphasis of Robert Jordan's personal struggles makes it less a novel about the Spanish Civil War, for it could be set in any war with resistance figures and idealistic volunteers. The setting is secondary to the personal saga of Robert Jordan, and so the reader walks away from the book with a clear idea of who the hero was, but not of the complexities of the conflict. The touches of disenchantment are personal, and the greater challenges posed by them about who was really in charge and what exactly the Spaniards were fighting over are at best secondary elements of the book. Indeed, other criticisms of the book suggest that the author changed or shaped the content to be

⁶⁹ Josephs, 54.

popular, such as his decision to switch Robert from being a former Communist of two years to an antifascist, a much less controversial choice in America at that time through today. *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is mainly about an American, and fails to educate about the war.

This does not necessarily mean that the book is bad, but it does support the Soviet narrative of idealism versus fascism that the USSR wished to maintain, an image which gave the Popular Front the façade of legitimate resistance rather than communist co-option. Hemingway's greatest tribute to the war, a work that consciously rejects many of the elements of the propaganda he himself produced, still functions to mislead the reader. The dominance of this simple image leaves the reader with the impression that the Soviets, though problematic, were helping the good guys, and that the Republic was the just cause it presented itself as, the cause Robert Jordan died for. This is the dominant piece of writing to retain its popularity to the present day, and its role in keeping the leftist narrative afloat should not be easily dismissed.

7. The Narrative in the Air: Radio

It is quite probable that of all the different ways in which Americans heard news about the progress of the war, radio reached the largest audience. The war took place in what is known as the golden age of radio, a time when Orson Welles could terrify the nation with a broadcast of *War of the Worlds*. Before the advent of television, radio captivated a greater number and variety of listeners than newspapers and carried news and propaganda from around the world. In 1936 there were thirty million radios in the U.S., and “by 1938 it was estimated that ninety one percent of all urban households and seventy percent of all rural homes in America contained at least one radio.”⁷⁰ Radio culture in its heyday was vastly different from the modern use. Families would listen as a common activity and there were only a small number of stations to choose from, boosting listening audiences to a proportion of the population unrivalled by other media formats.⁷¹ President Roosevelt’s average audience for a fireside chat, for example, was seventy two percent of the total U.S. population.⁷² Both sides of the conflict and their supporters would make heavy use of this media platform to state their case to vast numbers of the American public. Short wave radio could reach across the Atlantic, and functioned to bring the war into the living rooms of America and heighten the drama and immediacy of the struggle. The towering proponent of the Catholic perspective on the radio was Father Charles Coughlin, the radio priest, who drew ten million listeners on a weekly basis.⁷³ The period of the Spanish Civil War was exactly the right moment to propagate a distorted narrative: the medium was reaching its peak numbers in this time, and the

⁷⁰ Robert J. Brown, *Manipulating the Ether* (Jefferson N.C.: McFarland, 1998). pp 2.

⁷¹ Ibid, 3.

⁷² Ibid, 21.

⁷³ Ibid, 84.

legislation related to the coming of World War II would muzzle Coughlin's program on suspicion of fascist sympathies. The left had no orators to equal Coughlin, and the pro-Franco narrative benefited greatly from this medium. During the Cold War, anticommunist lobbying further restricted the possibilities of radio for supporters of the Spanish Republic.

Radio demagoguery did not begin with Rush Limbaugh; that noted polemicist can trace the heritage of his techniques and success to a charismatic preacher in the 1930s. In fact, the targets of Father Coughlin in 1937 were accused of harboring exactly the same politics as Limbaugh does presently: communism. From the Shrine of the Little Flower in Royal Oak, Michigan, Father Charles L. Coughlin preached radio sermons mixed with political messages about the issues facing the Depression-wracked country. He began his career in radio in the late twenties, gradually shifting from religious content into political demagoguery. Coughlin began the thirties as a supporter of President Roosevelt's policies, but came eventually to blame the president for the problems of the depression. "Franklin Double-Crossing Roosevelt" was one of the many names Coughlin called him.⁷⁴ His enormously popular broadcasts formed the base of a political organization dedicated to implementing the policies he presented to millions. Coughlin's Catholic faith informed his radical politics as well as a ferocious anticommunism, which shaped his opinion of the Spanish Civil War. Coughlin celebrated the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War as a holy crusade, the first challenge to the wave of atheistic communism which threatened the Catholic faith internationally and in Spain. His position as a member of the Church lent him the appearance of Papal authority to much of his audience, a belief the

⁷⁴ Ibid, 85.

Father did little to correct.⁷⁵ Franco, he told his listeners, was a defender of the Faith doing his duty to protect Spanish culture and religion from international communism. Father Coughlin's ideas were further validated when the Pope sided with Franco. In his weekly radio broadcasts to the American public, Coughlin compared Franco to George Washington and Abraham Lincoln.⁷⁶ Coughlin demonstrated the force and size of his movement late in the war when it seemed that congress was considering lifting the arms embargo against the Spanish Republic. In early 1939 Coughlin delivered a notably influential radio address. In it he urged his supporters to send telegrams to congress supporting the embargo. "My friends, I ask you: 'Shall we Americans engage in foreign entanglements? Shall we consider ourselves the policemen of the world?' We will not be deceived by the spurious lie that Italy and Germany are assisting the Spanish Rebels!" Mixing isolationism with anticommunism, this speech alone resulted in 150,000 telegrams and around 1.75 million signatures on petitions in favor of the arms embargo.⁷⁷ The cumulative political pressure of the tidal wave of telegrams ensured that the embargo would stay in place. The radio priest had reached out to almost two million people who were persuaded to his interpretation, and who thus all shared the same general narrative of the conflict. Coughlin's radio empire thus played a crucial role in maintaining the international arms embargo that was so central to the defeat of Republican Spain. The medium proved capable of shaping international events with as little as a single broadcast, from one man. Father Coughlin is remembered today as possibly the worst

⁷⁵ Ibid, 86.

⁷⁶ Warren, Donald I. *Radio Priest: Charles Coughlin, the father of hate radio*. The Free Press, New York 1996. pp110.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 112.

anti-Semite of 1930s America, but his role in the Spanish Civil War should not be forgotten.

Radio would bring the American people closer to the war than any other medium. The possibilities of short wave transmission were used in the war to transmit straight from the conflict. The radio correspondent H.V. Kaltenborn traveled to Spain with a portable radio broadcaster. Hidden in a haystack in July of 1936, Kaltenborn reported on the battle of Irun as it raged around him.⁷⁸ The sounds of war flew across the Atlantic, and the American people could hear with their own ear the consequences of isolationism and the toll of the embargo. American correspondents weren't the only source of international coverage; the American public was targeted for propaganda by a bevy of different foreign stations. From Spain, Americans heard two radically divergent stories of what the war meant. Early in the war the Republic seized the EAQ transmitter in Madrid, one of the most powerful radio transmitters in Europe.⁷⁹ From this station Republican news bulletins were sent out in a variety of languages. Prominent leaders of the Republic, such as Prime Minister Largo Caballero, made the case for the loyalist side directly to the American people. The rebels countered with their own narrative of the war. Insurgent propaganda led by General Quiapo de Llano did daily broadcasts on the progress of the war.⁸⁰ Many European nations also directed slanted coverage of the war towards the American public. The Soviet and French news radio broadcasts tended to favor the Republic, while the Italians and Germans denied their involvement and praised Franco.⁸¹ American public opinion had never been subject to such an intense bombardment of

⁷⁸ Robert J. Brown, 158.

⁷⁹ F. Jay Taylor, *The United States and the Spanish Civil War* (NYC: Bookman Associates, 1956). 120.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 120.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 120.

propaganda from abroad, and this played a significant part in public perception of the conflict.

World War Two and the Cold War would trim the spectrum of political opinions available on the radio. In the later stages of the Cold War radio would once again be a fruitful outlet for disseminating the pro-Republican narrative. In 1982 NPR created and broadcast a one hour special on the war, *Corpus Duende*.⁸² The consulting historian for the project was Robert Colodny, a veteran of the International Brigades and professor emeritus of history at the University of Pittsburgh.⁸³ *Corpus Duende* is a masterful production, which tells the story of the Spanish Civil War through the work of one of its most famous victims, the poet Federico Garcia Lorca, and multiple narrators. Unfortunately, the content of the program is weighted heavily towards describing the crimes of the Franco regime, rather than the balance of truth. *Corpus Duende* is a lachrymose tribute to the fall of the Spanish Republic, which is presented as democratic and an unambiguously positive institution. The narrators talk about the deceptive role of the press, but only in terms of the right wing smear campaign against the Republic. The massacres and political crackdowns of the rebels are covered, but nothing is said of the darker side of Soviet involvement or Republican massacres of dissidents. While the use of Lorca's poetry creates a more immersive and entertaining presentation, it makes the program more of an artistic piece, dwelling on the myth of the lost cause, and the tragedy of the Spanish Civil War, not the truth. A listener of the program (and there were many, it was broadcast nationally) would come away with a very clear idea that the fall of the Spanish Republic was a tragedy caused by nonintervention, and that Franco was a villain.

⁸² National Public Radio, "Corpus duende," 1982, cassette.

⁸³ Ibid

Like much of the media surrounding the war broad strokes of description erase important elements of the conflict, perpetuating the simplistic narrative of the Popular Front. For a radio segment made forty years after the war it fits comfortably with the leftist narrative of the 1930s.

Radio was a potent weapon for the Catholic narrative, and the mastery that Father Charles Coughlin gained over it may have decided the fate of the Spanish Republic. The ability to connect to an enormous audience made it a powerful force in swaying public opinion, but its shelf life was shorter in duration than literature. Broadcasts from the 1930s did not have the ability to impact the new left emerging in the late sixties and seventies. It took renewed interest or developments in Spain to prompt more programming on the subject. On that count, it is similar in effect to newspapers.

8. The Dueling Narratives in the Papers

The coverage of the Spanish Civil War in American news and magazines was an essential element of disseminating a favorable narrative. Stalinist propaganda operations could hardly be successful without support from major news outlets, which directly influenced the opinions of their readers. A number of factors influenced how coverage was presented, and the agency of all parties involved must be recognized to form an accurate picture. The beliefs of the war correspondents on the scene, their handlers, the Spanish censors reports had to go through, and the editorial boards back home all played a role in the presentation of the war: Analysis of the situation renders a clear verdict: while the Soviet narrative would ultimately dominate, the credit for this triumph is at least as dependent on contingency as it was on Soviet operatives. Without legitimate and broad antifascist support and access to reporters who could be swayed to a certain perspective or were already politically committed, the war for the minds of the American people could not have been won. The victory of the Loyalists in the hearts and minds of Americans can be discerned from polls conducted at the time. In February of 1937, support for the loyalists was at twenty two percent and the rebels at twelve percent. By 1938 the numbers tell a different story: the insurgents enjoyed a doubling in support, but seventy two percent now sided with the Republic.⁸⁴ Literary propaganda could not have caused this shift: the majority of literature about the war was written after it ended. Only *Man's Hope*, by André Malraux, had come out at the time. The dominant media formats which shaped the early perspective of the war were newspapers, magazines, and radio services; these media collectively reached vast swathes of the population and influenced opinion during the conflict. The most respected institutions and war correspondents of

⁸⁴ George Gallup, *The Gallup Poll 1935-1971* (New York: Random House, 1972). 49 and 75.

America's press establishment took sides and unknowingly perpetuated the distortions of the left or right.

First, though, it is necessary to clarify the differences between modern and 1930s-era reporting which helped to shape the actions of journalists at the time. Without a clear understanding of the perspective of those involved we cannot understand how they perceived their role in relation to society. Reporters behaved in a fashion which conformed to their own ethics and should not be answerable to the modern conception of reporting, nor can we find them guilty for failing to obey it. National papers varied widely in their depictions of the events of the war, and this lack of consensus provided a vacuum in which the positions of reporter and editorial staff could play a significant role in shaping narrative. William Randolph Hearst, whose newspapers, alongside Joseph Pulitzer's, had fabricated the *casus belli* of the Spanish American War, was still governing the Hearst consortium. Yellow journalism, in other words, was far from gone. Thus it is invaluable to understand what ethical reporting represented. What was the consensus at this point then? In fact, reporting was in a turbulent period where standards were fluctuating and there was little in the way of across-the-board agreement. The level of objectivity a reporter was held to was set at a comparatively low level, the editorial boards of the individual papers. Martha Gellhorn, Hemingway's lover and a correspondent herself, summarized one extreme succinctly "Gellhorn disdained the very concept of unemotional coverage and mocked what she called 'this objectivity shit.'"⁸⁵ Gellhorn, a fervent supporter of the Popular Front, represented a radical opinion and played an influential role in the lives of the major reporters in Spain. She was Hemingway's lover and tutor in international politics, a friend to the famous

⁸⁵ DePalma, 60.

photographer Robert Capa, and as a confidant to Herbert Matthews, the *New York Times* correspondent to the Republic.⁸⁶ The Soviet narrative impacted these men through their relationship to her in much the same fashion as Münzenberg's network; journalists supported the narrative because they were persuaded by moral conviction. Gellhorn championed two intersecting and important concepts, political commitment in reporting and support for the actions of the Communist Party in Spain, which she identified as one and the same as the Republic.

Gellhorn's standards weren't accepted norms, though. The major perspectives which competed for predominance occurred along two lines of thought. The first supported a form of reporting that included a role for interpretation. "It (reporting) did not merely present the facts; rather, it also pointed out causes and consequences."⁸⁷ A reporter who followed this school of thought would be failing if he or she did not include further analysis from their own experience. The second school, from which modern reporting standards stem, argued that objectivity and impartiality are the goals of good reporting.⁸⁸ Adherence to one school of thought over the other led to distinctly different styles of reportage. Most of the writing produced by the war presents itself as objective truth conveyed by reporters who served as cameras, capturing and transmitting the reality of the scene.⁸⁹ As any good propagandist (and Robert Capa) would note, the camera is as effective a tool for propaganda as the pen. Of course work from either school of thought

⁸⁶ Ibid, 55. Robert Capa was arguably the most prominent photojournalist to cover the Spanish Civil War. A leftist Hungarian, Capa was embedded with the POUM and other militias during the war. His most famous image from the war, *The Falling Soldier*, is considered by many to be staged, and an excellent example of propagandistic photography.

⁸⁷ Monteath, Peter. *Writing the Good Fight*. Greenwood Press: Westport, CT, 1994. Page 128.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 129.

⁸⁹ Ibid, Page 130.

could still serve as propaganda, if the reporters themselves were being manipulated. This was Münzenberg's preferred technique.

To that end, Münzenberg and his compatriots ensured that war correspondents in the Republic gave things a Soviet slant. The *New York Times* and Ernest Hemingway would prove useful outlets of pro-Russian reporting. A variety of methods were employed in this undertaking, from the venal to the bureaucratic. The first check on reporter's independence came at the border: on both sides of the conflict, reporters covered the action at the discretion of the regime they were embedded in, and reporters considered hostile were not welcome. Once inside, dispatches sent home had to pass muster at the censor's office. It was a result of this system that Herbert Matthews was able to report for the *New York Times*: their previous correspondent, William Carney, ran afoul of the censors and ended up covering the war from the rebel's lines.⁹⁰ These were the more brutish techniques, and could hardly sway the minds of the reporters they suppressed. More subtle methods of coercion were also at play. Münzenberg made sure to surround the journalists with friendly faces who just happened to support the Popular Front and the goals of the Comintern. There were bonuses too: Hemingway, by far the biggest fish in war coverage, was supplied with an aide-de-camp who spent much of his time flattering the writer's already considerable ego, and hunting down liquor to keep the great man well stocked.⁹¹ These techniques were all on top of the fact that the Soviets, at the start of the war at least, were the sole international supporters of the just cause. Thus the USSR gained moral credibility in the eyes of Popular Front sympathizers. International issues such as the Spanish Civil War, LGBT rights, and racial equality cost

⁹⁰ DePalma, 54

⁹¹ Stephen Koch, *The Breaking Point* (New York: Counterpoint, 2005). 82.

the Soviets little, and bore little relation to their domestic policy. This strategy was at the heart of propaganda operations and gave them great standing with ethicists for a time. The dirty little tricks that Münzenberg had spent two decades honing in the Cominterns service did not fail him in Spain, and the foreign press reporting from the Republic ended up believing the war myth: of a successful republic, that social revolution was not underway behind the lines, and that the interests of the USSR were in line with the interests of Spain.

Hemingway and Matthews shared similar views on the conflict. To both of them, the particulars of why each side fought and whether they were right came in a distant second to the bravery and nobility under fire of the soldiers. Matthews was hooked on the heroism and mythology of war from his first dispatch. One of his more colorful articles from the front is a piece on the International Brigades, entitled “The Free Lances of Madrid.” In this piece he not only attributes the success of the Chinese Long March to the commander of the Brigades, but describes in detail the heroics of the men who he says have all kinds of political orientations.⁹² This only makes sense given that “the struggle in Spain between democracy and totalitarianism meant less to him than the measures of valor of the men of both sides.”⁹³ Matthew’s pieces could go too far for editorial comfort; anti-communists and Catholics alleged bias in the *New York Times* constantly throughout the war, and editorial boards placated them. One case in particular stands out: during the battle of Guadalajara in March of 1937 Matthews reported that Italian munitions and, worse, soldiers were all over the battlefield. The editors suspected bias though, and his

⁹² Herbert Matthews, *The New York Times*, FREE LANCES OF MADRID FIGHT WARS WITHIN WAR, Jan 3, 1937.

⁹³ DePalma, 55.

honest reporting was moderated by changing every reference to Italians to “insurgents.”⁹⁴ So, while pressures on reporters were exerted by the Comintern and its agents, the editorial boards back home still retained a final ability to cut what they chose not to believe.

Matthews and the *New York Times* were an important news source, but they were far from the sole target of the Comintern soft touch. That honor belonged to Ernest Hemingway. Lured by the scent of war in 1937, Hemingway had been made correspondent for the North American Newspaper Alliance (an umbrella organization of sixty different newspapers) for a fantastical sum of money. He travelled to Madrid, and was embedded with Republican and International Brigade soldiers on battlefields such as the storming of Teruel.

The counterpoint to pro-Stalin interpretations of the Spanish Civil War had credible sources to draw upon as well. The most notable, perhaps, came in 1939, when former Comintern secret agent Walter Krivitsky collaborated with the writer Isaac Don Levine to produce a fantastic exposé, in the *Saturday Evening Post* and later that year as a bestselling book, *In Stalin's Secret Service*.⁹⁵ “Stalin's Hands in Spain” and other articles described the Soviet liquidation of Spanish Republicans, an important element in turning Krivitsky to anticommunism. Sadly, he was most likely murdered by a Soviet assassination team that faked his suicide. There was more than one reason that the anticommunist narrative of the war didn't have as many public intellectuals.

Language, and the word choices of newspapers are one of the most effective means to identify what narrative a paper pushed. The title of Republic, regardless of

⁹⁴ Ibid, 58.

⁹⁵ Richard Gid Powers, *Not Without Honor*, 149-50.

whether it was merited, immediately conjures American sympathy for a fellow democratic state. Terms such as “loyalist” and “insurgent” might have been accurate, but they also played a hand in shaping American perceptions. In fact, Catholic and anticommunist publications of the times preferred the title of “Nationalists” for the rebels and “Communists” or “Reds” for the forces of the Republic. Other newspapers preferred a different binary: the loyalists against the fascists. The terms of both groups are problematic, and the word choice stems from beautifully symmetrical roots. Invariably, the opposition was characterized by the least most incendiary element of what were broad based coalitions.

By using language in this way, American news outlets took a stance on the legitimacy of the conflicting sides. The use of one set of terms supported the line that the Republic was democratic, a claim which becomes more and more dubious as the war progresses. The obverse is true of Catholic supported nomenclature: the allegations of communist infiltration which were slanderously untrue at the start of the war gained greater and greater credibility as democracy was squeezed out of the republic.

The conflicting narratives of the war both found their voice in different news outlets. Hearst’s anticommunism meant that one of the largest news organizations of the time supported Franco and voiced the grossest distortions to support him. Franco presented an editor at the *Brooklyn Tablet* a medal after the war because of how friendly the coverage had been.⁹⁶ The *New York Times* and doubtless many other newspapers maintained a fairly objective standard but used language that supported the Popular Front narrative, though the term “Nationalist” gradually came into common usage in the press. An important difference separating journalism from the other forms of media is

⁹⁶ Powers, Richard Gid. 134.

that the process, while collaborative, was vulnerable to meddling at several stages (censors in Spain and editorial boards at home), and was reactive to external pressures. Many are the times when Herbert Matthews in his book on the war laments the effect of letters to the editor from Catholics in support of Franco. Political tampering from censors and editorial meddling to keep the readership happy meant that only extremely politically dedicated newspapers would broadcast a pure reflection of either narrative. In the case of the Catholic narrative, this meant publications such as Father Coughlin's *Social Justice*, and for the leftists the Communist Party's *New Masses*. These sorts of papers went for the jugular, producing content which clearly reflected the partisan perspective of the demographics they catered to. Radio and newspapers were diverse industries and thus had businesses willing to stake claims far outside of the dominant perspectives towards the war. Films about the subject were far less brazen when it came to propagating a particular narrative.

9. The Red Tinted Celluloid Screen

The romance of the Spanish Civil War was celebrated in a number of Hollywood films and in documentaries commemorating the struggle. The Soviet film-maker Joris Ivens produced what is probably the finest cinematic propaganda of the war, although it is rivaled by a work from the 1970s that makes brilliant use of interviews with Abraham Lincoln Brigade veterans. The Hollywood movies are less effective propaganda for the same reason that mainstream newspapers weren't particularly propagandistic: they were made to be profitable. The argument can be made that the Hollywood films were not propagandistic at all, but tailored to the popular public opinion in order to succeed financially. That does not seem to be likely, because Hollywood demonstrated clearly its support for the Republic. The Spanish Civil War "roused eager partisanship for the anti-Franco cause. Stars gave benefit concerts, screenwriters spoke at meetings, and directors raised money for ambulances."⁹⁷ The Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy raised significant amounts of money from the movie industry, and the Motion Picture Artists Committee purchased eighteen trucks for the Madrid government.⁹⁸ The depiction of the Rebels and the Republic in most of the major films on the topic follows the pro-Republican narrative closely.

There were a number of Hollywood hits about the war. The first of the litter released as the war still raged in 1937, *Last Train From Madrid*, was simply a classic adventure story updated for the political situation at the time that used Spain as a setting

⁹⁷ F. Jay Taylor, *The United States and the Spanish Civil War* (NYC: Bookman Associates, 1956). 131.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 131.

for intrigue.⁹⁹ It avoids engagement with the issue of the war, instead focusing on a closed story of refugees on a train fleeing the siege of Madrid. It is a classic example of 1930s film noir, but not of any particular political agenda.

Blockade, on the other hand, is flush with pro-Republican messages. The film was an RKO pictures masterpiece released in 1938, starring Henry Fonda as a noble Spanish peasant protecting the Republic.¹⁰⁰ Fonda takes up arms to defend his land after the Nationalist army enters his valley, and heroically rallies the fleeing militia to halt the offensive. He falls in love with a daughter of the nobility, whose father is a spy working to sink supply ships. The action then moves to a besieged Republican city, where starvation has begun to set in as a result of a blockade.¹⁰¹ The source of the supply ship, presumably Russia, is not mentioned at all in the film, and the nature of the cargo is presented as food for the starving people and milk for the many hungry children of the city.¹⁰² The women of the Republic are repeatedly and without any relation to the plot, shown praying in a church to be saved; seemingly a direct rebuke of the charge that the Republic was godless.¹⁰³ The suffering of the civilians is highlighted throughout the film; in a particularly touching scene the female lead stops to ask why a woman is sitting, crying, in front of a bombed out ruin. The bilingual reporter accompanying her explains that the woman lost her three children and cannot bear to go on.¹⁰⁴ After several other displays of this nature the female lead breaks down herself, and sobbing rejects the Nationalists to help the Republic. The only depiction of the Nationalists is as a villainous

⁹⁹ D. Hogan, James P. *Last Train From Madrid*, 1937.

¹⁰⁰ *Blockade*, United Artists, 1938. Directed by William Dieterle

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

and amoral conspiracy, led by an Englishman whose only goal is war profiteering. A key part of the intrigue is that the commander of the Republican army is in fact a traitor, and working for the Nationalists. He is only stopped by an army commissar, who orders him arrested and saves Fonda from execution.¹⁰⁵ This supports many of the elements of the pro-Republican narrative, while justifying political control of the army. As if the point was not already clear enough, the film ends with Fonda asking for an end to the arms embargo with the line, “Where’s the conscience of the world?”¹⁰⁶ It attracted massive amounts of Catholic ire: several organizations, most prominently the Knights of Colombus, protested that it would “stir up prejudice, bad feeling, and contention among many groups of people.”¹⁰⁷ The producer of the movie, Walter Wanger, gave an eloquent and telling response:

I firmly state that my picture 'Blockade' never intended nor does take sides in the present Spanish conflict. I freely admit, however, that I am and always will be against cruelty to innocent women and children, and if my picture carries that message I think that (my critics) should be the very first to agree with me in the importance of its message.¹⁰⁸

While the denial that the movie chooses sides rings false, it highlights the motivation that pushed many in Hollywood to produce such pointed films. They were not spies of McCarthy’s fantasies, willfully distorting the record at the bidding of Joseph Stalin. They were acting (sometimes literally) out of conscience, responding to moral dilemmas of the time. The screenwriter of the movie, John Howard Lawson, was a member of the Hollywood 10, who were found in contempt of Congress in 1947. The plot of the film is

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ *Blockade*, United Artists, 1938. Directed by William Dieterle.

¹⁰⁷ “Producer Defends Movie ‘Blockade,’” *New York Times*, June 19, 1938.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

a barely disguised metaphor for the non-intervention agreement and embargo, as the title suggests, and is a direct appeal for the removal of the embargo.

Fallen Sparrow was produced in 1943, when Franco was a quiet friend of Nazi Germany. This movie was another film noire, but unlike *Last Train From Madrid*, it directly addresses the politics of the war. The hard boiled protagonist is a veteran of the International Brigades, who escaped Spain after two years of torture.¹⁰⁹ He is a strong, smart, and brave antifascist who describes his resistance as “sticking it to the little man in Berlin.” Once again, the only face the movie puts to the Nationalists is a villainous cabal of spies and torturers. The lead describes the fall of the Republic as a tragedy, and presents the same simple version of events as the pro-Republican narrative. The film treats Franco-era Spain as a Nazi territory. The action is driven by the plot element of the hidden battalion flag of the protagonist’s Republican unit, which Hitler has apparently vowed to gain as vengeance for the death of one of his generals.¹¹⁰ An unseen Nazi with a limp completes the portrait of the collective villainy of Franco and Hitler.¹¹¹ The audience of this film would connect Hitler to Franco, and the Spanish Republic to the resistance against fascism. Once again the use of simple narratives masked the complex issues involved, and once again it was to the benefit of the Republic.

The two major documentaries about the Spanish Civil War were produced by members of the left. Joris Ivens was an apparatchik who obeyed Stalin’s orders to the T, and the result was a phenomenal documentary which divides its time between scenes of the conflict and a successful collective farm whose grain, the voice of Hemingway

¹⁰⁹ *Fallen Sparrow*, dir. Richard Wallace, RKO Pictures, 1943, Videocassette.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid

informs us, feeds the people of Madrid.¹¹² *The Spanish Earth* is shot and edited brilliantly, and a moviegoer would never suspect the land behind Republican lines had been home to a savage bloodletting at the hands of the honest looking peasants it shows. There is no mention of dissension, and the USSR is represented as a heroic nation acting out of purely selfless motives.

The Good Fight, made in 1984, follows in the same tradition of Popular Front film-making and makes grand claims about the successes of the Republic.¹¹³ The documentary is narrated by Studs Terkel, whose credibility helps to legitimize the movie's narrative of events. It paints a happy picture of an unambiguously good Spanish Republican government, with no mention of the disunity and conflict which threatened to tear the Popular Front to shreds. The movie is a beautiful tribute to the volunteers of the Brigades and their interviews are pitch perfect. It focuses on the positive aspects of the Brigades: the first group of American soldiers in which African-Americans commanded white soldiers, the acceptance of gay and lesbian members, and the friendship of the Spanish people.¹¹⁴ It makes light of the presence of political commissars in the units, men who were tasked with dispensing communist ideology to the soldiers who supposedly represented a united coalition of leftist groups. The title and content make the case that Spain was a just fight while glossing over the highly complex and problematic truth. This movie was one of the main media works created to introduce a new generation to the Spanish Civil War, and it follows the old standards uncritically. Both documentaries are

¹¹² *The Spanish Earth*. Directed by Joris Ivans. 52 Minutes. Contemporary Historians Inc., 1937.

¹¹³ *The Good Fight*. Directed by Noel Buckner. 98 Minutes. First Run Features, 1984.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

in keeping with the pro-Republican narrative, all the more impressive given the gap of forty years between the two productions.

The Popular Front dominated the silver screen during and after the war. Fictional or documentary, almost all work in both genres would predispose the audience to a highly positive interpretation of the Republic which omits the infighting that helped to seal its fate. The negative influence of the Soviet Union in the conduct of the war, and the fact that every weapon the USSR sold to Spain was paid for with the Spanish treasury, never comes up. The simplified narrative of the war was a useful tool for movies, and its use in film was endemic.

10. The Cold War and Popular Front Narrative

The end of World War II marked the beginning of a new phase in the American saga of the Spanish Civil War. While veterans of the International Brigades had been treated with suspicion and kept from serving in some theatres during the Second World War, persecution of supporters of the Spanish Republic was relatively low.¹¹⁵ With fascism defeated and the Soviet Goliath still standing, the priorities and sympathies of the U.S. government now tacked firmly into the waters of anticommunism. While the Cold War was the active ingredient in changing the narrative, the passive effects of the defeat of the fascist European powers also account for an important part of this shift. The real threat of that ideology, which united supporters of the Spanish Republic, had disappeared. Antifascism had lost its *raison d'être*, and could no longer legitimize itself by pointing to an international threat to democracy. Anticommunism on the other hand was entering its heyday. In such circumstances anti-fascist movements such as the anti-Franco one would be judged guilty until proven innocent while anticommunism reigned in the halls of government. The narratives of the Spanish conflict in this time were not reinvented, but were a direct recapitulation of the prior discourse on what Spain meant, in the context of a burgeoning Red Scare. The meaning of the Spanish Civil War would quite literally be put on trial.

The political realm was profoundly changed. The primary difference between the earlier phase and this new period was that the dominant leaders in government held common consensus on anticommunism as the basis for foreign and internal security

¹¹⁵ Carroll, Peter. *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994. pp259.

policy. Hubert Humphrey, JFK, and many other Democratic party leaders may have been accused of being soft on communism, but the reality of their positions in situations such as the Cuban Missile Crisis and the hunt for spies shows that belief to be far from the case. The conservative and Catholic segments of American society which subscribed to the notion of the Republic as nothing but a communist vanguard were able to capitalize this shared anticommunism and actively targeted those who held the flame of the Republic aloft. From the old pro-Franco perspective the conclusion that supporters of the Republic were fellow travelers is fairly obvious. The ugly result was that all supporters were tarred by the same brushstroke; all were considered worse than suspect. With the Cold War in full swing, “the government could interpret opposition to the Franco regime or support for Republican refugees in Mexico as evidence of malicious intent,” and the various anticommunist investigative bodies were willing to do so.¹¹⁶ FDR demonstrated mixed feelings towards the Republican cause and its champions, at one point considering violating the U.S. embargo to sell planes to Spain.¹¹⁷ While he had authorized Herbert Hoover to put “subversive activities” under surveillance, blacklists and loyalty boards had not yet begun to target suspected communists.¹¹⁸ Truman, however, was on the defensive. He had barely managed to keep the presidency in the 1948 election and defended himself against charges of being soft on communism by strongly supporting anticommunist measures such as executive orders establishing loyalty review boards, oaths, and internal investigations of suspected subversives. The executive branch was reacting to the now Republican dominated congress, which crafted the harshest internal

¹¹⁶ Carroll, Peter. 268.

¹¹⁷ Tierney, Dominic. Franklin D. Roosevelt and Covert Aid to the Loyalists in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-39, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (Jul., 2004), pp. 300

¹¹⁸ Carroll, Peter. 268.

security measures since the Alien and Sedition acts.¹¹⁹ The state had adopted a position of active hostility and distrust to the “premature antifascists” of the Spanish Civil War which would endure through to the 1960s.

Anti-Franco sentiments also ran counter to the geopolitical strategies of the Cold War: beginning with Truman, successive administrations would see alliance with Franco as a necessity, pouring economic relief into the disastrously mismanaged Spanish economy in exchange for missile and naval bases.¹²⁰ Thus the government had a second reason to discredit the Spanish Republic: anti-Franco sentiment had run extremely high in the public during the conflict, and accepting the narrative that Spain was the last holdout of brutish fascism would make an alliance politically risky.¹²¹ For both reasons, realpolitik diplomacy and anticommunist fears, the leftist narrative of the War and its proponents came under attack. While supporters of Spanish Aid groups would suffer badly, even going to prison in some cases, the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade were the hardest hit in the period. A dark age of exile to the fringes of American society was dawning on them, with blacklists forcing many into deep poverty and bitterness. Milton Robertson, a veteran and award winning radio story writer, found by 1946 that broadcasters refused to even read his scripts.¹²² For supporters of the Spanish Republic the 1950's were a terrible decade, when even humanitarian organizations for Spanish refugees would be charged as communist fronts and the government subscribed to the broad accusations of the conservative narrative.

¹¹⁹ Harry Truman, 254. Veto of the Internal Security Bill, Truman Library: <http://trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/viewpapers.php?pid=883>, December 14th, 2011.

¹²⁰ Carroll, Peter. 282.

¹²¹ Carroll, Peter. 286.

¹²² Peter Carroll, 312.

Alvah Bessie was the first veteran to come under attack. Bessie was a committed communist and screenwriter, and was a member of the Hollywood Ten questioned by HUAC about their Communist affiliations. He and the others famously refused to answer on Fifth Amendment grounds and were found in contempt of court. He spent eleven months in jail and was blacklisted, forcing him out of screenwriting and into a life of terrible jobs.¹²³ In 1945 he had been nominated for an Oscar, by 1950 his job for the next seven years was as a below union minimum nightclub manager.¹²⁴

The new direction of the American narrative was entwined with the rise of the Red Scare, a defining element of the Cold War. The first stirrings of persecution began a mere five months after the close of World War II, when the leadership of the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee (JAFRC) was subpoenaed by the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC).¹²⁵ The JAFRC was a humanitarian relief group which raised funds and coordinated aid for the half a million Spanish refugees who had fled their country for France, Africa, and the Americas. The organization also sought the freedom of imprisoned soldiers still being held in Spanish concentration camps, and publicized the crimes of the Franco regime, later arguing against the massive aid-for-bases deal that the U.S. and Spain would sign. In newsletters, pamphlets, short films, and charity functions, the JAFRC sought to keep alive the memory of “the valiant undefeated,” who had been, “forgotten, neglected by the world,” and the oppression of Spain.¹²⁶ The JAFRC was closely connected to the Unitarian Ministry and operated in

¹²³Peter Carroll, 315.

¹²⁴ Alvah Bessie, *Spain Again* (San Francisco: Chandler and Sharp, 1975). 9.

¹²⁵Peter Carroll. 286.

¹²⁶ Tamiment Library Archives, Vertical Files, Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee Records, Box 1, Folder 2.

France through it.¹²⁷ In short, it seemed unlikely to be a Communist front. In spite of this, HUAC questioned the nonprofit status of the JAFRC and demanded a full disclosure of the Committee's financial activities.¹²⁸ The leadership of the group refused on the grounds that the demand was an unconstitutional infringement of the first amendment and would endanger the lives of the Spaniards the committee was attempting to save, because Franco was using assassination teams to target Republican refugees, most apparently in Cuba.¹²⁹ Congress did not see things the same way, though, and in 1947 found the Executive Committee in contempt, putting the ten leaders of the group in prison for three months. Dr. Edward Barsky, the chairman, spent five months in Federal prison and had his medical license revoked for a further six months.¹³⁰ This was only the opening salvo of the government's attack on JAFRC and the other supporters of the Republic.

The faulty logic which underpinned prosecution of anti-Franco Americans was in place well before the machinery was created to act on it:

By 1946, the two threads-Spain and Communism-were inseparably interwoven; the reasoning had become perfectly circular. The Truman administration supported Franco because he was anti-communist; his opponents could therefore be dismissed because they were not loyal cold warriors.¹³¹

The broader attack began in earnest in 1947, and grew steadily worse after the 1948 elections which preserved Truman's presidency while bringing a hardline Republican majority into power in Congress. The first wave of persecution began after Truman's executive orders regarding suspected Communist fronts. The Attorney General listed both the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade (VALB) and JAFRC as

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Carroll, Peter. 286.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 286.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 286.

¹³¹ Ibid, 283.

subversive organizations, making the membership of both groups a target of public persecution.¹³² VALB was also ordered to register as a foreign agent and hand over its records, with a penalty of 5 years imprisonment and fines of \$10,000 for each day of noncompliance.¹³³ These opening moves did not immediately stifle anti-Franco activism, but by 1950, “organized activity on behalf of Spain and the Spanish refugees virtually came to an end.”¹³⁴ The systematic persecution of pro-Republican forces silenced the once widespread movement to keep the flame of Republican Spain alive in America, and in the coming decade the loudest voices on the topic came from the other side of the political spectrum. Support of the leftist narrative or even past association with Republican Spain became a hazard. The 1950s witnessed even greater attempts by the government to refute the left’s depiction of the Spanish tragedy and its actors.

The years following World War II were marked by a terrible uncertainty and fear of a new depression. No longer united by the shared struggle of an enormous war and without the massive government spending necessitated by it, the domestic tranquility shattered. All manner of social conflict began anew. Workers had accepted a wage freeze for the duration of the war and with its close immediately began demanding better pay. Hundreds of thousands of GI’s came back to an economy that was threatening to stall and plunge back into a new depression. The international situation was not one of much desired peace, but hostile bickering between the US and a communist behemoth which appeared intent on holding onto the very countries the war had been fought to liberate. The uncertainty of the early postwar period, which featured massive strikes in American

¹³² Ibid, 287.

¹³³ Ibid, 287.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 293.

labor and the descending Iron Curtain in Europe, frightened the American population. The Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 aimed to stabilize the economy by cracking down on unions and laborers, and was called a slave labor law by the left.¹³⁵ Provisions of the law crippled the ability of unions to strike for better wages, which had not increased since America entered World War II. Its legislative sibling for anticommunism was the McCarran Internal Security Act. In addition to these federal laws, numerous states passed sedition laws allowing them to target suspect individuals. In the wake of their 1948 victory Congressional Republicans sought further measures to restore certainty and stability through extremely tough legislation. The Subversive Activities Control Board, created by the McCarran Act, put the Abraham Lincoln Brigade veterans square in its sights, as well as other pro-Republican groups such as the JAFRC.

Some of the more prominent Brigade members fled into the Communist underground if they found out about warrants out on themselves. Abe Osheroff, a veteran and Communist Party organizer, went into hiding for three years after being warned of his impending arrest, changing his name and identity every six months.¹³⁶ Most were not arrested but blacklisted and rejected from American society. They spent the decade of the 1950's in a sort of internal exile, a substantial portion of American society having decided that their communist ideals invalidated the Popular Front narrative of the Spanish Civil War as well. Herbert Matthews observed the fallacy of this reductionist perspective

¹³⁵ Carroll, Peter N., 284

¹³⁶ Peter Carroll, 345.

well and pointed out that to be an idealistic young communist in the 1930's did not mean the men of the Brigades accepted the party that crushed Hungary in 1956.¹³⁷

The persecution of pro-Republican Americans halted by the 1960s, and by the end of the 1970s a combination of factors rehabilitated their legacy. First among these was the Vietnam War, the stunning conclusion of which provoked a questioning of the validity of anticommunism.¹³⁸ The revisionist school of history attacked the anticommunist narrative, creating space in academia for the Popular Front narrative of the war to reemerge.¹³⁹ The emergence of the New Left in America was the decisive factor.¹⁴⁰ During the anticommunist heyday the leftist elements which had constituted the Popular Front had embraced anticommunism as well, in part as a form of self-defense against accusations of communist sympathies. The narrative was dangerous to be connected to, and only the most deeply committed would risk publicly voicing support. The New Left welcomed the ALBA vets, and the intrinsically appealing Popular Front narrative filtered back into the consciousness of the left, helped along by new documentaries like *The Good Fight*. As Lincoln Brigade veteran Cecil Eby wrote in 1969, "the New Left, who knew only the legend and not the history, found them representatives of an ancient cause with which they could identify. It was like an apostolic succession- a laying on of hands."¹⁴¹ The Franco regime continued to look like the enemy to many Americans: the brutal treatment of union members and workers throughout Spain strengthened the earlier perception that Spain was the last outpost of fascism in Europe. The major difference from the past was an explicit government

¹³⁷ Matthews, Herbert, 50.

¹³⁸ Powers, Richard Gid. 298.

¹³⁹ Powers, Richard Gid. 301.

¹⁴⁰ Powers, Richard Gid. 298.

¹⁴¹ Cecil Eby, *Between the Bullet and the Lie* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1969). 319.

position in favor of Franco, which ultimately supported the pro-Republican narrative. The framework of revisionist history incorporated this alliance into the broader condemnation of anticommunism, helping to strengthen the leftist narrative which was reached by a continued attempt to commemorate the Republican cause and the American volunteers. In this case as in the 1936-1939 period the pro-Franco narrative was politically effective but culturally ineffectual. Its political successes in the Cold War would be the cause of its broader rejection after the discrediting of anticommunism. Once again the pro-Franco narrative failed to capture the imagination of the American people the way that the Spanish Republic did, and once the political expediency of the pro-Franco narrative was gone the great myth of the Spanish cause remained.

Conclusion

There are two sides to every story, or so the saying goes. In the case of the Spanish Civil War, two hundred would be closer to the mark. In America two distinctly different narratives arose which justified support for Franco or the Republic. The policy objective both sought to influence was the embargo on the sale of arms, a key factor in the war. Because of strong isolationist sentiment and heavy lobbying from American Catholics and anticommunists, the American Popular Front failed to overturn the embargo. The longer-term impacts of the narratives are a different story. The romanticizing of the conflict as a result of the passionate belief of the political left has shaped the narrative of the Spanish Civil War through to the present day. The period of dominance by a rival interpretation of the war left a far softer imprint on American culture. This negative depiction of the Republic failed to take because a) it did not persuade as large a number of Americans initially; b) was propagandized mostly in media formats which did not remain in circulation after their usefulness had expired; and c) lacked the morally righteous flair of its competitor, tainted as it was by the clear and ongoing evidence of Franco's despotic methods until his death in 1975. While the Nationalist cause could be justified (and glorified in some parts), Franco had crushed a democratic government and quietly supported the Nazis in the Second World War. His savage suppression of trade unions and the jailing and execution of labor leaders, publicized worldwide by pro-Republican groups, ensured that the American working public would despise him.

Proponents of pro-Franco arguments spoke out only when political developments required some form of action. While anticommunists such as William Randolph Hearst

played an important role in shaping the narrative and conveying it to the public, America's Catholics made up the majority of those who bought Franco-as-a-hero. Catholic support for Franco was a result of politics of opposition, because the anti-clerical rampage leading up to the civil war convinced them of the threat to Christianity. Their priority was to prevent the lifting of America's arms embargo, which helped to seal the fate of the Republic. In the Cold War the same narrative was used by the U.S. Government and anticommunists to target the still active network of pro-Republican organizations and the Veterans of the International Brigades. In this case it was because of suspicion of their loyalties and likely also because no other group would so staunchly oppose the decision to prop up and ally with Franco. In other words, the pro-Franco propagandists only made their cases out of political consideration when it appeared necessary. He might be treated warmly, even declared a defender of western morals when the occasion called for it; but this was because he was the lesser of two evils. Support for Franco was quite ironically similar to American support for the Soviet Union in World War II. During that titanic struggle the USSR was vital in combating the shared Fascist enemy. America produced sickeningly positive propaganda in favor of the USSR to defend the radical shift in policy that the alliance represented.¹⁴² The launch of the Cold War in turn vaulted the Soviet Union into Nazi Germany's former position in the U.S. foreign policy, and Franco was rehabilitated as a friend of America. In both of these cases the realpolitik of the situation was clear in spite of transparent platitudes. Neither state's government shared America's values, and the crimes of both were a matter of public

¹⁴² For reference, see Joseph Davies' *Mission to Moscow*

record.¹⁴³ The ugly nature of these relationships was not a point of pride and not celebrated in the general public, meaning that once the goal was achieved, the narrative ceased to be voiced in the discourse.

The left's narrative of the war was so much more successful in the long run because it was characterized by uniquely different attributes. It was and is ridden with the same duplicity as its competitor, but the Soviet propagandists proved far more capable of hiding their distortions and very role in the forming of the Popular Front consensus. The implications of this are disturbing, as they seem to suggest that propaganda operations, properly managed, can have lasting impacts on the shape of popular discourse with only a short-term investment of effort. If the lessons we learn from our political mythology are so readily shaped by our worst enemy's manipulation of the American public, and by extension our government, is disturbingly easy. A whole new danger exists, akin to that of false historical analogy, but with more ominous roots.

A key to understanding why this narrative, rather than a more accurate account never is present even today is in the hagiography of the war. To the American left the Spanish Civil War was the high water mark of cooperation on the left of the political spectrum. This narrative is appealing, as it presents a mythologized rendition of the war in which all of the good guys are on the same team, the team has the same liberal democratic government, and the villain is of the most despicable variety: fascists. The International Brigades, which drew volunteers from around the world to fight "for Spanish Democracy," are a stirring element of the tale. The defeat of the Republic has the

¹⁴³ Many on the left disbelieved the reality of Stalin's terror apparatus. The cognitive dissonance of the Soviet dream and the seemingly impossible scale of the Gulag archipelago would cause otherwise brilliant minds accept wild falsehoods. In the 1970's members of the influential new Revisionist school of historians denied that millions had been placed in gulags or executed. See Powers, Richard Gid, 333.

air of great classical tragedy about it, and the arms embargo by the Western democracies was surely the cause of defeat. The story also serves as a cautionary tale, because it was “World War II in miniature” or “the dress rehearsal for the Second World War.” This depiction of the war is much more understandable than the murky realities of the war, a war in which no one’s hands are clean and every political party on both sides seems to host ulterior motives and secret plans.

The great political importance of the idealized version of the Spanish Civil War is what has kept this version of the story so widespread. The left did not simply abandon its attachment to the struggle after it ended. Unlike the Catholic narrative, the supporters of the Republic wished to commemorate and keep safe the memory of the war. The Popular Front had invested far more heavily in fighting the war, and the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade felt a particularly strong obligation to preserve the meaning of the war. In addition to this, the war had still not ended for the left, because the Spanish people were still under the yoke of a dictator. The genuine moral commitment to the Spanish people resulted in a continuous push to keep the memory of the Republic intact. Because of this lasting commitment the leftists kept promulgating their interpretation in more permanent form: books, plays, and films were made after the war and undoubtedly affected the American public’s perceptions. These tributes to the cause are central to the modern perception of the war, and the pro-Franco narrative cannot compare with the catalogue of literature detailing the last good fight, as it is sometimes called. Picasso’s *Guernica*, one of the finest works of art in the modern age which continues to enjoy

renown is a memorial to Nationalist savagery.¹⁴⁴ Consider the potential sources for education on the topic: History classes at the high school level cannot hope to properly cover the topic, being as it is such a comparatively small event in the maelstrom of the twentieth century. While an exploration of the historical literature affords an accurate understanding of the conflict, novels such as *For Whom the Bell Tolls* are the most common way that a member of the general public will encounter the topic. The popular culture surrounding the war will forever remember it as the last good fight.

¹⁴⁴ The artwork, unveiled at the 1937 World's Fair, remained in the Museum of Modern Art in New York until Franco's death. It now resides in the National Gallery in Madrid

Appendix:

Political Affiliation of Americans in International Brigades, from Comintern archives at Tamiment library, NYU

American Total Tally as of Oct. 1, 1937

1845
119
32
1997

Total tally of American comrades	1845			
" " in C.P. -----	1211	-	65.6%	
" " in YCL -----	254	-	13.7%	
" " in S.D. -----	17	-	0.9%	
" " in Democratic Party	7	-	0.3%	
" " in F.L.P. -----	6	-	0.3%	
" " for CP Dist. Com. ----	33	-	2.7%	out of 1211 CP mem.
" " for CP Sect. Com. ----	119	-	9.8%	" " " " "
" " for YCL Dist. " ----	17	-	6.6%	out of 254 YCL mem
" " for YCL Sect. " ----	33	-	12.9%	" " " " "

Total tally for Native Born ----	1233	-	66.8%	out of 1845 I.B.
" " for Latin Amer. ----	110	-	5.9%	" " " "
" " for Negroes -----	14 (?)	-	0.7%	" " " "

Total tally for Age Limitations -	217	-	11.7%	out of 1845 I.B.
a) Under 21 -----	45	-	2.4%	"
b) Over 40 -----	172	-	9.3%	"

Total tally in Trade Unions ----	990	-	53.6%	out of 1845 I.B.
" " for White Collar ----	550	-	29.8%	"
" " for Basic Industry --	320	-	17.3%	"
a) Railroad 15	-	0.8%		
b) Longshoremen-Stevedores	213	-	11.5%	
c) Mining 23	-	1.2%		
d) Steel 42	-	2.2%		
e) Auto 27	-	1.4%		
Total tally for T.U. Leaders ----	29	-	1.5%	out of 1845 I.B.

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