

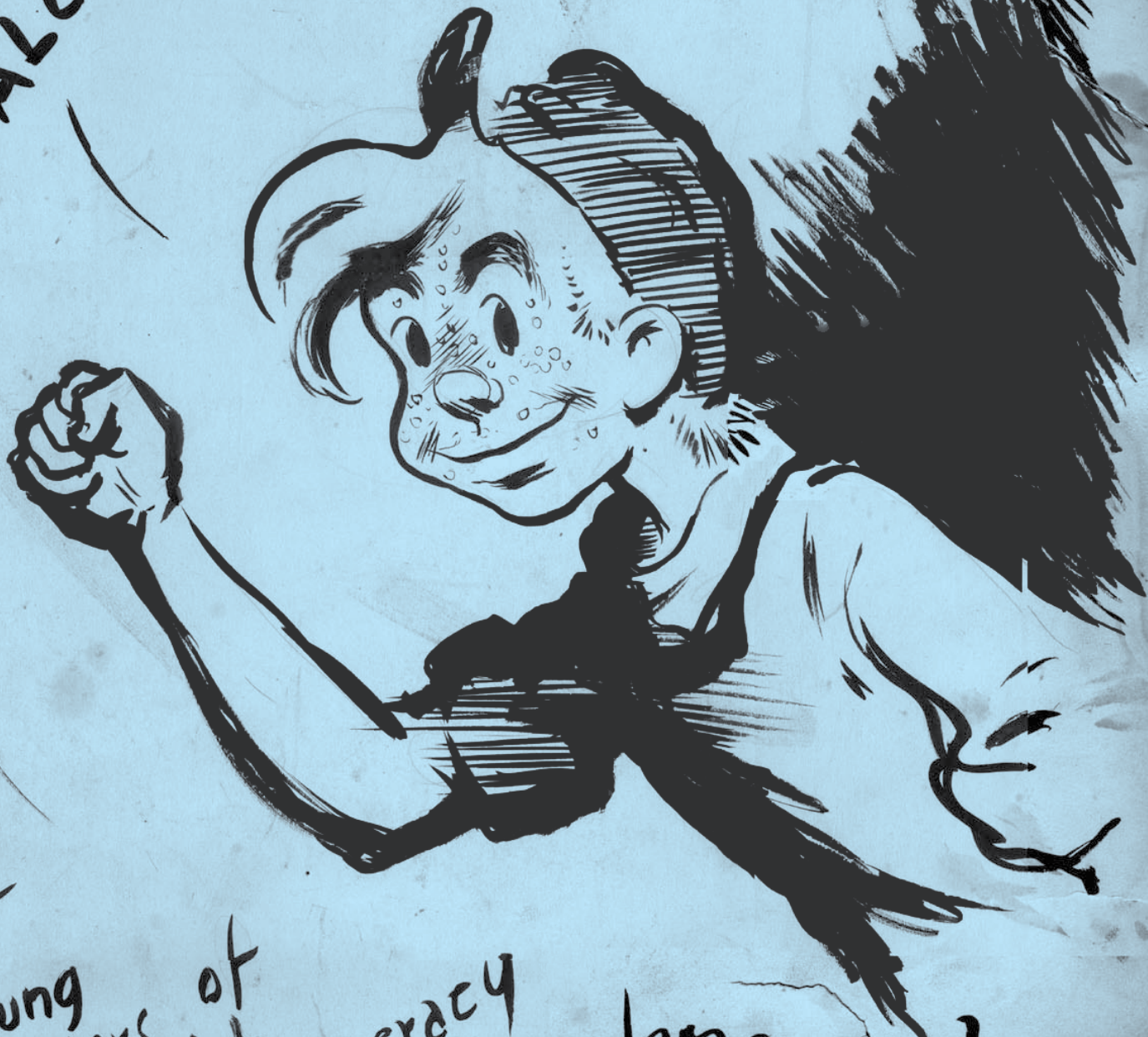
The Volunteer

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

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

FOUNDED BY THE VETERANS OF THE ABRAHAM LINCOLN BRIGADE

SALUD!



To Young
Defenders of
Spanish
Democracy

from
del

Poster drawn by *Daily Worker* cartoonist Maurice Del Bourgo as a gift to a group of kids from The Bronx Coops, who called themselves "Young Defenders of Spanish Democracy." Thanks to Jack Ziebel for passing it on to ALBA.

To the Editor:

Responding to a *New York Times* story of December 10, 2009, "Remembrance, and Maybe Sainthood, for Bishop Fulton J. Sheen," I was a member of a delegation, headed by former Attorney General Ramsey Clark, that went to Spain early in 1964 to act as observers at the trial of the Carabanchel Ten, who had been arrested and were later convicted for trying to organize unions in Franco Spain. I had a different perspective on Bishop Sheen and on the Catholic Church's unrelenting and successful campaign to prevent the United States and its European allies from lifting the embargo on the legally elected Spanish government. Had they not succeeded, it might have prevented Franco's allies from launching World War II, and I and millions of my compatriots, if we were fortunate to have survived, might not have had to spend three to four years in the military prosecuting the war against fascism.

If, as the article states, it takes 30 years for Bishop Sheen to achieve sainthood, it took at least that time for the Spanish people to rid themselves of the yoke of fascism. As a side note, on the day we arrived in Spain, its Prime Minister, Carrero Blanco, was assassinated when the car in which he was driving to his office was blown up. The underground press reported that Carrero Blanco had tried to get to heaven, but was only able to reach the fifth floor. That was about the only glint of humor in what was otherwise a dismal period for the Spanish people.

Henry Foner
Brooklyn, NY

ALBA Teachers' Institute Expands into Ohio

After holding successful week-long institutes for high-school teachers in New York City and Tampa, Florida, last year, ALBA is proud to announce its first institute in the Midwest, entitled "Ohio and the Spanish Civil War."

Co-sponsored by the Ohio Humanities Council, Oberlin College, and the Puffin Foundation, this interdisciplinary institute will allow 20 Ohio high-school faculty in social studies, Spanish, and English language arts to spend a week at Oberlin College working with primary sources, learning about the war in Spain and its impact on Ohioans—including David McKelvy White (son of a former Ohio governor), Salaria Kea (an African-American nurse), and Carl Geiser (who died last year). The program will help teachers develop materials to use in their classrooms. The resulting lesson plans will also be posted on the ALBA website. The institute will be held in Oberlin on June 13-18, 2010. Interested teachers should contact the institute director, Sebastiaan Faber, at sfaber@oberlin.edu.

Online Volunteer

Starting with this issue, The Volunteer is going online!

Here's our new address:

www.albavolunteer.org

In addition to the full text of the March 2010 print issue, the online edition carries materials such as photos, videos, longer pieces, and a new blog.

We are planning only 3 printed issues this year, for Spring, Fall, and Winter. The Summer issue will appear ONLY online.

To be sure you don't miss ALL the news, send YOUR email address to

info@alba-valb.org

We'll keep you posted.

If you have not been receiving the ALBA email newsletter, please email us at info@alba-valb.org and ask to subscribe.

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ALBA's First Activist Award to Honor Amy Goodman at Annual Reunion

The 74th Anniversary Reunion of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, May 2, 2010, will feature broadcast journalist Amy Goodman, host of the syndicated program *Democracy Now!*, who will receive the first annual ALBA Activist Award.

This year's event will be held at the auditorium of the Museo del Barrio at 104th Street and 5th Avenue at 4:30 pm, Sunday, May 2.

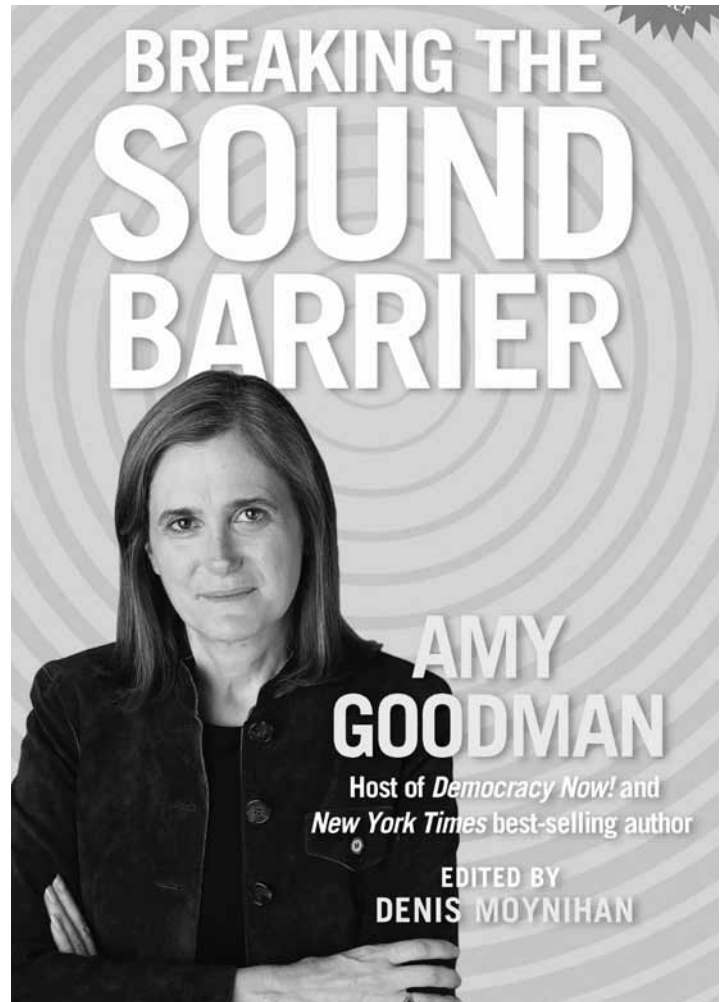
ORDER TICKETS ON LINE: go to www.alba-valb.org and click on "NEW YORK REUNION 2010."

In presenting the Activist Award to Amy Goodman, a news journalist famous for challenging mainstream media in the coverage of domestic and international events, ALBA is honoring the tradition of the volunteers and veterans of the Lincoln Brigade who went to Spain in defiance of U.S. government policy and remained lifelong activists for a variety of progressive causes. Goodman's news coverage reflects both that international perspective and a resourceful activism against bland media reportage.

The reunion event will also feature a visual presentation exploring newly discovered aspects of internationalism during the Spanish Civil War and a musical program created by Bruce Barthol.

Seating is limited. Buy your tickets now! And send a contribution, too!

For more information, write info@alba-valb.org or call (212) 674-5398. 📧



Vet Mattson Honored in Home Town

By Matti Mattson and Georgia Wever

Matti Mattson received a standing ovation after addressing the graduates of Fitchburg State College in his hometown in Massachusetts on January 29, 2010. College President Robert V. Antonucci presented the President's Medal to the veteran of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade before more than 200 new graduates, family, and community.

The attentive audience heard Mattson recall his early days in Fitchburg, where he learned the printing trade that served him the rest of his life, and remember the three Fitchburg buddies who volunteered for the International Brigades with him.

A voice called out from the bleachers, "And are you still a Red Sox fan?" Mattson voiced a strong "YES."

Mattson recalled the question he has been asked more than any other: "Why did you go to Spain?" His reply: "Why didn't more people go to Spain?"

Mattson went on to describe the world struggle against fascism in the 1930's, the progressive program of the elected government of Spain, and the failure of democratic countries to defend Spain. He called on students to make an effort to investigate the history of the International Brigades, because the full story is omitted from most curricula.

President Antonucci praised Mattson for his willingness to share his story, because it was "an inspiration to all of us."

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The War Before the Lights Went Out

Editor's Note: British historian Helen Graham is a visiting scholar of Spanish Civil War studies at New York University's King Juan Carlos I Center for spring 2010.

By Sebastiaan Faber and James D. Fernández

Telling big stories through individual human lives is a very powerful way of doing history. I am still very interested in theory, but I think that human lives—although obviously you have to pick the right lives—are in the end more complex than any theory." Speaking is Helen Graham (born in Liverpool, 1959), one of the most prominent English-speaking historians of 20th century Spain today. She is the author of, among other books, *The Popular Front in Europe* (1988), *The Spanish Republic at War* (2003), and the bestselling *The Spanish Civil War: A Very Short Introduction* (2005), a concise essay "that took me nine months to write and 20 years to prepare." Together with ALBA board member Jo Labanyi, she is also editor of the seminal *Spanish Cultural Studies: An Introduction* (1995).

Graham's new book in progress weaves together biographies of four individual participants in the war, including Bill Aalto, a Finnish-American member of the Lincoln Battalion who, in addition to being a Communist, also happened to be gay. Graham, a professor of Spanish history at Royal Holloway (University of London), currently holds the King Juan Carlos I of Spain Chair at New York University. On a Sunday evening

Sebastiaan Faber and James Fernández are members of ALBA's executive committee.

in January, she sat down to discuss her life-long fascination with the war, Spain's attempts at "recovering" its historical memory, and the skewed way in which the war is still viewed by many U.S. scholars and intellectuals. Some excerpts follow; the full interview, as well as an eight-minute video clip, can be found in the new online edition of *The Volunteer*, at www.albavolunteer.org.

Magic Territory

Graham has spent more than two decades studying the Spanish Civil War in all its dimensions, but she has been particularly fascinated with the reasons behind the Republican defeat. The topic gripped her from the beginning. "The Spanish Civil War is without doubt the reason I decided to become an historian. I distinctly remember being overwhelmed by the fact that the Republic hadn't won. How could that possibly be? Naturally you can't win the war for the Republicans. But you *can* very usefully spend your life explaining in great, complex detail exactly why they didn't. The Spanish Civil War was, in a sense, the war before the lights went out—the war that could have changed the course of European and world history if power actors had behaved in different ways. And it was such a transformational site, culturally, for so many different kinds of people, that it is really a bit of magic territory."

Graham approaches the past with a great deal of respect, sympathy, and nuance, taking into consideration everything from the psychology of political leaders to the evolution of class and gender relations. She categorically refuses to succumb to the temptation to

explain the world in binary terms. "I am interested in history because it is the ultimate antidote to any kind of oversimplification. As soon as somebody says, 'That is always the way this should be,' you can say, 'Ah, but it wasn't that way in X time.' In that sense, history is the perfect immunization against thinking in binaries and simplistic categories.

"In the *Very Short Introduction*, for example, I was very keen to talk about Communism as a social movement. The general public, even students today, buy into the ridiculous notion that Communism amounted to a kind of collective brainwashing. They don't seem to understand—and this has become worse after 1989—that it was not just about ideology. In the European context particularly, you really have to start from the idea that Communism was a mass social movement that embraced millions of people, and that was about the whole of their lives. Its significance was cultural as well as political."

Living with Defeat

Graham's new book explores the ways in which individual participants in the war learned—or not—to live with defeat. "If you had to put it in a grandiose way, I guess it is about finding an ethic after destruction. It's a bit like dealing with the Holocaust, which people want to explain into submission, with the idea that it's all going to be alright: you assimilate defeat and move on. But there are some experiences that cannot really be assimilated or explained away like that. And I think that the Spanish Civil War, like the Holocaust, is one of those. You just have to find a way to live with the negatives. Writing these four lives is

An Interview with Helen Graham

therefore something of a philosophical pursuit as well. It is a way of talking about how people live with a world that is not perfect, that's very different from the one that they wanted to create."

Seventy years on, the Spanish Civil War remains as controversial as ever. In Spain, the grassroots call for the "recovery of historical memory" of the past decade has put the war and the Francoist repression front and center of public discussion, generating a flood of publications. Graham thinks this has been a necessary process. "The whole explosion in the Spanish public sphere of historical memory—it should be really historical memories, in the plural—is obviously part of the democratic transition. What happened between the late 1970s and 1982 was a superstructural transition from a dictatorship to a parliamentary regime. But because of the particular way the transition was negotiated from the top down, there was a complete block on actually talking about what had gone on in the war and under Franco. Of course this partly happened for reasons of stability and because of the position of the army. But in the end it wasn't a terribly democratic process."

The Spanish Right has been sharply critical of the so-called memory boom, warning that "opening old wounds" can be a dangerous thing. Graham thinks differently. "The whole notion that Spain as a country has to agree on one specific version of the past is part of the Francoist legacy. The idea that if we all don't have a single view of the past it's going to be chaos come again, we're going to have another civil war, and we're all going to hell in a bucket—that's in itself also a *Franco*

effect. Making the transition to democracy—coming through and out the other end—means coming to a point when you understand that we all don't *have* to agree; that although we may see the past differently, it will all be alright."

Getting the Lincolns

While she respects and admires her Spanish colleagues, Graham has little patience for American scholars who approach the Spanish war from a narrowly U.S. perspective. "In a U.S. context, the Spanish Civil War punches above its weight because it really is not *about* the Spanish Civil War at all—in the end, it is always about *getting the Lincolns*. And therefore it is about post-1945 *American*

history. My big bugbear with people like Ron Radosh and others is that they don't know anything about the Spanish Civil War. Theirs is basically an imperialist take on the conflict. For them, Spain doesn't exist until the great powers inscribe a meaning on the face of Spain. This is clearly going to annoy anybody who has spent 20-odd years of their life working on all of the other debates and issues that were actually there in Spain to start with."

For the full interview with Helen Graham, see the new online edition of The Volunteer at www.albavolunteer.org, along with a video and a podcast of a talk by Graham on the International Brigades and other materials. ■

Matti

Continued from page 3



Photo by Robert Mattson

Mattson was featured in *The Fitchburg Pride* weekly of January 29. In the interview, he described completing his training as an Army Air Force pilot during World War II only to be denied a commission, a part

of the harassment of Lincoln veterans by the U.S. military. See www.fitchburgpride.com.

Responding to a suggestion that he wear the bright medallion on his approaching 94th birthday, Mattson remarked, "Why, I'll wear it every day in Brooklyn!"

Mattson was joined by his daughter, Ilona Mattson, of Maine, nephew Robert Mattson, and the editor of the former Finnish newspaper *Raivaaja*, Jonathan Ratila. He was also joined by Bill Gilson, vice-president of NYC Chapter 34 of Veterans for Peace, of which Mattson is a honorary member (along with all other Lincoln veterans), and Georgia Wever, representing Activists Forever! Friends & Family of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. ■

Mystery Photo: Gift to Obama Puts ALBA in the Spotlight

By James D. Fernández & Sebastiaan Faber

Who is the young black International Brigadier in doughboy gear whose portrait the Spanish government hopes to give to Barack Obama?

The photo appeared in the Spanish press in November 2009, where the man was described as an unidentified African-American member of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. The photographer is the Catalan Agustí Centelles (1909-1985), whose archive has just been purchased by the government in Madrid, to be included in the national Civil War archive in Salamanca. (The purchase shocked many Catalans, who consider Centelles part of their cultural patrimony, and angered them to no end.)

As Centelles' two sons handed over their father's work, they made an unusual request: Would Spain's Prime Minister be willing to give a print of this particular photo to President Obama on his next visit to Spain, by way of tribute to the more than 100 African Americans in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade? The government agreed. The Centelles brothers then called on the rest of the world to help them identify the man in the photo, so they could contact his family. When the item was picked up by British journalist Giles Tremlett of *The Guardian*, it began making the global rounds and even ended up as a segment on CNN, which interviewed ALBA's James D. Fernández on December 23.

Although the Centelles family did not contact ALBA directly, it was

a challenge we could not pass up. Press accounts were intriguing in their combination of precise detail and historical inaccuracy. Some journalists claimed to know that the man in the photo was from Alabama and had died at Brunete. Other initial guesses—Milt Herndon, Paul Williams, John Hunter—could quickly be dismissed. Two months of dogged detective work later, we know when and where the photo was taken; when, on what ship, and in whose company the man left for Europe; we have even discovered his nickname. But we still don't know who he is.

What we do know is that he was likely not one of the African-American volunteers, but rather a Cuban exile from New York.

The first hint was an easy one. Soon after the Centelles photo was published, we discovered a second image of the same man, taken on the same day, in a catalog of an earlier Centelles exhibit. In this other image we see a frontal shot of the volunteer in the same outfit, holding a banner that reads in Spanish, "First American Battalion / A. Lincoln / Centuria Antonio Guiteras / International Brigade." In fact, the Guiteras unit was one of the three sections making up the first infantry company of the Lincoln Battalion, which itself became part of the Fifteenth International Brigade of the Spanish Republican army, formed in late January 1937. Named after the Cuban politician and revolutionary Antonio Guiteras (1906-1935), the Centuria included about a hundred Cuban soldiers. Many of them had left from the United States, where they had been

living as political exiles. They were antifascists who thought that fighting in Spain would help them prepare for revolution in their own country. (As it turned out, at least one Cuban veteran from the Spanish Civil War would be there in 1959 with Fidel and Che—who themselves had been trained in Mexico by Alberto Bayo, a former officer of the Spanish Republican army.) The baptism by fire on Spanish soil for the Guiteras group was the Jarama Battle in February 1937, which decimated the ranks of the first division. Among the dead was Rodolfo de Armas, the founder and charismatic leader of the Cuban unit.

The discovery that "our man" may have been Cuban posed a dilemma. If we were right, the whole motivation for the issue's newsworthiness—the link with Obama—would be gone. (For a Socialist prime minister from Spain to give the U.S. president an image of an Afro-Cuban Communist would be very bad politics and diplomacy indeed.) On the other hand, our research had begun uncovering things that were new and interesting in their own right.

The first thing we realized is how little we knew of the Cuban story. The experiences of the Cuban volunteers who fought in Spain—more than 1,000, making them the largest contingent from Latin America—and especially of the sizable group that had come from the United States, had remained buried in the archives and had not entered the conventional narrative of American participation in the Spanish Civil War. Yet the exiled Cubans and their organizations, such as the Club Julio Antonio Mella and

the Club José Martí, constituted an important presence among the radical left in New York and played a key role in the recruitment effort of volunteers for Spain. Once on the battlefield, the Cubans distinguished themselves militarily as well.

The man in the Centelles picture is clearly dressed in the doughboy gear that the first groups of U.S. volunteers purchased at New York army-and-navy stores. As we analyzed the Centelles shots and scoured the archives, microfilm, libraries, and digitized U.S. and Spanish newspapers for related images and texts, we could pinpoint the exact date the photo was taken. This in turn allowed us to deduce on what ship our man must have arrived.

In a second big scoop, we recognized our man in two group photos of passengers on this ship, allowing us to identify him as the black Cuban soldier whom John Tisa, in his memoir of the war, refers to as “Cuba Hermosa”—literally, beautiful Cuba:

About 5 feet 8, boyish looking, magnificently proportioned, erect, and strong, he is beautifully jet black, with a mouthful of pearls for teeth and black, glistening eyes that are always smiling. Like other Cubans a refugee from Batista, he is anxious to go back to his home, family, and a free Cuba. He took the death of Rodolfo de Armas very hard.

(Cuba Hermosa, it turns out, is a line in a popular political song of the time, composed in 1932 by Eliseo Grenet, who soon after went into exile himself. His brother was in Spain when the war broke out and fought with the Republic.)

Despite generous help from friends in Cuba and elsewhere, it has proven difficult to take the final step



Photo courtesy of Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica, España, colección Agustí Centelles i Ossó.

of linking the face and nickname to a particular volunteer. As of this writing, he could be any one of a group of five.

In the end, of course, who he was is not that significant—nor, for that matter, which nation issued his passport. National identities were of little importance in the Spanish Civil War. The almost 40,000 volunteers resisted being singled out as heroes; they had joined an international, multi-ethnic and multi-racial coalition because they believed fascism was a global threat that demanded international solidarity, and they went to Spain despite the fact that many foreign governments opted for non-intervention.

That said, the search for this man’s identity has turned up surprising insights, not only about the key role played by New York’s Cubans. We have found indications, for instance, that the decision to name the

American battalion after Abraham Lincoln may have been made several weeks earlier than has long been assumed. Meanwhile, the treasure hunt has yielded dozens of other gems, ranging from diaries of fellow volunteers on the Cuban’s ship to revealing anecdotes of Cuban and American soldiers that had been buried in the Moscow archives. As the participants in the ALBA Teachers Institutes well know, a couple of days in the archives is enough to learn that the story of the Lincoln Brigade is too rich and complex to capture in a single over-arching narrative. Much remains to be written.

Please join us at the 74th Annual Reunion of the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade for a visual presentation of the search for the Centelles volunteer, preceding a talk by Amy Goodman. May 2, at 4:30 pm, at the Museo del Barrio in New York (104th St. and 5th Ave). ■

Henri Cartier-Bresson Footage Found in ALBA Archive

By Juan Salas

In late summer 1937, former editor of the journal *New Theater*, Herbert Kline, traveled to Spain with French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson and cameraman Jacques Lemare to shoot a documentary about the sanitary services of the American Medical Bureau, an organization created in the United States to aid Spanish democracy.

The previous spring, Kline had been in Madrid working as a journalist for EAR, the Spanish government's English language shortwave radio broadcasting station. He had been approached by the Hungarian photographer Gerza Karpathi to write a script for Dr. Norman Bethune to create a film on the work of his Blood Transfusion Institute in Spain. Neither Karpathi nor Kline had ever made a movie, but they became filmmakers overnight to produce the footage that was later edited as *Heart of Spain*.

Kline returned to New York City and gave the film to his friends Paul Strand and Leo Hurwitz of Frontier Films, who, with additional footage from newsreels and discards from Joris Ivens' *Spanish Earth*, created the documentary. When the film was released in September 1937, Kline was already in Spain, this time with a commission from the American Medical Bureau to collaborate with Henri Cartier-Bresson on a second film produced by Frontier Films.

Cartier-Bresson had studied documentary filmmaking with Paul Strand

Juan Salas is a scholar of visual studies and an independent curator of photography.



Jacques Lemare, Henri Cartier-Bresson and Herbert Kline.

in New York City in 1935 and had been assistant director to Jean Renoir in several movies in 1936 and 1937. He had decided to become a film director and leave behind his career as a photographer. Frontier Films knew Kline had the contacts needed in Spain to produce the film, and Cartier-Bresson had the experience, although limited, to direct the movie. *Return to Life* would be his first film.

After working on a script in Paris, the newly appointed documentarians went to Madrid to shoot, and later to the hospital of the international brigades, Villa Paz, in Saelices, near the Spanish capital. They traveled to the Valencian coast to film the recovery of wounded volunteers in the villas of Benicassim. They took two days off from the shooting to visit the Abraham Lincoln Brigade near the front to document its actions in Spain. The diaries of Robert Merriman, Chief of Staff of the Brigade, place the filmmakers in Quinto on the Aragon front on October 28, 1937, where the Americans were stationed after the fight for Fuentes de Ebro, just before moving to Ambite, near Madrid. Merriman reports that they were shooting two movies, one "sanitary film" on the medical aid to Spain,

and another one on the "L.W. Boys [Lincoln-Washington battalion]."

At the time Pierre Assouline wrote his biography of Henri Cartier-Bresson in 1999, the filmmakers had forgotten ever having shot *With The Abraham Lincoln Brigade in Spain*. Although the documentary is mentioned in several filmographies of the Spanish Civil War, all assumed the film was lost.

During my research on the photographs taken by the Photographic Unit of the XV International Brigade, I found several images of the three filmmakers shooting in Quinto with their 35mm Eyemo movie cameras. The photographs show the filmmakers in action, documenting scenes that match those shown on a short film that the office of the Veterans of the Lincoln Brigade has had for decades. It is indeed the lost documentary that the *Daily Worker* announced on May 20, 1938, as showing "intimate scenes of the American volunteers in the war against fascism."

With the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in Spain narrates the life of Americans in Spain from the time they trained near the front, waiting to be mobilized, to the time they saw action, were wounded, and were sent to hospitals.

Rare Documentary Film Saved

By Alice Moscoso

A year ago, film researcher Juan Salas made the startling discovery that a 16mm print of documentary footage in the ALBA Collection of the Tamiment Library was the long lost film made by Henri Cartier-Bresson during the Spanish Civil War, titled *With the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in Spain*. The discovery prompted the decision to preserve it. This collaborative effort was carried on by the Barbara Goldsmith Preservation and Conservation Department at NYU Libraries.

Preserving a motion picture film means creating new film elements from original existing ones in an effort to prolong its life and make it as widely available as possible. Every effort is made to be faithful to the visual quality and content of the original film, which are determining factors in the preservation strategy. The duplication process used in film-to-film preservation always implies generation loss and therefore an alteration of the image quality. The closer to the original elements one is able to work, the higher the image quality. The surviving print was in poor physical condition, multiple generations away from the original negative, and could not be projected. An

exhaustive investigation began to locate better elements from which to do preservation.

To find any existing film elements and information useful for the preservation work, repositories thought most likely to have a connection to the film were contacted, including the Henri Cartier-Bresson Foundation in Paris and the Filmoteca Española in Madrid, as well as a wider selection of international archives and organizations. After months of research, no camera original negative was discovered. However, additional prints were found. Upon inspection and comparison of these prints (of varying lengths and quality), the best print to use for the preservation work was identified.

One of the challenges in preservation is not to rush this process until all possible existing elements can be located and to determine when to stop the research if the original camera negative remains undiscovered. This can be difficult to achieve when there are specific deadlines to meet, such as an opportunity to show the film, which, in turn, can lead to funding to carry out the preservation work, as was the case with the Henri Cartier-Bresson film. The funding for preservation was



secured in the form of a donation of work by a New York lab, Cineric, a sponsor of the Seventh Orphan Film Symposium, where the film will screen in April 2010.

The lab work consisted of making a 35mm duplicate negative using an optical printer that re-photographs the 16mm print onto 35mm film. From that negative, a new 35mm print was struck. Because the film is silent, there was no sound to preserve. The decision was made to blow up the 16mm print to 35mm because that was the original format of the film. Additionally, given the preponderance of 35mm projection facilities, this choice will increase the film's future screening opportunities. Finally, a transfer of the 35mm film to Digital Betacam and DVDs will also facilitate wider access possibilities. ■

Alice Moscoso is the Moving Image Preservation Specialist at the NYU Libraries.

It features close-ups of the volunteers, the nurses who treated them, and the locals they met while recovering from their wounds. There are never-before-seen scenes of Madrid during the fall of 1937, the first of only two showers the internationals ever took in Spain, courtesy of the French Steel Workers

Union, and an unlikely soccer game in Benicassim.

The film was used in the United States to raise funds to bring American volunteers back home. Although shot in 35mm, it was distributed around the country in 16mm to be shown in union halls, clubs, and

other small venues.

The photographs of the shooting at Quinto help clarify the role of the three filmmakers during the shooting of both *Return to Life* and *With the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in Spain* and confirm what Kline had declared in

Continued on page 11

Flamenco Program Honors the Vets

By **Fredda Weiss**
and **Jeanne Houck**

The Madrid-based Flamenco group, Noche Flamenca, celebrated its 16th season in New York with a featured piece on the Abraham Lincoln Brigade last January. The small ensemble (3 guitarists, 2 singers, and 4 dancers) espouses a pure, authentic form of Flamenco known to very few outside of the Iberian Peninsula. Their mission is to educate audiences worldwide to this very passionate and non-commercial form, which has its roots in 15th century Andalusia.

Martin Santangelo, the artistic director of Noche Flamenca, calls the Flamenco form “a primal scream.” The music evolved against the background of an epic tragedy in Spanish history: the expulsion of the Moors from Granada and the ensuing persecution, humiliation, and slaughter of Spanish Jews, Arabs, and Gypsies that followed. Flamenco evolved as the physical and musical expression of this horror. As historian Felix Grande writes: “If we do not relate the music . . . to brutality, repression, hunger, fear, menace, inferiority, resistance and secrecy, then we shall not find the reality of cante flamenco . . . it is a storm of exasperation and grief.”

This year Santangelo and Soledad Barrio, his wife, co-founder, and star of the troupe, recognize the resonance of this period with the terror of the Spanish Civil War and the 40 years of Franco’s brutal dictatorship. The featured piece in their program, “ALBA,” is a riveting, emotional tribute to the Abraham Lincoln

Fredda Weiss is Vice Chair of ALBA;
Jeanne Houck is Executive Director.

Brigade, based on the poem “To the International Soldier Fallen in Spain,” by Miguel Hernandez.

“ALBA” begins with a passionate lament expressed by two guitars and two male voices, Manuel Gago (tenor) and Miguel Rosendo (baritone). The dancers enter the low-lit stage led by Soledad Barrio, the sole female performer. As she kneels beside the spot (or perhaps a grave) where a Brigadier has fallen, canes are silently passed from one dancer to another down the line of grieving figures until each holds one, straight and firm, on the cold ground. Suddenly, they strike the floor in unison, and the dancers explode into action. The canes’ violent syncopations are echoed by the dancers’ traditional footwork.

In a recent interview for *The Volunteer*, Santangelo described the symbolism of the canes: “They are the bones of the fallen, and as the Hernandez poem ends ‘around your bones, the olive groves will grow, unfolding their iron roots in the ground, embracing men universally, faithfully.’”

As the dancers move with increasing speed and intensity, intersecting and interacting in individual percussive rhythms, their feet, the guitars, and the voices combine to sound like bullets exploding and bodies falling. The emotional moments topple over one another. Moods

change unexpectedly, often separated by frozen moments of incredible tension. It is, alternately, an expression of the fury of war, courage, the resolve of freedom fighters, and the grief of a nation. Packed houses respond to the troupe’s intensity with calls of “Ole” throughout the performance and, at the conclusion, a standing ovation!

A solo by guitarist Jesus Torres, who has been with the company for many years, is a perfect, quiet and contemplative antidote to “ALBA.” In a magical moment, guitarists Salva de Maria and Eugenio Iglesias enter upstage and sit in the shadows, listening with the audience. Then Mr. Torres rises to leave, his hands stilled, but the music mysteriously continues. It is a seamless transition between the guitarists, which introduces the next piece, a slow, beautiful and sensual dance of love choreographed

TO THE INTERNATIONAL SOLDIER FALLEN IN SPAIN By Miguel Hernandez

If there are men who contain a soul without frontiers
A brow scattered with universal hair
Covered with horizons, ships, and mountain chains,
With sand and with snow, then you are one of those.

Fatherlands called to you with all their banners,
So that your breath filled with beautiful movements.
You wanted to quench the thirst of panthers
And fluttered full against their abuses.

With a taste of all suns and seas,
Spain beckons you because in her you realize
your majesty like a tree that embraces a continent.

Around your bones, the olive groves will grow,
Unfolding their iron roots in the ground,
Embracing men universally, faithfully.



by Soledad Barrio and performed by her and Noe Barroso. Two more virtuoso dance solos, performed with enormous energy, elegance, and an attitude of defiance by Antonio Jimenez and Juan Ogalla, complete the first part of the program.

The three pieces after the intermission are just as powerful as those that come before. Each dancer is featured in equal measure with Soledad Barrio's exquisite solo piece, eagerly awaited by the adoring crowd. The standing ovations demand a short encore, and the audiences leave the theater nearly as energized and exhausted as the performers.

Many in the audience for the three-week run were from the ALBA community. On the last day of performance in New York City, Abraham Lincoln volunteer Matti Mattson attended. Mr. Santangelo came out before the performance of "ALBA" to introduce Mattson to the audience. Amidst heads turning, gasps of surprised delight, and applause from the audience, Santangelo noted that because of Mattson and those like him who joined the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and the International Brigade, "There is a freedom in Spain. The Brigaders planted a seed of a liberty that is extraordinary."

After New York, the troupe went

Cartier-Bresson Footage

Continued from page 9

the 1970s about the shooting: "The visual ideas were mostly Cartier-Bresson's." While Kline acted as producer, securing the contacts needed to shoot both with the Brigade and at the hospitals, Cartier-Bresson and Lemare handled the cameras to fulfill the visual narrative that Cartier-Bresson had in mind.

The editing of *Return to Life* was done in Paris by Laura Séjour, working closely with Cartier-Bresson. The editing of the different sequences of *With the Abraham Lincoln Brigade* probably happened simultaneously. The production of the intertitles, aimed at an American audience, might have been done either in Paris, with the input of Kline, who was familiar with some of the members of the Brigade, or back in the United States at Frontier Films. Kline declared that although Laura Séjour was the editor of *Return to Life*, Cartier-Bresson should be fully credited for the editorial decisions of the movie, a statement we can extend to the editing of *With the Lincoln Brigade in Spain*, since some of the scenes that appeared in it were shot simultaneously with the shooting of materials for the other film.

Unscripted and apparently free from the constraints of having to fulfill a formal commission, *With the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in Spain* seems to have allowed the

still photographer to explore the possibilities of the moving pictures, placing himself behind the camera. Adding a temporal dimension to portraits of the volunteers and the crab dolly shots he used in several sequences, Cartier-Bresson contributed his sensitivity as a photographer to a medium that he ultimately would abandon after World War II, but that witnessed the transition between his photographic work from the early 1930s, influenced by the surrealists, and his later work, imbued with a humanism he embraced during the Spanish Civil War in contact with the Spanish people he encountered.

With the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in Spain shows the impact of the documentary work of Luis Buñuel and the images that his photographer friend Eli Lotar shot as cinematographer in *Las Hurdes. Land without Bread* (1932), but released in France only months before Cartier-Bresson left Paris to shoot in Spain. The appearance of *With the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in Spain* is an extremely interesting transitional episode in the career of the French photographer and offers further evidence of the intertwining of photography and documentary cinema during the Spanish Civil war, while showing unique and beautiful images of the American volunteers in Spain. ▀

on to Philadelphia, Montreal, and Toronto, where they received enthusiastic responses. For their tour schedule in other cities, visit www.nocheflamenca.com. The ALBA

newsletter will keep track of Noche Flamenca's world tour and will announce its return to New York later this year. ▀

Added to Memory's Roster

Carl Fredrick Geiser (1910–2009)

Carl Geiser, a key political leader in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and author of a pioneering book, *Prisoners of the Good Fight*, which included his own experiences during the Spanish Civil War, died November 28 in Corvallis, Oregon.

He was born in Orrville, Ohio, on December 10, 1910, the oldest of six children. His father, a farmer, died in the influenza epidemic at the end of World War I, and his mother a year later of tuberculosis. Carl received his primary education in a one-room schoolhouse while helping to tend the family's 16-acre farm. After high school, he enrolled in the YMCA School of Technology (later Fenn College, now Ohio State University) in Cleveland, majoring in electrical engineering.

In 1932, Carl was part of the first National Student Federation mission to travel to the Soviet Union. This visit had a decisive influence on his political thinking. Impressed by the Soviet system and the tenets of socialism, Carl joined the Young Communist League and became an active force in the American Student Union, serving as a delegate to the First Student Congress Against War and Fascism. It was there that he met his future wife Sylvia, a teacher and organizer who shared his political fervor. They moved to New York, where they were absorbed into a dynamic culture of political activism and organizing. Carl wrote press releases and edited International Labor Defense bulletins, organized for the League against War and Fascism, and in 1936 was elected to the



Photo by Carla Nordstrom.

National Committee of the YCL.

In April 1937, Carl boarded the S.S. *Georgia* to join the International Brigades in defense of the Spanish Republic. He served as an ammunition carrier at Brunete, saw action at Quinto, and advanced to the rank of lieutenant. Following the battle of Belchite, Carl was promoted to Political Commissar and charged with the organization of a training school for commissars at Tarazona. Wounded at Fuentes de Ebro, he returned to the front as Commissar of the Mackenzie-Papineau battalion, but he was captured by fascist forces on April 1, 1938. Narrowly escaping execution in front of a firing squad, he was interned at San Pedro de Cardena, along with over 650 International Brigades prisoners. Through the efforts of the Friends of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and the U.S. State Department, Carl and a group of 71 Americans were released in April 1939.

Carl returned to New York City and secured an engineering position with a manufacturer of aeronautic equipment. Eventually he filed

numerous patents for fuel gauges and, as a research director, supervised testing of a component used in the first lunar mission. He served briefly as president of Local 1227 of the United Electrical Radio and Machine Workers of America. Carl and Sylvia had two boys, Jim and Pete, before divorcing in 1946. With his second wife, Doris, he had three children, Linda, David and Gary. Carl studied psychology at Columbia University, graduating in 1963.

During the 1970s, Carl turned his attention once more to Spain and enrolled in a memoir-writing class. The essay he wrote on a Christmas concert held in San Pedro de Cardena was published in *The New York Times*. Its positive reception provided the impetus for Carl's study of his POW experience.

With the assistance of fellow prisoner Robert Steck, Geiser amassed biographical information on the 120 Americans incarcerated in Spanish prisons. He also corresponded with over 150 veterans worldwide to solicit their reminiscences and traveled to archives in the United States and Europe to conduct research. Ring Lardner, Jr., and members of VALB, eager to see the project to fruition, provided financial support. Five years of research and writing culminated in the publication of *Prisoners of the Good Fight* in 1986.

Geiser moved with his daughter and family to Corvallis in 1993, where he became actively engaged in the Democratic Party, the Green Party, the Committees for Correspondence, and the social action committee of the Unitarian Fellowship, and was

Continued on page 13



Max Aub's Civil War

Max Aub, *Field of Honour*, translated by Gerald Martin, with an introduction by Ronald Fraser. London, Verso, 2009.

Sebastian Faber

Max Aub was a novelist and playwright of remarkable originality who spent his life chronicling the war that tore his country apart and catapulted him into exile. As the cultural attaché for the Spanish embassy in Paris and co-organizer of the Spanish Pavilion at the 1937 World Fair, it was Aub who commissioned Picasso to paint the mural that would become *Guernica*. Following the Republic's defeat, he spent three years in French concentration camps before managing to escape to Mexico, where he died 30 years later.

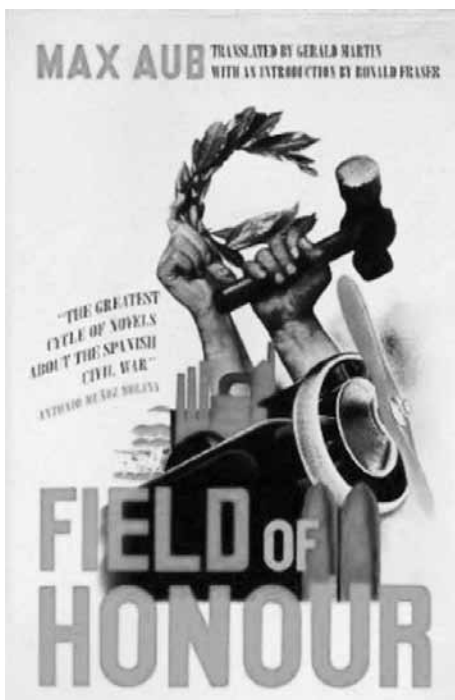
The centerpiece of Aub's extensive production is *El Laberinto Mágico* (*The Magical Labyrinth*)—five novels, a film script and some 40 short stories that weave a sprawling epic tapestry of the war in which hundreds of characters, both historical and fictional, try desperately to make sense of their violent and chaotic times. The *Laberinto* is recognized by many, including ALBA board member Antonio Muñoz Molina, as one of the most stunning literary renditions of the war in the Spanish language. Yet for many years none of it was available in English.

Now, almost 40 years after Aub's death, Verso has published *Field of Honour*, the English translation of *Campo cerrado*, the *Labyrinth's* first novel, published in 1943. *Field of*

Sebastian Faber teaches Spanish literature at Oberlin College.

Honour is a self-contained coming-of-age narrative that covers the final moments of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship and the five years of the Second Republic, which was proclaimed in April 1931. The book ends with 30 breathless pages covering the heady and chaotic first day of the war in Barcelona.

The main character of the book, Rafael López Serrador, is an anti-hero of sorts, a pícaro or scoundrel who relies on his wit to survive, a poor and ignorant kid from a small town



on the border between Catalonia and Aragon who decides to try and make something of his life.

Aub wrote this novel in 1939, during the first precarious months of exile, holed up in a Paris attic room, separated from his wife and

daughters. He would soon be arrested on false charges from an anti-Semitic, anti-Communist snitch. The text retains some of the urgency and claustrophobia of the moment.

The novel is not precisely an easy read. "The book has been a challenge for the translator," Gerald Martin writes in his prefatory note, "and will be a challenge to the reader; but the rewards are great." He is right on both counts. The novel is well edited, with a brief preface by the historian Ronald Fraser (author of *Blood of Spain*), an informative translator's note, a chronology, and lists of historical characters and organizations.

For a full-length review of this book, see the *Volunteer's* online edition at www.albavolunteer.org.

Memory's Roster

Continued from page 12

a frequent visitor to the Newman House. During this period he became concerned about environmental issues and wrote a number of articles entitled "As I See It," which were published in regional media. At the age of 93, "Perspectives and Resources: The Task My Generation Faced" was published in a special edition of *Science and Society*.

Carl will be fondly remembered for his appreciation of those around him, for his faith in education and respect for all people regardless of creed or origin, and for his commitment to a just and peaceful world. Memorial services are planned for spring 2010.

—Linda Geiser

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To be announced. For information go to www.alba-valb.org.

Other Spring Events

March 9, 8 pm: Orphan Film Festival , NYC

Henri Cartier-Bresson's lost documentary, *With the Lincoln Brigade in Spain* (1938)

IFC Center, 323 Sixth Avenue at West Third Street, (212) 924-7771

For tickets go to <http://www.ifccenter.com/films/best-of-the-orphan-film-symposium-third-edition/>.

April 14, 7 pm: Screening & Roundtable

To My Son in Spain: Finnish Americans in the Spanish Civil War

The King Juan Carlos I Center, 53 Washington Square South, NY

Co-sponsored by ALBA and the King Juan Carlos Center

Free to the public. Reception to follow.

April & May: Seattle Series

Lives, History, Memory: The Spanish Civil War Seventy Years After

University of Washington, Gowen Hall Rm 201

For more information, call (206) 543-2022

April 27, 7 pm: Helen Graham, Professor at the University of London

"Border Crossings: Thinking about the International Brigaders before and after Spain"

May 25, 7 pm: Jordana Mendelson, Professor at NYU

"History on Display: Context, Controversy, and Picasso's *Guernica*"

Film Series On Spanish Civil War. For details, go to www.albavolunteer.org or call (206) 543-2022.