

Memorializing “The Last Great Cause”: Spanish Civil War Refugees and the Re-Alignment of
the American Left in the 1950s

By

E. Kyle Romero

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Approved:

Paul A. Kramer, Ph.D.

Celso Castilho, Ph.D.

Introduction

Writing twenty years after the conflict had ended, famed cellist Pablo Casals attempted to capture the misinterpreted legacy of the Spanish Civil War, at least in his eyes. Bemused by the lack of knowledge on the event among his audiences throughout the world, Casals commented, “most people forget that the Civil War was even before the World War II.”¹ Beyond the date, he continued, most people he interacted with only saw the Spanish Civil War in a Cold War context. Spain, to them, remained one of the earliest battlefields of communism and anti-communism playing out on the world stage with General Francisco Franco on the one side as the fervent anti-communist and the forces of the Spanish Republicans, buoyed by Soviet support, on the other.

Casals, an ardent anti-Francoist and strong supporter of the Spanish Republican government that Franco had routed by 1939, tried to offer an alternative narrative. “It is true that the Spanish Republic bought arms from Russia during the war” Casals writes, “but why? Because no one else would sell them, and even then the Republic had to pay very high for horrible arms.” Indeed, Casals continued, “Franco, with his white flag of anti-Communism is the first to have commerce with the Russians, and then what is worse is his hypocrisy of hiding himself behind the Cross of Christ. Sacrilege!” By inverting the Cold War tropes, placing Franco on the other side of the U.S./Soviet dividing line in an attempt for his cause to appeal more broadly, Casals engaged in an active process of making memory of the Spanish Civil War, what it meant, and why it still mattered.

On one level, this type of active memorialization seems obvious: Casals responded to the new social and political environment of the 1950s in order to craft a new narrative of the Spanish Civil War that would gain better purchase in the Cold War world. However this explanation

¹ Emphasis already in the text. Pablo Casals to Nancy Macdonald, September 5th, 1959. Papers of the Spanish Refugee Aid organization, Tamiment Library and Wagner Archives, New York University, NY. Box 159, folder 6.

clashes against a long intellectual tradition that regards the Spanish Civil War as a transhistorical ideological conflict. Historian Allen Guttman argued just that, writing that the war was in essence “a conflict among the rival ideologies of the twentieth century.” A moment when the forces of liberal democracy, communism, and fascism crystallized and portended the following decades’ ideological struggles, including World War II and the Cold War.² However this type of historical prophesying obscures the importance of the shifting memories of Americans who observed and partook, often intellectually but sometimes literally, in the Spanish Civil War. As with all historical events, time and re-telling tends to simplify matters. This separation of history from the continued lived memories of those involved, or who claimed intellectual or ideological interest, in the Spanish Civil War continues within a historiography that largely sections off the history of the Spanish Civil War’s reception in the United States to the conclusion of armed conflict in 1939.

Memory, how it is constructed, and its usefulness as a historical topic have all been the focus of new psychological and historical approaches in the twentieth century. Historians Stefan Berger and Bill Niven emphasize psychological and sociological developments that highlighted the extent to which “memory was no longer an enormous thesaurus one carried in one’s head and accessed when required, rather it was a volatile and malleable property.”³ They continue, “there

² Allen Guttman, *Wound in the Heart: America and the Spanish Civil War* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), 212. Although over fifty years old, many scholars still consider Guttman’s work as the pre-eminent history on American perceptions of the Spanish Civil War. See Eric R. Smith, *American Relief Aid and the Spanish Civil War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2009), 1.

³ Stefan Berger and Bill Niven, *Writing the History of Memory* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2014), 2. The increasingly popularized psychological theories of Sigmund Freud helped to propagate the concept of memories as malleable, constructed, and instrumental in the early twentieth century. French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs’ *Les cadres sociaux de la memoire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1925) translated into English to *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992) serves as one of the key linkages to the study of historical memory from Freud’s psychology. Halbwach proposed the concept of “collective memory” wherein individual ideas participated in social frameworks to form unifying and coherent narratives of historical thought that led to the present. This could be put to both good and evil purpose, as his later revisions pointed towards Nazi revisionism as a clear example of memory-making. Historians of the Annales School, like Lucian Febvre and Marc

can be no doubt that the impact of memory on the course of history would seem fundamental to developments certainly in the twentieth century.”⁴ For American observers overseas, or in some cases the young radical leftist Americans who traveled to Spain to join in the conflict, the meaning and legacy of the Spanish Civil War remained constantly changing and evolving as the years went on.⁵

Aside from the Abraham Lincoln Brigade (ALB), a volunteer force of American citizens who fought for the International Brigades against Franco in the war, one large group of American residents looked overseas to Spain in the late 1930s with great interest: leftist intellectuals.⁶ Predominantly living in New York, although many were recent European émigrés who claimed transatlantic intellectual identities, these radical thinkers, socialists, and artists looked to Spain with great hope. In 1936, only five years after becoming a democracy, Spain elected a group of Popular Front politicians to office, part of a broad international coalition of centrists, leftists, socialists, and Communists that all unilaterally opposed fascism. The Popular Front’s victory in Spain signaled across Europe and the U.S. that the burgeoning fascist

Bloch, borrowed this idea from Halbwach, of whom they were close associates, to form their historiographical project of mentalités.

⁴ Berger and Niven, *Writing the History of Memory*, 3.

⁵ The early 1990s saw an emerging cohort of twentieth-century American historians that focused on the construction of memory in the United States, with particular focus around the memorialization of World War II, the Holocaust, and the Vietnam War. For examples of this see John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982) and *The Good War in American Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011); Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993); Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, eds., *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 1996); Peter Novick *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York: Mariner Books, 2000); Michael Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000).

⁶ The lives and times of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade have been extensively chronicled by a rich literature that continues to grow. For examples of this see Peter Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade: Americans in the Spanish Civil War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); Cecil D. Elby, *Comrades and Commissars: The Lincoln Battalion in the Spanish Civil War* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2007); and Victor Hoar, "In Our Time: the American Lincoln Brigade and the Historians," *American Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1970), 112-119.

dictatorships in Germany and Italy might be resisted.⁷ Within weeks, an insurgent military force led by Francisco Franco attempted a coup across Spain that failed to capture the major cities of Seville, Barcelona, and Madrid. The country devolved into war. If Spain stood as a beacon of hope for American leftists in 1936, then the subsequent war served to further emphasize the threat of fascism for Americans watching the events unfold across the Atlantic. By 1939, Franco's forces had routed the Spanish Republican army, sending hundreds of thousands of refugees over the Pyrenees into France. To make matters worse for the onlookers, the U.S. and the European powers officially recognized Franco's administration as the legitimate government of Spain in 1939 and the continued existence of the fleeing Spanish refugees became obscured or ignored.

With the advent of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in 1939, which promised non-aggression between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, American support for the Popular Front largely disintegrated. In the following years, those American leftists and former Communists felt betrayed by the U.S.S.R. and horrified by the tales of purges and executions throughout the Soviet bloc. They memorialized the Spanish Civil War as the "last great cause."⁸ For these estranged socialists and Communists, the Spanish Civil War embodied the final time that leftists and centrists came together to fight the evils of fascism, a distant ideological touchstone.⁹ The memorializing of the Spanish Civil War had already begun.

⁷ As with most scholars, I use the pronoun "Communists" when referring to card-carrying members of the international Communist Party, and the informal "communist" when referring to people who claimed a the political orientation without necessarily the organizational affiliation.

⁸ This phrase first appeared in writing in Stanley Weintraub, *The Last Great Cause, The Intellectuals and the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1968), although Weintraub mentions in his work that he recalled the term being spoken to him by Mark Schorer years earlier, who claimed that he coined it offhand in the aftermath of the war (314).

⁹ For reviews of this branch of former leftists, their politics throughout the twentieth-century, and the importance of the Spanish Civil War in shaping their intellectual lives and identities see, Weintraub, *The Last Great Cause*; Allen Guttman, *The Wound in the Heart: America and the Spanish Civil War* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962); Alexander Bloom, *Prodigal Sons: The New York Intellectuals and their World* (New York: Oxford

In the decades following World War II, the most prominent group of these leftists, those located in New York, formed a private aid organization to help the Spanish refugees that had fled from Franco. Nancy Macdonald, former business manager at the *Partisan Review* and wife of cultural critic Dwight Macdonald, founded the Spanish Refugee Aid group (SRA) in 1952. Their roster of donors and founding members included extremely influential thinkers in mid-century America, from intellectuals with political influence like Hannah Arendt and Arthur Schlesinger Jr. to theologians like Norman Thomas and Reinhold Niebuhr. Over the organization's long tenure – the SRA only dissolved in 2006 – the organization collected millions of dollars in aid for refugees, and articulated a powerful narrative of the Spanish Civil War in their pamphlets, circulars, and letters that complicated triumphalist antifascist narratives.

In order to create such a powerful narrative, however, the leaders of the SRA adapted their memories of the Spanish Civil War to offer a more compelling account. Maurice Halbwachs, one of the early twentieth century proponents of the theory of malleable memory, posited “collective memories” that entire societies or nations could form. However, consensus on such a grand scale seems impossible, as many historians have argued since.¹⁰ Within a tight-knit community of intellectuals and activists like the SRA, however, the concept of a collective memory, reinforced by shifting political ideologies and repeated circulation of memorial narratives, seems much more plausible. This new set of memories about the meaning of the war laid the framework for a new narrative of the Spanish Civil war.

For the Macdonalds, Nancy and Dwight, and the other board members of the SRA, the Spanish Civil War refugees harbored in France served as a key touchstone for identity and

University Press, 1986); James D. Wilkinson, "Truth and Delusion: European Intellectuals in Search of the Spanish Civil War," *Salmagundi* no. 76/77 (Fall 1987-Winter 1988), 3-52; and Peter N. Carroll and James D. Fernandez, eds., *Facing Fascism: New York and the Spanish Civil War* (New York: New York University Press, 2007).

¹⁰ Berger and Niven, *Writing the History of Memory*, 4-12.

politics. In a radically changing world, surrounded by the Cold War, nuclear weapons, and McCarthyism, these former leftists often employed and manipulated the legacy of the war and its refugees to justify their politics. This paper seeks to examine how the SRA engaged in a process of memory-making within a small group of intellectuals and how they propagated that message throughout the United States.

As volunteers at a refugee aid organization, the board members of the SRA were particularly concerned with refugees. They desperately tried to engage a public that had largely forgotten about the Spanish Republicans. They struggled with questions. Why were the Spanish refugees marginalized in the global discussion? How could they funnel more money to the refugees? How could Franco's fascist government continue to exist in a postwar world? These questions all reinforced the invention of new memories and new narratives of the Spanish Civil War and its meaning. By modifying and instrumentalizing the legacy of the conflict, the SRA tapped into postwar discourses on the changing nature of totalitarianism and American refugee policy to craft a powerful narrative about the need for the continued presence of the Spanish Civil War in American life.

The Founding of the SRA: Revisionism and Cold War Politics

Although the chairman of the SRA changed frequently, Nancy Macdonald led the organization from its inception – although she only held the post of “Executive Secretary” during the 1950s, the time period of this study. While intellectuals like Dwight Macdonald, Hannah Arendt, and Arthur Schlesinger Jr. offered political and ideological frameworks for the SRA to operate in, Nancy Macdonald contributed more to the daily activities of the SRA than any other board member. She first encountered the tales of Spanish refugees in 1940, when she met a

Spanish Trotskyite Anarcho-Syndicalist, one of the various fractious groups that opposed Franco's coup, named Victor Serge who lived in France at the time. Serge, also a poet and writer, contributed several pieces to the *Partisan Review*, where Macdonald worked as the business manager and her husband Dwight as an editor. The Macdonalds joined the *Partisan Review* as part of a new cadre of young intellectuals hired by editors Philip Rahv and William Phillips to break away from Communist Party line material. Disturbed by news from the Soviet Union of the Moscow Show trials, and disappointed in official Party propaganda corrupting the nature of literary criticism, the editors of the magazine adopted a new wave of Trotskyite thinkers, like the Macdonalds, to move towards independence from the Communist Party.¹¹ In the early 1940s, however, the pacifist Dwight Macdonald clashed against the pro-war editors of the *Partisan Review* both in his divergent political views as well as his distress that the magazine published less and less political commentary and more literary criticism.¹²

The Macdonalds' pacifism did not restrict them from contemplating the fate of the Spanish refugees after World War II. As the international furor over Franco's ascent died down, aided in no small part by the actions of Nazi Germany in 1939, the refugees faded from public memory in the United States. Even Nancy Macdonald, who followed the events of the Spanish Civil War with a keen interest, admitted that it was not until several years after the end of the war that she began "to think in terms of special aid to the Spanish refugees."¹³ The lives of the refugees have been told elsewhere, but in a short summation: many of the refugees joined the French resistance when Germany invaded France. Ten thousand that refused to work for the Vichy government were sent to the infamous Mauthausen concentration camp, only two

¹¹ James B. Gilbert, "Partisan Review: New York, 1934-" in Joseph R. Conlin ed., *The American Radical Press, 1880-1960 Vol. 2* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1974), 548-552.

¹² Nancy Macdonald, *Homage to the Spanish Exiles: Voices from the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Insight Books, 1987), 61-62.

¹³ Nancy Macdonald, *Homage to the Spanish Refugees*, 58.

thousand of whom survived. Over one hundred thousand Republicans renounced their political beliefs and returned to Francoist Spain, many were never heard from again. All told, by the end of World War II, only two hundred thousand refugees remained in France, the rest having died, left, or had been integrated into the French economy, which Nancy Macdonald believed made aid unnecessary.¹⁴

With the case of the Spanish refugees growing in importance for the couple, the Macdonalds began a new “little magazine” of their own that focused solely on the pressing political issues of the day, titled *politics*.¹⁵ The Macdonalds officially abandoned their Trotskyite affinity in the early days of World War II with both relatively following the political trajectory of the editors at the *Partisan Review* away from Communism towards increasing distrust and hatred for the Soviet Union and Stalin in particular. Between 1945 and 1950, Nancy Macdonald again worked as business manager and partial financier for Dwight’s magazine – Nancy retained a large inheritance from her wealthy parents that funded most of Dwight’s business ventures. During this time she wrote several pieces calling for aid to the Spanish Republicans that, in her words, were “the forgotten victims of our time.”¹⁶ A service called “*politics* packages abroad” (PPA) served as the main vehicle for aid to the Spanish refugees, as well as others deemed to be victims of fascism. The model of the PPA, developed by Nancy Macdonald, continued largely unabated into the SRA, however with a much more specific focus on only Spaniards after 1952.

¹⁴ The lives and trials of the Spanish refugees have been best told, if perhaps uncritically, largely by Spanish historians. As the focus of the study remains on American perceptions of these refugees, see these works for a more comprehensive narrative of the refugees: Jose Borrás, *De los Exiliados Españoles 1944-1950* (Paris, Ruedo Iberico, 1976); Shirley Mangini, *Memories of Resistance. Women’s Voice from the Spanish Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Francisco Caudet, *Hipótesis Sobre el Exilio Rrepublicano de 1939* (Madrid: Fundacion Universitaria Espanola, 1997); Alicia Altet Vigil and Manuel Aznar Soler, eds., *Literatura y Cultura del Exilio Español de 1939 en Francia* (Salamanca: AEMIC, 1998); Odile Jacob, ed., *Républicains Espagnols en Midi-Pyrénées*. (Presses Universitaires du Mirail: Toulouse, 2004); Alicia Altet Vigil, *La Voz de los Vencidos: El Exilio Republicano de 1939* (Madrid: Aguilar, 2005).

¹⁵ Dwight Macdonald continually insisted on the lowercase spelling of *politics*, despite its frequent misuse in other media outlets, in order to reflect the lack of high ideological arguments within his magazine. Instead, Macdonald sought to present politics “as they were.” *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁶ Nancy Macdonald, *Homage to the Spanish Exiles*, 65.

As part of every issue of *politics*, the Macdonalds would send out a circular requesting money or clothes for the Spanish refugees. Also on the pamphlet would be a form for “adopting” a family abroad: similar to modern aid programs, a *politics* reader could receive information about one particular refugee family, sending them letters and aid for their particular needs.¹⁷

Personal politics still guided the Macdonalds’ aid program, however. As former Trotskyites, and viciously opposed to the Soviet Union in the postwar period, Nancy and Dwight Macdonald selected who the “real” victims of fascism were. Only three weeks after they founded the program in 1945, the Macdonalds received a message from the International Solidarity Committee hoping to cooperate on sending packages to those in need. However, Nancy Macdonald recounts in her memoir, “at this meeting we decided not to join them when we learned that they were mainly helping Socialists.” The PPA, Nancy believed, should be used to help “dissidents...and we wanted to keep in touch with our kind of people.”¹⁸ At that moment, “our kind of people” meant anti-Communist activists throughout Europe, particularly the Spanish Republicans.

It was during this time that Nancy began to construct her own narrative of why the Spanish Republicans were important. “These were the people who had fought to keep their country free from Fascism,” Macdonald wrote, “but the democratic countries had not helped them.”¹⁹ For Nancy Macdonald, the Spanish Republicans represented a lost cause in history. Not only a losing side that she and her fellows had supported but also a cause that could have altered the course of history had more Americans volunteered support. “If that Spanish Civil War had

¹⁷ Dwight Macdonald, “How Can I Tell You...?,” *politics*, May-June, 1947. An excerpt of this issue can be found in Papers of the Spanish Refugee Aid organization, Tamiment Library and Wagner Archives, New York University, NY. Box 174, folder 28.

¹⁸ Nancy Macdonald, *Homage to the Spanish Exiles*, 65.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 71.

ended differently there might have been no WWII.”²⁰ Beyond this historical plea, Nancy Macdonald’s sole focus on the Spanish Republicans, as opposed to any of the other various socialist or Communist forces involved in the fight against Franco, remained attached to the personal politics of the Macdonalds.

By 1950, though, the dynamic of the Macdonalds permanently changed. Dwight and Nancy began a long process of divorce, although the couple continued to remain in contact for decades. Deprived of Nancy’s inheritance, Dwight Macdonald, still the sole editor of *politics*, closed down the magazine. Nancy began to work at the International Rescue Committee (IRC), a humanitarian aid organization founded by Albert Einstein dedicated to helping refugees across the world. The IRC served as a semi-independent private distributor for the International Rescue Organization (IRO), a federally funded organization. In 1950, the IRO discontinued the Spanish Republicans for aid programs, and the IRC did the same two years later. Writing a special letter in 1951 to the reader list of *politics*, despite the magazine’s discontinuation, Nancy Macdonald called for “a special appeal for aid for Spaniards in France... Since the IRO ceased their aid to the Spanish Republicans, their situation has become more and more desperate.”²¹ With the Spanish Republicans devoid of international funding, Nancy wrote “I thought that many people must feel guilty, as I did, at the failure of our country to help the Spanish Republic... I decided to do something. I also wanted to direct my energies and divert my thinking from my marriage, then breaking up.”²² That “something” became the Spanish Refugee Aid organization.

Founded in 1952 to form a single coherent organization to provide aid to refugees from Francoist Spain, Nancy Macdonald combined the humanitarian project of the PPA with her

²⁰ Ibid., 72.

²¹ Nancy Macdonald, November 12th, 1951. Papers of the Spanish Refugee Aid organization, Tamiment Library and Wagner Archives, New York University, NY. Box 174, folder 28.

²² Nancy Macdonald, *Homage to the Spanish Exiles*, 71.

personal politics and narrative of the Spanish Civil War to form the primary means by which Americans remembered and interacted with the Spanish refugees.²³ Their roster of donors and founding members, all contacted personally through the personal networks of the Macdonalds, included extremely influential thinkers in mid-century America like Hannah Arendt, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., Albert Camus, and more. Certainly for many of these people membership in the SRA was probably not a defining characteristic of their lives – just one more group that they contributed money to. But for the critical members, like presidents Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy or board members Dwight and Nancy Macdonald, this organization bent on aiding Spanish refugees did indeed serve as a large factor in determining their memorialization of the Spanish Civil War, largely filtered through the changing politics of the most active members.

Devoid of its longer foundational history, the SRA's successes seem to run counter to the prominently conservative political and social currents of the 1950s. The SRA was founded in 1952, the era of high-McCarthyism. Only two years before, Congress had passed the McCarran Internal Security Act that required any organization suspected of harboring Communist sympathies to register with the government, and potentially for all members to lose their citizenship. The House on Un-American Activities Committee continued to prosecute those suspected of harboring Communist sympathies. Nancy Macdonald's personal history reveals why 1952 found the organization incorporated, but the timing could not seem to be worse for an organization dedicated to aiding a group of soldiers and refugees still frequently associated with

²³ While books like Eric R. Smith, *American Relief Aid and the Spanish Civil War* focus on American private aid to the Spanish Republicans, including their early days as refugees in 1939, the majority of these works cease their analysis at the convenient dividing juncture of the onset of World War II. Interestingly, there have been several significant articles and books published on British aid to the Spanish refugees as well, indicating the broad international concern over the Spanish Civil War and transatlantic connections of refugee aid movements in the 1930s. See, Jim Fyrth, "The Aid Spain Movement in Britain, 1936-1939" *History Workshop* no. 35 (Spring, 1993), 153-164; Tom Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and C. Fleay and M.L. Sanders, "The Labour Spain Committee: Labour Party Policy and the Spanish Civil War" *The Historical Journal* vol. 28 no. 1 (March, 1985), 187-197.

the Soviet Union.²⁴ However, Nancy Macdonald helped the SRA skirt by McCarthyism largely unscathed through shrewd politics.

Nancy Macdonald, in fact, contacted historian and future JFK advisor Arthur Schlesinger Jr. for advice. A relatively savvy political operator, Schlesinger offered several key pieces of instruction. In a letter from 1952, he wrote, “The committee should obviously be as strong as possible. Its appeal should be humanitarian and not political... The appeal should be broad anti-totalitarianism, but not anti-Franco... As for the Communist issue, I would get around that by making the committee so unmistakably anti-communist in its composition that the issue would not easily arise.”²⁵ The SRA followed almost all of Schlesinger’s suggestions to the letter, including adding Schlesinger himself to the executive membership of the organization. Famed for his participation, and historicization, of the “liberal consensus” Schlesinger’s personal attachment to the SRA and his political prescriptions sheltered the SRA from early associations with communism. In order to guarantee an apolitical place in the restricted political geography of McCarthyism, the SRA named Pablo Casals and Salvador de Madariaga as honorary chairmen. Casals, a cellist, and Madariaga, a scholar, both viciously opposed Franco’s rule in Spain but, in the Cold War world, were relatively unthreatening and retained almost no connection with the Soviet Union. Even though Nancy Macdonald, a former Trotskyite, composed most of the pamphlets of the SRA, Casals and Madariaga’s name went at the top of each one.

²⁴ There is a small but significant historiographical shift among media and culture scholars that challenges the long held belief that the 1950s were a repressive and uniformist cultural counterpoint to the rampant individualism and cultural expression of the 1960s. For more on this reevaluation see Daniel Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999); David Joselit, *Feedback: Television Against Democracy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007); Lynn Spigel, *TV by Design: Modern Art and the Rise of Network Television* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008); Peter J. Kuznick and James Gilbert, eds., *Rethinking Cold War Culture* (New York: Smithsonian Books, 2010); Fred Turner, *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia and American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013). Although the cultural conservatism of the 1950s may be overstated, this can be validated by the relative cultural openness of the members of the SRA as well, the fear of political repression under McCarthyism remained a very real concern for Nancy Macdonald and the other members.

²⁵ Arthur Schlesinger to Nancy Macdonald, February 10th, 1952. Papers of the Spanish Refugee Aid organization, Tamiment Library and Wagner Archives, New York University, NY. Box 165, folder 12.

In addition to the connection with Schlesinger, Nancy Macdonald sought out political assistance from James Loeb, then serving as executive aide to W. Averell Harriman, governor of New York at the time and one of the longtime Washington foreign policy experts known as “The Wise Men.”²⁶ Writing in 1953, Macdonald commented that an SRA donor had directed her to Loeb, this woman had suggested, “that [the SRA] should somehow bring our committee to the attention of the Justice Department and Sec. Brownell in order to point out to him right from the start that we are not Communist. She tells me that already a friend of hers had remarked that she thought we were a subversive outfit!”²⁷ Although it remains unclear if Loeb forwarded Nancy’s message to Attorney General Brownell, it should be noted that the federal government never investigated or prosecuted the SRA during its tenure. This serves in stark contrast to the concurrent prosecution of the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade (VALB) who, during the same period, offered similar aid programs overseas.²⁸

Thanks to careful politicking and political connections the SRA avoided immediate scrutiny for potential subversion. The message they cultivated also worked to confound federal investigation by offering a seemingly clear stance on the recipients of aid. This comes out best in the pamphlets and circulars of the SRA. In one pamphlet from 1959 soliciting money for the refugees the section “Are They Communists?” is printed in big bold letters. The following

²⁶ Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas coined this term to refer to Harriman, Dean Acheson, Charles E. Bohlen, George F. Kennen, Robert A. Lovett, and John J. McCloy, who they identified as the key architects of U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War. Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, *The Wise Men: Six Friends and the World They Made* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986).

²⁷ Nancy Macdonald to James Loeb, May 13th, 1953. Papers of the Spanish Refugee Aid organization, Tamiment Library and Wagner Archives, New York University, NY. Box 158, folder 37.

²⁸ For more information on the prosecution of the VALB under the McCarran Act, see Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Records, Tamiment Library and Wagner Archives, New York University, NY. Box 16, folders 22-41. Following a Freedom of Information Act Request by the Abraham Lincoln Brigades Archives, the files and records of all FBI investigation of the VALB were made accessible at the Wagner Archives of NYU. These records detail decades of extensive surveillance of the VALB as a potentially subversive organization, including hundreds of files from undercover agents used to help prosecute the group in the 1950s. These can be found at Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade: Freedom of Information Act Files, Tamiment Library and Wagner Archives, New York University, NY.

answer is a resounding no. The pamphlet reads: “The great majority of the Spanish refugees in France belonged to one of the two big working class movements in Spain before Franco, the Socialists and the Anarcho-Syndicalists (the Communists were a negligible factor).” In addition to engaging in historical revisionism by obscuring the role of Communism in the Spanish Civil War, the SRA pamphlet also goes on to comment that the “tiny pro-Communist minority among the refugees is cared for by powerful Communist organizations.”²⁹

This restriction of aid towards non-Communists, however, was not only a Cold War strategy but also part of the general antipathy of the leaders of the SRA towards card-carrying Communists. Similar with the *politics* packages abroad, the personal politics of the Macdonalds, and their contempt for Stalin, shaped the distribution of aid, declaring who the “right” refugees were. Indeed a simple form questionnaire served as part of the standard SRA aid process given to all of the Spanish Refugees located in the camps of France. One of the final questions reads in Spanish, “Are you, or have you ever been, a member of the Communist party?”³⁰ Macdonald even went so far as to break ties with an international labor organization due to rumors they received money from Stalin’s regime.³¹ This filtering of aid due to the politics of the organizers is completely missing from the SRA’s program plans and circulars, where the existence of Communist Spanish refugees is obscured and trivialized.

Despite their successes in avoiding prosecution, the SRA’s attempts to spread its message on the continued presence and need of the Spanish refugees, however, continually ran afoul of a powerful antifascist narrative concerning the Spanish Civil War, which many members of the

²⁹ SRA Pamphlet, “The Story of the S.R.A.” 1959, pg. 1. Papers of the Spanish Refugee Aid Organization, Tamiment Library and Wagner Archives, New York University, NY. Box 174, folders 34.

³⁰ SRA Questionnaire, undated. Papers of the Spanish Refugee Aid Organization, Tamiment Library and Wagner Archives, New York University, NY. Box 188. Translation done by author.

³¹ Nancy Macdonald, *Homage to the Spanish Exiles*, 66.

SRA actually helped to establish, that obscured the personal legacies of the Spanish Civil War while reaffirming its place as a purely ideological conflict.

Combatting the “Popular Front” Narrative: Spanish Civil War as Counterexample

For the future members of the SRA, the 1930s were a bleak period, including both a global economic depression and the rise of fascism throughout Europe. Viewed from across the Atlantic, the quick arrival of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 offered a seemingly simple conflict. As one historian argues of this worldview, “the Spanish conflict was one of elemental issues and stark contrasts, pitting democracy against dictatorship...” In this simplified conception of the war:

The Spanish Civil War becomes a moral allegory played out in a landscape of absolutes... It is not difficult to understand the fascination in exercised on so many intellectuals in the late 1930s as they rallied to the banner of “engagement” under the twin shocks of the Great Depression and the rise of fascism.³²

This purity of ideological purpose, however, was only short lived. In 1939, news of Franco’s victory in Madrid swept through the community of intellectuals in New York. Philosopher and writer Albert Camus best summed up the perception of failure caused by Franco’s victory. He wrote:

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

In its own time, the Spanish Civil War had been considered the greatest failure of cooperation between proponents of antifascism, international communism, and liberal democracy; a “last great cause” for leftist intellectuals and radicals. The subsequent arrival of World War II, however, changed the scope of the narrative.

³² James D. Wilkinson, "Truth and Delusion: European Intellectuals in Search of the Spanish Civil War," *Salmagundi* no. 76/77 (Fall 1987-Winter 1988): 3.

Historians have carefully followed how, in the wake of the American successes in World War II and the subsequent onset of the Cold War, these same leftist activists and intellectuals crafted a powerful retrospective narrative about the meaning of the Spanish Civil War. Historian George Esenwein describes this narrative:

According to this, the democratically elected government of Spain was fighting a war, not merely against a rebellious caste of military officers and their civilian supporters, but against Franco's fascist allies, Italy and Germany. Over the course of the war, the idea that the global struggle between democracy and fascism was being played out on Spain's battlefields was continuously reinforced by Communist propaganda.³³

This historical narrative constructed in the early 1940s would only be buoyed by the successes of the postwar order, with the US remaining dominant and fascism largely crushed. Esenwein terms this the Popular Front narrative. In this account, the Spanish Civil War could be seen as a testing ground in the 1930s for the ideological battles of WWII rather than a separate failed ideological conflict. Although antifascism lost in Spain, the loss would be quickly assuaged by the allied victories over Germany and Japan a few years later. Although the Popular Front narrative did not fully erase the memories of failure from the war it tempered the perception of defeat with a forward-looking triumphalism. With American power resurgent, the emergence of a "liberal consensus" among policymakers and intellectuals, and a postwar order organized around the rehabilitation of former fascist states, the Popular Front narrative guaranteed political and ideological stability among former leftists in the early Cold War.

In contrast to the development of legacies focused on guilt, particularly in relationship to the Holocaust, the SRA targeted this triumphalist anti-fascist narrative of the Spanish Civil War that came to popularity after World War II as harmful to their cause. Popular memory of the Spanish Civil War remained muddled, memorialized in plays, songs, poems, and perhaps most

³³ George Esenwein, "The Persistence of Politics: The Impact of the Cold War on Anglo-American Writings on the Spanish Civil War" *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* 41 no. 1-2 (2014): 118.

famously in Ernest Hemingway's opus *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Contrasting concepts of shame and nostalgia, failure and victory permeated these memorials.³⁴ While no public memory ever truly reaches a consensus, and this is particularly true of the Spanish Civil War, the antifascist narrative of the Popular Front thinkers offered a powerful framework to shape historical and popular thinking. Through the scattered recognition of contrasting principles and cultural symbols, or general ignorance as Casals bemoaned in 1959, Americans incorporated this globe-spanning narrative of triumphant anti-fascism which served to dominate the memory of the Spanish Civil War among intellectuals and leftist activists. While such a narrative served to unite former radical leftist intellectuals together, it also undermined the goals of the SRA. As an embodied legacy of the failures of antifascism in the Spanish Civil War the Spanish refugees could not be revised with a celebratory post-WWII narrative of success. They were a symbol of loss. The SRA sought to complicate the dominant Popular Front narrative by refining the legacy of antifascist success with some of its failures: the Spanish refugees.

Again, the refining of this narrative occurred largely through the circulated materials of the SRA, often in the form of pamphlets and letters requesting money. In one pamphlet, the SRA relates its own narrative history, writing, "In 1953, a small working committee called Spanish Refugee Aid was formed in New York City. Its general aim was to help the forgotten heroes of the first war against fascism."³⁵ By connecting the Spanish Republicans to a war against fascism, rather than as serving a Communist agenda, the SRA here channeled the Popular Front narrative.

The pamphlet goes on to say that a donation is "really not charity at all. It is a debt that all

³⁴ This is extensively covered in Peter Glazer, *Radical Nostalgia: Spanish Civil War Commemoration in America* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005). Although Glazer focuses heavily on the memorials and monuments of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, often to the detriment of other Americans who engaged with the Spanish Civil War apart from the ALB – such as the members of the SRA – *Radical Nostalgia* is one of the few works that covers the mixed, contested, and often constructed legacy of the Spanish Civil War outside of the traditional chronological boundary of 1939.

³⁵ SRA Pamphlet, "The Story of the S.R.A." 1961, pg. 1. Papers of the Spanish Refugee Aid Organization, Tamiment Library and Wagner Archives, New York University, NY. Box 174, folders 34.

opponents of black, brown, or red totalitarianism owe to those who first took up arms against our common enemy.”³⁶ While the Spanish Republicans had failed, thus adding a necessary caveat to the triumphalism of the Popular Front narrative, their spirit of resistance lived on, and thus deserved a repayment. By both utilizing and refining the Popular Front narrative, the SRA sought to appeal to broader audiences still basking in the victories of World War II. In addition to the Popular Front narrative, this line of narrative that the SRA offered also accessed a particularly powerful ideological conflation particular to the early Cold War period: totalitarianism.

Tapping into Totalitarianism

By the early 1950s thinkers with political influence like Arthur Schlesinger Jr., Hannah Arendt, and George F. Kennan had developed and propagated new theories on dictatorship. Instead of separating out fascism and communism as two ends of the political spectrum – extreme right and extreme left – these intellectuals identified Stalinism and Nazism as coming from the same dictatorial source: totalitarianism. Kennan named totalitarianism “the phenomenon of our time... the greatest of all American problems,” and he located the phenomenon largely to the Soviet Union, who in his eyes had adopted and perfected Nazi practices of governmental repression.³⁷ Works like *The Vital Center*, by Schlesinger, and *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, by Arendt, helped to spread this idea throughout the United States, where the conflation of fascism with communism, seen as being based in the same phenomenon, helped establish a powerful discourse on the meaning of government power and the

³⁶ Ibid.,pg. 2.

³⁷ This speech by Kennan can be found in Carl J. Friedrich, ed., *Totalitarianism: Proceedings of a Conference Held at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1954), 1-18. This conference, held in Boston at the Academy of Arts and Sciences, also hosted other esteemed thinkers, like Hannah Arendt, to try and define – and combat – the totalitarian menace of the Soviet Union. Many of the speeches and papers given at the conference worked to solidify the connection between fascism and communism.

exceptionalism of the United States in the postwar world.³⁸ As president of the SRA in the late 1950s, Arendt continued this conflation in the messages and requests of the organization.

Even before Arendt's presidency, however, the SRA still tapped into the totalitarian rhetoric provided by members of by her and Schlesinger in order to draw the connection from Stalinism and the Soviet Union to Franco's rule in Spain. Continuing from the letter that from Pablo Casals that began this paper, the cellist wrote to Nancy Macdonald:

It is unfortunate and annoying that people still think all Anti-Francoists have Communistic ideas. On the contrary! We are more against Communism than they are since we know by experience what tyranny is, and we know better how to detest it, since fascism, Nazism, and Communism are basically the same – lack of liberty and justice!³⁹

By accessing the language of totalitarianism – claiming that communism and Francoism are “basically the same” – Casals, and the SRA, could draw a clear and sharp line from Stalin to Franco while obscuring the very real differences and antipathies between the two. Indeed, Nancy Macdonald found Casals' language so persuasive that she included it verbatim from his letter in every pamphlet the organization sent out between 1953 and 1961.⁴⁰ The language of totalitarianism as an all-encompassing enemy also allowed the SRA to downplay the role of

³⁸ While many books have been written on this subject, a conscious literature around the concept of totalitarianism has not yet emerged. This has led to many of the newest works on the subject speaking at cross purposes, or at least not acknowledging or engaging with the claims of the others. Further, many books in this field still write largely in the shadow of Hannah Arendt, whose political philosophy remains dominant in shaping how historians conceive of totalitarianism. Arendt abstracted the force away from political action, instead positing a sort of looming specter of totalitarianism always ready to leap on unsuspecting centrists who move too far away from a democratic tradition. This type of abstraction has limited the ways that historians have been able to trace the very real personal and political connections that shaped fascism in the United States. For an early example of this literature that relies heavily on the Cold War interpretation of totalitarianism see Les K. Adler and Thomas G. Paterson, “Red Fascism: The Merger of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia in the American Image of Totalitarianism,” *American Historical Review* 75 no. 4 (April, 1970): 1046-1064. For newer works see Benjamin Alpers, *Dictators, Democracy, and Public Culture: Envisioning the Totalitarian Enemy, 1920-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Michaela Hoenicke-Moore, *Know Your Enemy: The American Debate on Nazism, 1933-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Christopher Vials, *Haunted by Hitler: Liberals, the Left, and the Fight against Fascism in the United States* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014).

³⁹ Pablo Casals to Nancy Macdonald, September 5th, 1959. Papers of the Spanish Refugee Aid organization, Tamiment Library and Wagner Archives, New York University, NY. Box 159, folder 6.

⁴⁰ For an example of this see SRA Pamphlet, “The Story of the S.R.A.” 1961, pg. 1. Papers of the Spanish Refugee Aid Organization, Tamiment Library and Wagner Archives, New York University, NY. Box 174, folders 34.

specific ideologies in shaping the refugees lives, thus obscuring the often leftist or socialist past of many of the Republicans. By focusing on a common enemy rather than a shared political ideology, the SRA constructed a more appealing narrative of the refugees.

Through circulars and pamphlets on the meaning of the Spanish Civil War that elided the fractious political and ideological conflicts of the war, the SRA established this clear and simple narrative without staking any firm political stance. However, as Casals' final plea indicates – when he says that fascism, Nazism, and Communism are the same – this narrative relied implicitly on a Cold War conception of global politics that placed the “free, democratic world” on one side and the “un-free totalitarian, or Soviet, world” on the other. In addition to being a powerful narrative device to rehabilitate the Spanish conflict in the eyes of the SRA this argument also held a very practical purpose in the 1950s: it appealed to donors.

Building on this message about the meaning of the Spanish Civil War as embodied in the Spanish Republican refugees, the SRA consciously attempted to instrumentalize the nostalgia and regret over American non-intervention in the conflict to gain donations. The SRA claimed that the Spanish refugees were victims of totalitarianism, on par with the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. In making this comparison, the SRA sought to remove the Spanish refugees from the ideological contestations of left vs. right politics, while simultaneously and implicitly reaffirming the Cold War rhetoric of the United States that separated the world into free and un-free.

By channeling this nostalgia the SRA tapped into these discourses of totalitarianism and antifascism that harkened back to a fictionalized time of ideological purity. This strategy proved extremely successful. Despite being only a tiny organization in terms of staff the SRA raised over five million dollars, as well as innumerable individual packages and “adoptions” by donors

and members.⁴¹ This aid remained dedicated to a selective process of aiding the “right” refugees while simultaneously tethered to a narrative of the Spanish Civil War that changed to fit Cold War politics. Despite offering a powerful narrative incentive to donate, the SRA’s plans rarely affected politics in the same way. This is most obvious in the case of official American refugee policy, and the continued U.S.-Spanish diplomatic relationship that continued unabated throughout the Cold War.

Refugee Politics in an Age of Anticommunism

The early plans for the SRA, while still following the PPA plan of aid packages, also sought to bring Spanish refugees to the United States.⁴² Although the 1950s saw a sea change in official U.S. refugee policy, none of the Spanish Republicans qualified under the new mandates passed by the federal government. Before 1948 the U.S. had no official policy towards refugees, instead only allowing immigration through official channels. Following World War II, and the millions of displaced peoples (DPs) routed from their homes by fascism, the U.S. passed three significant refugee aid bills within a decade, allowing four million refugees through their borders before the century closed. Despite this broad change in scope, American refugee policy remained largely tethered to certain tenets of domestic policy and Cold War strategy.

The first American refugee policy act, the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 set the stage for refugees as a site of Cold War contention. The millions of stateless Europeans that had fled from fascist persecution became a battleground to demonstrate the superiority of the American state over Soviet oppression. Refugees seeking asylum in the United States needed to demonstrate a

⁴¹ Nancy Macdonald, *Homage to the Spanish Exiles*, 190.

⁴² Nancy Macdonald to James Loeb, March 11, 1952; and Nancy Macdonald to Evelyn Dubrow, April 5th, 1952. Papers of the Spanish Refugee Aid organization, Tamiment Library and Wagner Archives, New York University, NY. Box 159, folder 6. See also “Asylum in U.S. for Spanish Refugees Urged as Part of 10-Point Rescue Plan”, *The Washington Post*, October 9, 1939; Nancy Macdonald, *Homage to the Spanish Exiles*, 44.

history of anti-communism and a fear that return to their country – often nations in Eastern Europe that had recently been absorbed into the Soviet bloc – would lead to political persecution.

This novel legislation would be buoyed by two critical acts in the next five years: the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 and the Refugee Relief Act of 1953. Passed at the height of McCarthyism, the McCarran-Walter Act broke from a long tradition of immigration legislation that focused solely on country of origin as the primary factor in determining the acceptability of immigrant candidates. Instead, the act focused on refusing access to immigrants who were considered politically radical or unable to be assimilated into U.S. society. The primacy of country of origin became superseded by general acceptance towards American economic and social goals, especially in regards to Cold War prerogatives. The passage of the Refugee Relief Act of 1953 set down certain national quota restrictions for refugees while actively maintaining the McCarran-Walters Act's focus on assimilation as a new goal for refugees. These new types of Cold War legislation cemented this new approach to refugees as legitimate subjects of foreign and domestic policy.⁴³

Hannah Arendt wrote that the refugees targeted by these acts, “were persecuted not because of what they had done or thought, but because of what they unchangeably were – born into the wrong kind of race or the wrong kind of class or drafted by the wrong kind of

⁴³ Historians and policy analysts Gil Loescher and John Scanlan were mainly responsible for establishing the narrative of refugee policy as a strategy goal of foreign policy during the Cold War. See Gil Loescher and John A. Scanlan *Calculated Kindness: Refugees and America's Half-Open Door, 1945 to the Present* (New York: Free Press, 1986) This approach has been reinforced by the work of Michael G. Davis, see Michael Gill Davis' “The Cold War, Refugees, and U.S. Immigration Policy 1952-1965” Ph.D. Dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1996 and Michael G. Davis, “Impetus for Immigration Reform: Asian Refugees and the Cold War,” *Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, Vol. 7, No. 3-4 (1998), pp. 127-56. While new works by historians like Carl Bon Tempo have sought to nuance the history of refugee policy, trying to tie innovations in refugee legislation to the changing nature of immigration and nationhood in the United States, most works still follow the narrative established by Loescher and Scanlan fairly closely. See Carl J. Bon Tempo, *Americans at the Gate: The United States and Refugees During the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

government.”⁴⁴ The Spanish Republicans formed a major section of her analysis, but Arendt’s focus on the Republicans as legitimate refugees never penetrated official U.S. policy where fleeing from Soviet persecution formed the most critical aspect of a “good” refugee. Arendt attempted to connect the language of totalitarianism to the selection process of refugees, writing of the power of totalitarianism in a seemingly globalized society, “The danger is that a global, universally interrelated civilization may produce barbarians from its own midst by forcing millions of people into conditions which, despite all appearances, are the conditions of savages.”⁴⁵ Despite the Republicans suffering from totalitarianism, in the narrative of the SRA and Arendt, no Spanish refugees were ever recognized by the American government as acceptable for migration to the United States.

This selection process can be best examined in comparison with one of the most famous episodes of refugee politics in the 1950s, the Hungarian Crisis of 1956. Part of the Soviet bloc, Hungarian students and activists rebelled against the Stalinist government in 1956 hoping to capitalize on the confusion following the death of Stalin. In response, the U.S.S.R. invaded Hungary causing floods of refugees to flee into Austria and Yugoslavia. In the U.S. an emerging consensus among conservatives that American foreign policy should focus on “liberating” Soviet satellite states led Eisenhower to implement a radical new refugee policy: the parole. The parole system allowed for selective extensions of the Refugee Relief Act quota system based on presidential authority. Roughly 38,000 Hungarians were allowed into the United States, the most of any asylum-offering nation. The parole offered the president almost unilateral power in deciding who were the “right” refugees and for the entirety of the 1950s that definition focused on those fleeing from Soviet persecution. Although that definition would change by 1960, when

⁴⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1951), 294.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 302.

Kennedy allowed Cubans fleeing Castro access to the United States, the Spanish Republicans never qualified for the parole. The language of totalitarianism offered a convenient process for the SRA to access nostalgia, but the particulars of the Spanish Republicans could not be wholly obscured by the rhetoric. Although the Republicans were refugees, they were fleeing from Franco, not out of fear of Soviet persecution.

One particular event reinforced this separation only one year later. In 1957 six Spanish sailors in the Spanish Navy jumped ship when their boat neared the west coast of the United States. U.S. Navy forces seized them and their requests for political asylum were ignored. One sailor reportedly claimed, “We have dreamed of getting away from the Franco regime all of our lives.”⁴⁶ After a short internment in a Navy camp, the sailors were returned to Spain “because the U.S. Immigration Service and the U.S. Navy regard them as deserters.”⁴⁷ The spread of this story led to one editorial quip in the *New York Post* where the author posed the question, “When is a refugee from totalitarianism a hero and when is he a deserter?” The answer, “when he flees from communism, he’s a hero, when he flees from fascism, he’s a deserter.”⁴⁸ While the simplification of totalitarianism offered narrative benefits for the SRA, it still collided against U.S. refugee policy in ways that restricted the terminology’s success.

The SRA found this as one of the few limits of this “totalitarian” simplification. Although indicting Franco as a totalitarian allowed the SRA to tap into a powerful discourse on the origins of dictatorship that stretched back decades, it had little political consequence in the United States or Spain. Franco continued to live on with little regard for the changing world. Not until 1975, when most of the Spanish Republican refugees had actually already died, did Franco finally pass

⁴⁶ “Democracy’s Cold Shoulder”, *New York Post Editorials*, August 6th, 1957. A clipping of this newspaper can be found in Papers of the Spanish Refugee Aid organization, Tamiment Library and Wagner Archives, New York University, NY. Box 175, folder 20.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

away, still a stalwart Cold War ally of the United States. So in purely political terms the SRA had little success in shaping the political debate on Franco's rule, but their complication of the "Popular Front" narrative proved more successful. By adding the Spanish refugees as a necessary consideration tacked onto the triumphalism of antifascism, the SRA spread the celebratory message of totalitarian defeat while also instrumentalizing nostalgia and regret over the loss in Spain. This narrative which placed the Spanish Civil War as an ideological conflict of democracy vs. authoritarianism served as the key narrative in almost all historiography on the Spanish Civil War that came out in the early Cold War. It remained relatively uncontested for decades.⁴⁹

For Nancy Macdonald, and the other leaders of the SRA, the Spanish Civil War remained a key touchstone of identity and politics well into the 1950s. However the conflict did not remain an unchanging transhistorical moment for these leftist intellectuals and activists, as many historians tacitly argue. Surrounded by radical changes in the acceptability of politics, the language of totalitarianism, and U.S. refugee policy the SRA attempted to pioneer a narrative that could effect change in the world, guided by their own changing politics. They deployed the shifting legacy of the Spanish Civil War to tap into nostalgia, to make money from donors, and to avoid governmental persecution. For these people, the Spanish Civil War had stayed alive, and they put it to extensive use.

⁴⁹ George Esenwein, "The Persistence of Politics: The Impact of the Cold War on Anglo-American Writings on the Spanish Civil War" *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* 41 no. 1-2 (2014): 118-122.