

*ROJOS, MOROS, Y NEGROS*

RACE AND THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

by

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(Under the Direction of John H. Morrow, Jr.)

ABSTRACT

This work examines the attitudes regarding race of both the Nationalist and Republican during the Spanish Civil War in order to investigate what effects race had on the conflict's course and outcome. Additionally, it explores the wartime influx of non-Spaniards to learn more about Spanish conceptions of their own racial identity during the Civil War. Nearly every conflict of the 1930s was imbued with a racial facet because of the prevalence of racial theory and the imperialist system that governed so much of the globe. This was the age of eugenics, colonies, and a deeply racial construction of national identity all over Europe and indeed the world. The Spanish Civil War must be understood within these cultural and ideological currents to truly comprehend what took place. With these factors in mind, this thesis undertakes to explicate the role of race both materially and mentally in the Spanish Civil War.

INDEX WORDS: Spanish Civil War, Spain, Race, Imperialism, Moors, Spanish Morocco, Francisco Franco

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## Introduction

### *Reconquista* Redux

Historians as well as the general public have long regarded the Spanish Civil War as much more than an internal conflict among Spaniards. As the first clash between the two ideological juggernauts of the 1930s, Fascism and Communism, the three years of conflict on the Iberian Peninsula have often been presented as the opening salvo of the Second World War. In this larger international context the intervention of non-Spaniards is well known and documented. Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy sent enormous quantities of men and materiel in support of the Nationalists' military rebellion. Images of Guernica are etched in the historical memory in association with the German Condor Legion as the proving ground for the *Blitzkrieg* tactics that would shortly take Europe by storm. Less well known but more numerous was the *Corpo Truppe Volontarie* sent by Mussolini, of whom perhaps 75,000 would eventually serve in Spain.<sup>1</sup> The Republican forces received Soviet aid and thousands of idealistic volunteers fighting their own battles against Fascism, with George Orwell being perhaps the most famous of these volunteers. The liberal democracies of Western Europe, however, largely maintained a neutral stance hoping to avoid being drawn into a wider war. Perhaps reflecting the Eurocentric nature of the historiography of the Spanish Civil War, these are often the first groups that come to mind when discussing foreign intervention in the conflict.

Yet this represents only a partial accounting of non-Spanish involvement in the Civil War and ignores the very first days of the *alazamiento*. The Nationalist uprising began not on the Spanish mainland, but across the straits of Gibraltar in Spanish Morocco in what Gabriel Jackson

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<sup>1</sup> Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (revised) (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 938.

has termed “the Achilles’ heel of the Spanish Republic.”<sup>2</sup> Spanish Morocco would also serve as the initial base of operations for the man who, after absconding from his post in the Canary Islands to take command of the Army of Africa, came to lead the Nationalist war effort and Spain itself for over three decades: Francisco Franco. The first shots of the war were fired in Spanish Morocco and its native inhabitants were to have an enormous impact on the Spanish Civil War from the outset. By war’s end, between sixty and seventy thousand Moroccan soldiers would see combat as part of the Nationalist war effort.<sup>3</sup> They played an integral role in the rebellion’s success and represented the second largest foreign contingent in Spain behind only the Italians. These units were among the most battle ready and highly regarded formations in the Spanish Army. In short order they also became the most feared soldiers in the Nationalist coalition due in no small measure to racially based fears of these modern Moors.

In response to the key role that African troops played from the outset of the Nationalist rebellion it might seem odd that a detailed study of race in the Spanish Civil War has yet to appear. The lack of scholarship on the subject becomes even more remarkable in light of the fact that the Republicans joined their Nationalist foes in employing non-Spanish troops, though on a more modest scale and in a notably different manner. George Esenwein notes that a number of “African Americans and African volunteers... partly motivated by the identification of fascism with racism,” served on behalf of Republican Spain.<sup>4</sup> A large number of international Jewish volunteers similarly sought the opportunity to strike back against Fascism and its fellow traveler anti-Semitism by fighting with the Popular Front forces in Spain.<sup>5</sup> Although the Jewish troops were almost always of European or American origin, their position as a racially distinct group

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<sup>2</sup> Gabriel Jackson, *The Second Spanish Republic and the Spanish Civil War 1931-1939* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 232.

<sup>3</sup> George R. Esenwein, *The Spanish Civil War, A Modern Tragedy* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2005) 153.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Esenwein, 159.



was recognized by Republicans and emphasized by the Nationalists. That a number of foreign participants viewed the conflict in racial terms and were racially distinct from the Spanish population alone merits inquiry into the role of race in the Spanish Civil War. The need for such a study becomes even more pressing when one takes into account the Spain's historical relationship with the issues of race.

The Moroccans fighting with the Nationalist rebels did not mark the first North African foray into Spanish affairs. Spain's history with Muslim North Africans began with the "Arab and Berber Muslims who colonized the Iberian Peninsula in Ad 711," in short, the invasion of the Moors.<sup>6</sup> The Spanish nation was forged in opposition to the Moorish presence in Iberia during a nearly eight-century struggle against Muslim rule, the *Reconquista*. This 'reconquest' imbued the regions that would come to form the modern Spanish state with a strong Catholic identity particularly hostile to non-Christians. One manifestation of this animosity was the doctrine of *limpieza de sangre* or blood purity first promulgated in Toledo in 1449.<sup>7</sup> The statutes that followed regarded Jewish or Muslim blood as inferior to Christian blood which made one liable to moral corruption; consequently banning those who possessed such blood from offices, professions, and marriage to Old Christians.<sup>8</sup> The exclusion of Muslims and Jews from this conception of the Spanish nation became unmistakably clear as both groups were ordered either to convert to Christianity or flee the peninsula. Ferdinand and Isabella formally expelled Spain's Jewish population with the Alhambra Decree in 1492, but as Americo Castro highlights, regional massacres and expulsions of Jews began as early as 1391.<sup>9</sup> The Moors were systematically

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<sup>6</sup> Daniela Flesler, *The Return of the Moor*, (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2008), 3.

<sup>7</sup> Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Isaac, and Joseph Ziegler, eds., *The Origins of Racism in the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 254.

<sup>8</sup> Feldon, Isaac, and Ziegler, 242.

<sup>9</sup> Americo Castro, *The Spaniards, An Introduction to Their History*, Translated by William F. King and Selma Margaretten (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 60.

driven from Spain culminating with the completion of the *Reconquista* in 1492. Muslims who chose to remain in Spain following the fall of Granada converted and became known as *moriscos*, but their stay was cut short when in 1609 King Phillip III decided to end “an Islamic diaspora in Spain by reuniting the moriscos- Muslims in their hearts- with their coreligionists in the Maghreb.”<sup>10</sup> Though some *moriscos* may well have taken issue with King Phillip’s analysis of their situation and subsequent decision, the last non-Spanish group was now expelled from Spain. The expulsions also illustrate the extent to which race and religion are intertwined in Spain because of “the refusal to recognize Muslims and Jews as an intrinsic part of Spanish identity.”<sup>11</sup> These two groups, serving as the non-Spanish peoples who had been expelled from the country, reinforced the idea that those who remained must be Spaniards.

Although Spain lacked any significant racially distinct populations within its borders by the early seventeenth century, the expulsions did not herald an end to race based thought in the country. For as the peninsular re-conquest was coming to an end, Spain set out on a new series of expeditions that would not only revolutionize global affairs, but also deeply influence Spanish ideas on race from 1492 onwards.<sup>12</sup> Even historians like Barbara Fuchs who reject the representation of Spanish conquests in the New World as a repetition of the *Reconquista* acknowledge that “the historical revival of it as a model to galvanize the Spanish not only in the New World but also in the Mediterranean is undeniable.”<sup>13</sup> Spanish experiences in the Americas strengthened the link between Catholicism and Spanish racial identity, which Teun A. Van Dijk

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<sup>10</sup> Benjamin Ehlers, “Violence and Diaspora in the Morisco Communities of Valencia,” Paper presented to UGA History Department, 1.

<sup>11</sup> Flesler, 28.

<sup>12</sup> While any detailed discussion of Spanish exploration and colonization in the New World is made impossible by the focus of this work, a brief examination of the effects of Empire on Spanish racial thought is necessary to understand the development of racial ideas prior to the Spanish Civil War.

<sup>13</sup> Barbara Fuchs, *Mimesis and Empire: The New World, Islam, and European Identities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 8.

notes served as “the basis for the judgment of Others,” both in Spain and the colonies.<sup>14</sup> Racist thinking in the Spanish empire reached a dubious pinnacle of racial categorization in Latin America represented by the “casta paintings” which attempted to catalogue racial groups “based on degrees of relationship and graduations of skin colour running the full spectrum from white to black.”<sup>15</sup> Such concerns over racial categorization may have had limited applicability in Spain, especially after the loss of Spain’s remaining colonies in 1898, as Joshua Goode notes.<sup>16</sup> The development of such ideas, however, suggests that an attentiveness to racial concerns remained among Spanish policy makers despite a relatively homogenous domestic population.

Spain, virtually alone among major European nations, lacked significant racial minorities within its borders during the 1930s. Unless one counts the distinct cultural communities of Basque, Catalanian, and Galician peoples as separate races, no internal racial diversity existed. The idea that these groups were racially different is not an idle one, especially in the case of the Basques whose “nationalism was racially derived and exclusive, rather than linguistically based and therefore much more willing to assimilate immigrants, as was Catalanism.”<sup>17</sup> Even the Basque community, however, was included in the “idea of Spain as coterminous with Catholicism, *Hispanismo*, the corporative state, [and]... Francoist National-Catholicism [that] was born during the Dictatorship of Primo de Rivera,” in the 1920s.<sup>18</sup> Thus, Basques and other communities were included in the conception of the Spanish race and nation in a way that would

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<sup>14</sup> Teun A. Van Dijk, *Racism and Discourse in Spain and Latin America* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2005), 14.

<sup>15</sup> J.H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World, Britain and Spain in America 1492-1830* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 170.

<sup>16</sup> Joshua Goode, *Impurity of Blood, Defining Race in Spain, 1870-1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 13-14.

<sup>17</sup> Helen Graham and Jo Labanyi, eds., *Spanish Cultural Studies, an Introduction: The Struggle for Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1995), 37.

<sup>18</sup> Alejandro Quiroga, *Making Spaniards: Primo de Rivera and the Nationalization of the Masses, 1923-30* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 188.

have been impossible for the Jewish community in Nazi Germany. Despite significant cultural differences, Spain was by and large racially homogeneous in the early twentieth century.

The basis for this homogeneity has served as one of the more divisive disputes in Spanish historiography. In this debate, Americo Castro's theory of *convivencia* positing a Spanish race created through centuries of Moorish, Jewish, and Christian intermingling holds sway for a number of scholars.<sup>19</sup> Others side with Claudio Sanchez-Albornoz's assertion that a "raza hispana" preceded the Moorish conquest and emerged following the expulsion of the Jewish and Muslim populations.<sup>20</sup> Yet, whether one sides with Castro or Snachez-Albornoz is unimportant for the purposes of this study. Regardless of whether the Spanish race was a Jewish, Muslim, Christian hybrid or an essential *raza*, each theory provides for a unique and homogeneous Spanish race. Indeed, as David Nirenberg notes, Castro's emphasis on the "'cultural' traits of Jews and converts are startlingly similar... to those 'racial' ones listed by Renan or his disciples (which on this score included the champion of the 'raza hispana' and Castro's arch-rival, Claudio Sanchez Albornoz.)"<sup>21</sup> The debate over Spanish racial characteristics was not confined to Spaniards' views of themselves and a number of foreigners weighed in on the issue of race in Spain.

Outside of Spain there was "a long history of accusing Spain of being 'impure' in racial, cultural, and religious terms because of its connection to oriental and African elements and the mingling of Christians with Jews and Arabs."<sup>22</sup> The 'other' that Spaniards, especially those in the Nationalist camp, sought to define themselves by was seen as an essential part of what made Spaniards distinct. This contributed to an image of Spain "more akin to Africa than to Europe,

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<sup>19</sup> Castro, 584.

<sup>20</sup> Claudio Sanchez Albornoz, *Espana, un enigma historico*, Tomo I (Barcelona: Edhasa, 1973), 13.

<sup>21</sup> Feldon, Isaac, and Ziegler, 247.

<sup>22</sup> Flesler, 20.

encompassed in the French saying ‘Africa begins at the Pyrenees.’”<sup>23</sup> For some non-Spaniards, Spain was racially homogenous due to its connections to Jews or Moors rather than their distinction from them. In the bizarre yet influential view of Adolf Hitler, “the only superior racial element in the Spanish people, the Visigoths, had been heavily diluted... He believed that the highest culture ever seen in Spain was that of the Muslims since it was so refreshingly non-Christian.”<sup>24</sup> Aside from reinforcing the fact that other Europeans viewed Spain as different because of its mixed racial and cultural history, Hitler also demonstrates the linkage of religion and race in Spain. The connection in Hitler’s mind between Spaniards and Catholicism is further illustrated by the fact that the only notable mention of Spain in *Mein Kampf* refers to its lack of denominational factions which enabled fights “against clericalism or Ultramontanism, without running a risk,” of sparking sectarian conflict.<sup>25</sup> Other European nation’s marked Spain’s racial distinctiveness based on its history of cross-pollination and connection to Catholicism. It was thus a Spain of Spaniards that descended into bloodshed, for both the country’s inhabitants, as well as much of the rest of Europe. These views were informed not only by Spanish history, but also the new sciences of genetics and eugenics sweeping Europe during the early twentieth century.

The Spanish Civil War was not fought in an intellectual vacuum. Although detractors would later accuse Franco’s regime of attempting to create such a vacuum, Republican Spain was very much a part of the European intellectual community. As such, academic and scientific trends affected the ideologies and conduct of the Spanish Civil War. In Spain, a “younger generation had contributed to revamping new liberalism with the introduction into the political

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Franco and Hitler: Spain, Germany, and World War II* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 20.

<sup>25</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*. Translated by Ralph Manheim, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1971), 563.

arena of new topics typical of the 1920s such as equality of the sexes, divorce, and eugenics.”<sup>26</sup> For the purposes of this paper, eugenics is of primary concern. This pseudo-scientific movement, which underpinned much of Nazism and other racial ideologies, was also present in Spain, though it manifested itself in a decidedly different fashion. Whereas eugenics primarily applied to racial thinking in Germany, “in Spain eugenics took a more hygienic than hereditarian turn, being more concerned with health reform.”<sup>27</sup> One likely reason for this divergence was the uniformity of race in Spain. Eugenics would have almost no policy application unless it related to a concern that would affect Spanish society. This does not mean that eugenics did not influence Spanish opinions on race, but rather that race took a backseat to health concerns for the time being. With the onset of the Civil War and the presence of large numbers of North Africans in Spain, the logic of eugenics was once again turned towards racist thinking. Eugenics must be kept in mind as the basic tenets of hereditary racial characteristics and racial hierarchy were a significant frame of reference for the discussion of race during the 1930s.

This brief background to racial thought in Spain is by no means exhaustive, nor is it meant to be whiggish in charting the inevitable course conceptions of race took in the Spanish context. There certainly was no inexorable progression from “Isabella to Franco.”<sup>28</sup> The purpose of outlining the various trends and ideas that shaped the debate over race in Spain is to provide a sense of the racial ideas informing Spaniards during the periods preceding the Spanish Civil War. These conceptions of race and the weight of Spain’s racial history, fraught with the complexities of a Christian, European nation that had been under non-Christian rule, were significant factors in the racial constructs that both Nationalists and Republicans employed

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<sup>26</sup>Graham and Labanyi, 128.

<sup>27</sup>Susan Pinar, “The Emergence of Modern Genetics in Spain and the Effects of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) on Its Development.” *Journal of History and Biology*, Vol. 35, no. 1 (2002): 125.

<sup>28</sup>Goode, 12.

during three bloody years of war. During the Spanish Civil War race was more than merely an issue of academic debate; racial ideas inspired specific efforts on and off the battlefield for Nationalists and Republicans alike. Actors on both sides of the conflict were acutely aware of racial meanings, both inside and outside of Spain, and made decisions based on these conceptions. This is not to say that the Spanish Civil War was a racially driven war; it clearly was not. Race and racist ideas were, however, a part of the ideological milieu that contributed to the brutality of the conflict. Racial conceptions also had tactical and propaganda influences that directly affected the outcome of various engagements and the war itself. Although racist thinking influenced the Civil War, such attitudes also shaped notions of race in Spain going forward. Thus an understanding of the role racial thought and practices played in the Civil War is necessary to comprehend fully the conflict and subsequent Spanish history.

Race has long been a popular line of inquiry into Spanish history as demanded by Spain's relationships with non-Spanish peoples since at least the eighth century. Yet according to George Esenwein, "one rarely finds an analysis of the social and cultural factors relating to the categories of race, religion and gender" in narratives on the Spanish Civil War despite the growing interest in studying these themes in other periods of Spanish History.<sup>29</sup> This work focuses on the first of those three themes while necessarily discussing the other two in order to address this shortcoming in Spanish Civil War scholarship. In the context of this paper race appears in the broad sense as "a 'mode' of viewing human difference," as defined by Joshua Goode.<sup>30</sup> As a cultural construct, race is not limited to perceived physical differences alone. Indeed, Stanley Payne notes the word "race" has "strong patriotic-cultural (rather than merely

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<sup>29</sup> Esenwein, 153.

<sup>30</sup> Goode, 207.

bioethnic) connotations in Spanish,” independent of relatively recent academic trends.<sup>31</sup> This paper explores how perceptions of difference in racial terms affected the course of the Spanish Civil War and how the conflict altered conceptions of race in Spain. Its chronological analysis encompasses the effects of race and racism on the Spanish Civil War, a comparison of Nationalist and Republican views on race, how the conflict demonstrates Spanish racial conceptions, and how it changed those attitudes.

Chapter one opens with the military uprising and the arrival of Moroccan troops in southern Spain. The chapter follows Franco’s Army of Africa during its campaign in Spain to examine Nationalist and Republican racial attitudes towards the utilization of non-Spanish, Muslim troops on the Iberian Peninsula in light of Spain’s history with the Moors. It incorporates a specific focus on images of the Moroccan soldiers and the ramifications of their racial difference on the battlefield.

The Second chapter examines the middle years of the conflict and non-Spanish participation in the Republican war effort. A sizable portion of this section will examine the experiences of African American and Jewish volunteers fighting with the international brigades as they trickled into Spain during 1937 until their withdrawal in October 1938.<sup>32</sup> In particular, it studies how racial difference affected their deployment in battle, their relationships with other Republicans, and especially their interactions with local Spanish populations in comparison to the experience of North Africans fighting with the Nationalists.

The third and final chapter centers on the later stages of the conflict and addresses the Spanish Civil War’s implications for race in Franco’s Spain. It scrutinizes how Republicans and Nationalists viewed each other in racial terms. This chapter will conclude by exploring the

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<sup>31</sup> Stanley Payne, *The Franco Regime* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 402 n.19, originally found in Joshua Good, *Impurity of Blood*, 10.

<sup>32</sup> Paul Preston, *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War* (London: Fontana Press, 1996), 210.



Franco regime's post-war racial ideas and practices. Franco's Moroccan bodyguard and the ideology espoused by the *Movimiento Nacional* serve as some of the analytical focal points. The conclusion examines the debate over race and its ramifications for historical memory of the Spanish Civil War as well as questions of *Franquismo's* place in European fascism.

## Chapter One

### *Hay Moros en la Costa*

The Spanish saying “Hay Moros en la Costa,” translates literally to “Moors on the Coast”.<sup>33</sup> Colloquially, however, it carries a warning of impending danger as a holdover from Spain’s earlier history with its North African neighbors. As tensions increased during the months prior to the Nationalist uprising, one would be hard pressed to find a more astute description for Republican Spain, both literally and figuratively. In the summer of 1936, the people of Southern Spain witnessed a sight not seen in over four hundred years – the Moors returned to southern Spain. Thousands of heavily armed, Muslim warriors from the shores of North African overwhelmed the area for the first time since the *Reconquista*. Two years earlier, however, the people of Northern Spain experienced the Moroccan *Regulares*’ wrath during the failed Asturian revolt of October 1934. After the inclusion of three ministers from the conservative *Confederacion Espanola de Derechas Autonomas* (CEDA) in Prime Minister Alejandro Lerroux’s new cabinet, a coalition of leftists led by the socialist *Union General de Trabajadores* (UGT) rose in insurrection against the Popular Front government.<sup>34</sup> The uprising was quickly subdued in most areas but “truly prospered only in the province of Asturias,” where better coordination between the leftist factions allowed for a degree of success.<sup>35</sup> Their success

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<sup>33</sup> Daniela Flesler, *The Return of the Moor, Spanish Responses to Contemporary Moroccan Immigration* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2008), 3.

<sup>34</sup> Stanley Payne, *Politics and the Military in Modern Spain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), 296.

<sup>35</sup> Brian D. Bunk, *Ghosts of Passion: Martyrdom, Gender, and the Origins of the Spanish Civil War* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 30.

proved short lived as “General Franco proposed the sending of troops from Africa,” under Juan Yagüe to deal with the rebels.<sup>36</sup>

Asturias had held a hallowed position in Spanish history as the birthplace of the *Reconquista* and sole region unconquered by the Moors.<sup>37</sup> Thus the *Regulares* represented an affront to the Spanish identity which Franco and conservative Spaniards cherished. Yet Franco mercilessly unleashed his Moorish mercenaries on the local populace. Newspaper accounts detailed the “pillaging and cold-blooded assassination of men, women and children by Moroccan soldiers.”<sup>38</sup> In a harbinger of things to come, Franco justified such actions as necessary in “a frontier war...against socialism, Communism and whatever attacks civilization in order to replace it with barbarism.”<sup>39</sup> Paul Preston characterizes this as “the same racist contempt with which he had [held] the tribesmen of the Rif.”<sup>40</sup> This racial logic which emphasized removing the impure elements of Spain by any means available would underpin many of the Nationalist’s actions throughout the Civil War.

The Nationalist utilization of Moroccan soldiers from the war’s earliest days provides an invaluable window into racial views on each side during the conflict. Their presence forced the Nationalists to address issue of race despite the fact that Francisco Franco’s rhetoric and policies clearly lacked the distinctly racial overtones of Adolf Hitler and to a lesser extent Benito Mussolini. The reasons for this are numerous, one of which is Civil War era Spain’s lack of a significant racially different population within its borders. This does not mean, however, that

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<sup>36</sup> Joaquin Arraras, *Francisco Franco, the Times and the Man*, translated by J. Manuel Espinosa (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1938), 129.

<sup>37</sup> Americo Castro, *The Spaniards, an Introduction to Their History*, translated by William F. King and Selma Margaretten (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 49.

<sup>38</sup> “Slayings in Spain Laid to Moroccans,” *The New York Times*, Oct. 29, 1934.

<http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?index=28&did=94574723&SrchMode=1&sid=2&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1269021627&clientId=30345> (accessed March 21, 2010)

<sup>39</sup> Paul Preston, *Francisco, A Biography* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), 105.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

race was not a concern for Franco and the Nationalists during their struggle for victory. Franco and the Nationalist Coalition were acutely aware of the meanings of race both inside and outside of Spain during the Spanish Civil War and utilized conceptions of race to advance, as well as defend, their actions en route to victory over the Republican forces.

A second important reference point for race in the years leading up to the Spanish Civil War is “the era of ‘new imperialism,’ in which primarily European powers expanded their power and dominion exponentially over the globe.”<sup>41</sup> Spain, though a junior member of this club, embarked on colonial adventures driven by the same scientific racism concerned that “The future of one’s inherently superior race and culture, and of civilization was at stake.”<sup>42</sup> For Spaniards, the new imperialism had the added advantage of colonizing their former colonizer with respect to the North African Moors in their “effort to demonstrate full European status.”<sup>43</sup> The importance of the racial aspects of the Spanish Civil War is obvious for a number of reasons, most notably because the largest number of non-Spaniards who took part in the War came from Spanish Morocco.

In a number of other visible, but important ways the colonial experience profoundly shaped the Spanish Civil War. Not the least of these was the fact that the Nationalist rebel leaders “conceived of their struggle in terms of their experience in Morocco... It was a means of purifying a degenerate Spain from the outside.”<sup>44</sup> Due to the experience of these officers in Spain’s colonies, they were able to unleash a new brutality on Republican forces they viewed as the enemies of Spain. Morocco had the effect of allowing the officers who served there to put aside racist ideas to combat what they saw as a greater threat to Spain: an atheist-communist

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<sup>41</sup> John H. Morrow Jr., *The Great War: An Imperial History* (New York and London: Routledge), 6.

<sup>42</sup> Morrow, 10.

<sup>43</sup> Flesler, 22-23.

<sup>44</sup> Sebastian Balfour, *Deadly Embrace: Morocco and the Road to the Spanish Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 315.

Coalition under the banner of Republican forces. Spain's imperialism in North Africa had come full circle from a racist premise to prove Spanish vitality in Africa to a desire "to rechannel colonialism towards the homeland."<sup>45</sup> The experience of one young Galician officer exemplified this transformation. His name was Francisco Franco.

As an ambitious young army officer, Franco was elated when in 1912, he "received his order to report to the captain-general (military governor) of Melilla, a North African city, that along with its counterpart to the west, Ceuta, still belongs to Spain."<sup>46</sup> This assignment began the long association of Franco and Africa, leading Franco to later remark to "an interviewer, 'Even I can't understand myself without Africa.'"<sup>47</sup> This relationship was to continue on and off until the days leading up to July 18<sup>th</sup>, 1936 and the military revolt. At the time of the rebellion it was far from clear that Franco would emerge as the eventual leader of the Nationalists, though it was clear that Franco was needed because "The coup could not possibly have a chance of succeeding without the Moroccan Army [Army of Africa] and Franco was the obvious man to lead it."<sup>48</sup>

Given the intimate links between Franco and Africa from his earliest involvement in the Nationalist cause, one can fairly assume that there was at least a recognition of the need to address race in the War. The use of African troops was clearly at the heart of the rebels' strategy from the earliest days. It would be impossible for these men not to realize the racial undertones of this strategy given the prevalence of scientific racist thought, the inherent racism of imperialism, and Spain's racial history. Yet Franco and his co-conspirators remained silent on the subject in a calculated ploy to downplay the significance of non-white troops in their

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<sup>45</sup>Balfour, 316.

<sup>46</sup> Geoffrey Jensen, *Franco: soldier, commander, dictator* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, Inc., 2005), 14.

<sup>47</sup>Jensen, 23.

<sup>48</sup> Paul Preston, *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War* (London: Fontana Press, 1996), 70.

campaign. Only when they were forced to address the matter based on actual battles and incidents involving the Moorish troops did Nationalist figures address the race issue.

The backdrop of racial thought and identity leading up to the Spanish Civil War provides the context for the actual experiences of the war and the roles race played in the conflict. As stated above, the Moroccan forces were essential to Nationalist planning from the beginning, because after the coup's failure led to civil war, a Nationalist victory "in that war was now unthinkable without the participation of the only truly professional troops in the Spanish army, the Army of Africa," which contained some 16,000 Moroccan troops in 1936.<sup>49</sup> The importance of these troops was underscored by the extraordinary measures taken in order to get the Moorish soldiers onto the Iberian Peninsula. As falangist businessman Rafael Medina noted, waterborne transport was impossible because the force "was blockaded in its bases by several warships whose sailors had killed their officers who had been trying to rally to the uprising."<sup>50</sup> The Nationalists overcame this challenge with German and Italian military aid in the form of planes with which "In less than a fortnight some 14,000 men, fifty-two artillery pieces, and 283 tons of war materiel were flown to Spain."<sup>51</sup> This "African influx" would have immediate ramifications for the Nationalist successes that soon followed and the brutality that came to characterize the war in Spain.

With the arrival of the Army of Africa in the south, Nationalist forces were able "to undertake two campaigns which considerably improved their situation."<sup>52</sup> These campaigns culminated with the link up between Nationalists in northern Spain and Nationalists from the south led by the Army of Africa under Colonel Juan Yagüe, after which "Yagüe's troops turned

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<sup>49</sup> Balfour, 271.

<sup>50</sup> Rafael Medina, quoted in Ronald Fraser, *Blood of Spain, An Oral History of the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979), 108.

<sup>51</sup> Balfour, 288.

<sup>52</sup> Preston, *A Concise History of The Spanish Civil War*, 87-88.

back to capture Badajoz.”<sup>53</sup> When the city fell on August 14<sup>th</sup>, 1936, “Grim rebel Moors and Spanish foreign legionnaires systematically marked hundreds of loyalist prisoners for summary execution... bodies continued to be piled in pools of blood,” because the “Moorish conquerors were anxious to expose corpses for as many hours as possible of an example.”<sup>54</sup> Badajoz represented a new level of brutality in the Spanish Civil War that reflected “the traditions of the Spanish Moroccan Army and the outrage of the African columns at encountering a solid resistance.”<sup>55</sup> This escalation of violence was accompanied by a fearsome reputation as they “continued to play a crucial role as the shock-troops of the Nationalist Army.”<sup>56</sup>

The reasons for their effectiveness were numerous, but one distinct feature was the close bond between officers and men, an officer corps that “cultivated concern for the health and welfare of their men and were prepared to expose themselves to equal if not greater danger.”<sup>57</sup> This bond was of enormous importance considering the difficult assignments and high casualties endured by Moroccan units. One first hand account of the Army of Africa in urban combat related how “These Moors, calm and tight-lipped expert workmen... would clean these buildings floor by floor and the Moors would die floor by floor.”<sup>58</sup> The Army of Africa’s determination was also encouraged by the reality that “unlike other Nationalist soldiers, the Legionnaires and Moroccan troops were given freedom by some of their commanders for one hour to scour a town they had captured for booty and women.”<sup>59</sup> Nationalist use of colonial troops increased the

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<sup>53</sup> Preston, *A Concise History of The Spanish Civil War*, 88.

<sup>54</sup> “Loyalist Losses Before Badajoz Mount to 2,000,” *The Washington Post*, August 18, 1936.  
<http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?index=8&did=247644722&SrchMode=1&sid=2&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1269353068&clientId=30345> (accessed March, 24, 2010)

<sup>55</sup> Preston, *Franco*, 166.

<sup>56</sup> Balfour, 306.

<sup>57</sup> Balfour, 314.

<sup>58</sup> John T. Whitaker, *We Cannot Escape History*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1943), 102, excerpted in Balfour, 307.

<sup>59</sup> Balfour, 293.

brutality of the Spanish Civil War and quickly took on racial dimensions that Franco and his Nationalist allies had to confront.

Due to the historical enmity for the Moors that had been at the heart of Spanish identity for well over four centuries, Nationalists had to develop creative explanations for the use of Moroccan troops in Spain. One such method was to claim the Republican forces had tried unsuccessfully to recruit the Moors, stating that “The Madrid government then attempted to stir up the Moroccan tribes...over the radio with rabid speeches in Arabic, undesirables were bribed, and agents sent out to foment insurrection.”<sup>60</sup> With these claims, the Nationalists attempted to sideline the race issue by emphasizing that both sides had courted the Army of Africa. In doing so, they undoubtedly hoped to prove that the use of African troops was legitimate in the minds of both Nationalists and Republicans from the war’s outset. This undercut Republican arguments which attempted to characterize the use of Moorish troops as barbaric or un-Spanish by claiming that the Nationalists had simply been more successful in pursuing African forces. Nationalist propaganda played this up as a legitimate victory in Spain’s colonies because “The Moors revered Franco, whose military prowess overawed them.”<sup>61</sup>

The Nationalists thus attempted to stop the debate over the legitimacy of using Moorish troops in Spain by implying that both sides had planned to utilize the armed forces across the Straits of Gibraltar. They attempted to glorify Franco’s military capabilities and turn a potential chink in the armor of Nationalist rhetoric into an early triumph of the rebel forces. By emphasizing Franco’s “prowess,” over the Moorish soldiers, Nationalists sought to cast him as a sort of modern El Cid who reigned over the Moors as commander rather than conqueror. The effectiveness of this approach is debatable, especially due to the Spain’s centuries long

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<sup>60</sup> J. Arraras, *Francisco Franco* (London, 1938), 202, excerpted in George R. Esenwein, *The Spanish Civil War: A Modern Tragedy* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), 154.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.



experience with the Moors as a traditional enemy. Though this does not detract from the fact that had the Army of Africa stayed loyal to the Republic, Madrid would certainly not have turned down such an effective fighting force within Spanish territory. Such an argument was not the only attempt the Nationalists made to defend the use of non-Spanish troops in their crusade for Spain.

The Nationalist coalition also attempted to cite precedent in their quest to legitimize using African troops in the rebellion. In order to do so, Franco and his allies had only to look back twenty years earlier to the First World War. Colonial and non-European troops had played an integral in the Allied victory over the Central Powers. Utilization of such forces was necessitated by both the global nature of the conflict and the enormous manpower requirements of modern warfare. French General Charles Mangin had called for the use of African troops to combat the falling French birthrate as early as 1910; and though initially proposing that “these troops would serve in North and West Africa,” the huge casualties brought African troops onto the Western Front relatively early in the war.<sup>62</sup> Great Britain called upon the massive Indian Army to aid in its fight against the Germans and the United States employed African American troops when it finally entered the conflict in 1917. These facts were fresh in the minds of those fighting Republican forces in Spain when critics maligned the introduction of North African troops to the conflict. Nationalist sympathizer Eoin O’Duffy was quick to opine that in light of the fact “Great Britain, France, and America all used coloured troops, Indian, Algerian, and Negro, it is rather difficult to understand the moral indignation professed in certain quarters against the employment of the Moorish troops.”<sup>63</sup> One must acknowledge the validity of this

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<sup>62</sup> Morrow, 17.

<sup>63</sup> Eoin O’Duffy, *Crusade in Spain* (Clonskeagh: R. Hale Limited, 1938), 27, excerpted in George R. Esenwein, *The Spanish Civil War, A Modern Tragedy* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2005), 155.

justification based on precedent. It seems a double standard to condemn Moorish involvement when contrasted with the Allies unabashed exploitation of colonial troops two decades prior.

Upon closer examination, however, there are significant differences between the two examples, not the least of which is the historical legacy of the Moors in Spain or the use of these forces by Spaniard against Spaniard. Republicans were quick to bring these discrepancies to light in their efforts to demonize Nationalists over the issue of North African troops. Republican leaders astutely pointed out that scant precedent existed for using colonial forces against one's own nation; unless one considers the suppression of the Asturias revolt. By the outbreak of the Civil War, however, the insurrection in Asturias was increasingly viewed as the first skirmish of the war rather than a separate conflict.<sup>64</sup> In the winter of 1936 Basque President José de Aguirre, whose forces were fighting with the Republic at the time, asked his audience to "Imagine the indignation of the British people, if British generals paid by the people, who had sworn loyalty to the Empire, should transport to their country black colonial forces, to be launched against their compatriots, who had democratically elected a Government."<sup>65</sup> Such an argument pointedly critiques the use of Moorish troops in this fraternal conflict, due to the distinct difference between using colonial forces against an internal rather than external enemy.

Also present, however, was a more bluntly racist argument against the use of non-white troops, when earlier in the broadcast President de Aguirre made an "appeal to the universal conscience against the monstrous fact that traitor generals in rebellion should utilize black mercenary forces."<sup>66</sup> The fact that these troops were black was clearly the egregious crime here given that the Republicans were more than willing to use foreign forces, which ironically would

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<sup>64</sup> See Bunk, 11.

<sup>65</sup> *An Address by His Excellency the President of the Government of Euzkadi H.E. José A. de Aguirre*. Broadcast from Radio Euzkadi, 22 December 1936, printed in Esenwein, 156.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

include a number of African Americans. Also notable is the use of the term ‘black’ instead of ‘Moorish’ to describe the Nationalist troops, which seems to indicate naked racism rather than the historical or religious enmity that is typically part of Spanish racial thought.

Republicans were not alone in debating the justness of the Army of Africa’s presence in Spain based on race and Nationalists jumped into this discourse with their own racially configured arguments. As previously noted, the Spanish Civil War occurred during the height of eugenics in European intellectual and scientific thought. The obsession with skull measurements, racial hierarchies, and pseudo-science that characterized eugenics across Europe manifested themselves in the debate over Moorish troops. The presence of racially distinct troops broadened the eugenic discussion in Spain, because it was the first time that such theories could be applied in a domestic setting. Members of the Nationalist coalition were influenced by these trends and attempted to legitimize the North African presence based on eugenic logic. This led one Nationalist volunteer to assert “The Moors are not Negroes; the shape of the head, nose, and mouth, their hair and eyes, are more characteristic of the European. Many Moors are fairer in colour than either the Italian or the Spaniard.”<sup>67</sup> Nationalists were aware of the potential backlash against African troops and sought to minimize this by using the scientific discourse of Eugenics to deny their racial distinction. In much the same way that Republicans attempted to demonize the Moor as black, the Nationalists defended him as white or at least European. Each side sought to emphasize physical characteristics and skin color to justify their position on the issue.

The opposing coalitions’ focus on the racial qualities of Moorish troops to support their respective positions was not limited to verbal sparring. The Spanish Civil War is well known for the art it produced or inspired, including the large number of propaganda posters created by each

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<sup>67</sup> O’Duffy, 200-1, excerpted in Esenwein, 155

side, which has led at least one observer to label the artistic efforts as “The Visual Front.”<sup>68</sup> The effort of the Republicans on this “Visual Front” is particularly useful in gauging their attitudes toward the usage of Moorish troops and race in general. Numerous pictorial representations address these issues, demonstrating the fact that Republicans saw the use of African troops as particularly egregious.

One poster produced by the Republic’s Ministry of Propaganda entitled “The Nationalists” places a heavy emphasis on the Moorish issue.<sup>69</sup> The poster contains a cartoon ship which carries the Nationalist coalition. On this ship, two of the five figures on deck are North Africans in various garb and three other armed Africans can be seen poking out of the ship’s portholes. The presence of Moorish troops on the bottom level seems to indicate they are the foundation of Nationalist strength, which was true at least in the early days of the rebellion. The presence of two North Africans on deck among a Fascist businessman, Catholic Bishop, and General attempts to reinforce the African nature of the Nationalists as particularly objectionable. The poster attempts to Africanize and “blacken” the Nationalists to raise Spaniards ire towards them. The features and expressions of the North Africans in this poster and others also serve to reinforce eugenics-based racism.

Republican posters often prominently depict Moorish physical features in a different fashion than the other members of the Nationalist coalition. In Arturo Souoto’s drawing “the desert garbed Moroccan,” is bearded and swarthy looking compared to the Spaniards or other

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<sup>68</sup> “The Visual Front, Poster’s of the Spanish Civil War.” *UCSD’s Southworth Collection*. <http://orpheus.ucsd.edu/speccoll/visfront/> (accessed multiple times).

<sup>69</sup> John Tisa, ed., *The Palette and the Flame, Posters of the Spanish Civil War*, “The Nationalists,” Canavate, (New York: International Publishers, 1979), 10.

European allies.<sup>70</sup> His face is sinister with a devious look suggesting a brutality lacking on other members' faces. Luis Qunitanilla's work displays European Nationalist prisoners that look "less bizarre and threatening than the bearded kinky-haired Moroccan...He is little more than an animal."<sup>71</sup> These drawings betray a deep seated race based hatred for the Moorish troops absent from the portrayals of other Nationalists. Wartime Republican art makes a conscious effort to highlight racial differences to raise opposition to Nationalist rebels. It emphasizes eugenic features and facial characteristics to showcase African troops as uncivilized and non-European.

Nationalist artwork was notably silent on the subject of race with few representations of Moorish troops in their posters and drawings. This can partially be explained by the fact that "The Republican zone produced many more and generally better posters than the Nationalist, due not only to the presence of large numbers of talented artists... but also to the greater stress put on socio-political propaganda by the left."<sup>72</sup> Nationalists' failure to portray the differences also speaks to their desire to downplay racial differences because of the negative effects this would have on their efforts. The few artist renderings that do feature Moorish troops emphasize their soldierly qualities rather than racial ones. One "pro-Nationalist drawing depicting Moroccan troops boarding a plane in Morocco," leaves facial and racial features undefined.<sup>73</sup> Instead it prominently features soldierly and religious features of the troops with men in the fore- and backgrounds kneeling in prayer. This shifts focus to the troops' religiosity, which Franco and his allies emphasized as congruous with their own in contrast to the atheistic Republicans.

Nationalists sought to emphasize these similarities over racial differences on those rare occasions

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<sup>70</sup> Kathleen M. Vernon, ed., *The Spanish Civil War and the Visual Arts* (Ithaca: Center for International Studies, Cornell University, 1990), Plate 14, 115.

<sup>71</sup> Vernon, Plate 15, 117.

<sup>72</sup> Vernon, 132.

<sup>73</sup> Balfour, Plate 20.

where they portrayed African troops at all. These themes align with their efforts to downplay race in their efforts to garner Spaniards' support.

Though it may have been lacking in their visual propaganda, the Nationalists did not always downplay racist ideas of their Moorish troops. Nationalists sought to emphasize the brutal potential in their Moorish units in other ways in a form of psychological warfare. The Army of Africa had been forged in the bloody, no-holds barred colonial wars for North Africa and the Rif Rebellion and as a result "Most knew of no other war than the colonial war in which massacre and looting against other tribes was common culture and second nature."<sup>74</sup> If the Moorish troops carried this savage form of war over to Spain, they were encouraged by the fact that "Under Franco's command, the use of terror was written into the orders issued to the Nationalist army of the South."<sup>75</sup> This gave Nationalist troops an edge in combat because "it was enough...for someone to shout that the Moroccans were attacking for panic to spread," in the experience of at least one Republican soldier.<sup>76</sup> Such a reputation was warranted by incidents such as the slaughter at Badajoz where Moorish troops massacred suspected Republican fighters in the battle's aftermath. It is not surprising that "No official Francoist source would, of course, admit to such violence and pillage," but the message got across nonetheless.<sup>77</sup> Nowhere was this truer than in the application and threat of sexual violence at the hands of North African troops.

Both Nationalists and Republicans recognized the powerful image of Spanish women falling victim to the Moors with each side trading on the image in distinct ways. The Republicans held up the rape of Spanish women by African troops as one of the most heinous crimes committed during the conflict. Republican reports abound with accounts that "In small

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<sup>74</sup> Balfour, 286.

<sup>75</sup> Balfour, 292.

<sup>76</sup> Timoteo Ruiz, quoted in Fraser, 257.

<sup>77</sup> Balfour, 292.

towns hitherto occupied by the Rebels, the commanders of the Moorish detachments have had in some cases to share out captured women supporters of the government among the Moors...Moorish prisoners state that this expectation is of very considerable value in keeping up the spirit of African sections.”<sup>78</sup> Though incidents of rape were not confined only to African troops, Republicans emphasized these crimes because of the outrage and sympathy they provoked. Among Spaniards, the idea called to mind historic memories of Moorish rule and the threat of miscegenation for the Spanish race. In the wider international community shaped by colonial and racist norms, the idea of African troops raping European women raised widespread indignation.

With the pressure of international opinion, Nationalists could not openly raise the specter of Moorish rape for a strategic advantage. Despite this, various sources indicate “that rape was part of the everyday culture of war amongst the Legion and native troops.”<sup>79</sup> A thirteen-year-old eyewitness recounted “from a falangist who was present, I later heard that the woman had been raped by the whole Moorish firing squad before being executed.”<sup>80</sup> Such testimony is evidence that although no posters carried the threat; it was spread by word of mouth to instill terror in Republican supporters. At the very least, Nationalists did little to discourage the sexual threat posed by their African allies. Outright threats of such action were rare because the issue also had potential to fracture the Nationalist coalition domestically. Although, General Queipo de Llano’s daily harangues on Radio Sevilla were an exception to this rule. On July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1936 he boasted that “Our brave Legionaries and *Regulares* have shown the red cowards what it means to be a man. And incidentally the wives of the reds too...kicking their legs about and struggling

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<sup>78</sup> “Spain: American Friends of Spanish Democracy” (n.d.), *The Week* (New York), 6, excerpted in Esenwein 156.

<sup>79</sup> Balfour, 293.

<sup>80</sup> Carlos Castilla del Pino, quoted in Fraser, 157.

won't save them.”<sup>81</sup> One can safely assume that given the historical legacy of the Moors in Spain and prevailing racial attitudes, all but the most blindly committed Spaniards would have some measure of resistance towards Moorish rape of Spanish women.

Such suspicions are validated by an incident where, under the command of one Nationalist, “some ten to twelve Moroccan soldiers were executed for rape during the war.”<sup>82</sup> This suggests a limit to Nationalist tolerance for excesses by their Moorish allies. Other officers, however, seemed more willing to engage in sexual violence, as the “Moroccan officer of Regulares, El Mizzian ordered two teenage female textile workers arrested by the army to be taken to a schoolhouse to be raped by Moroccan soldiers,” in the presence of an American journalist before brushing “his protest aside, assuring him that the women would not live longer than four hours.”<sup>83</sup> One may be tempted to dismiss this incident as out of the ordinary because of the fact El Mizzian was Moroccan rather than an ethnic Spaniard, but the presence of a journalist and resulting publicity shows at the least indifference on the part of the Nationalist regime. El Mizzian would not have carried out the atrocities had there been real opposition to such tactics in the Nationalist hierarchy. The immediate execution of the victims also suggests that because the rape would not result in miscegenation for subsequent generations of Spaniards it was more acceptable. The elimination of potential racial intermingling allayed any eugenic concerns for the Spanish race's future. This logic still does not adequately explain the brutality tolerated by the Nationalists in their seemingly hypocritical crusade for Spain and raises the need for alternative explanations. Like so much of Nationalist strategy and ideology, one must turn to Spain's colonial experience in Africa to explicate the troops' excesses.

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<sup>81</sup> General Queipo de Llano, excerpted in Arthur Koestler, *Spanish Testament*, (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1937) 31.

<sup>82</sup> Balfour, 292.

<sup>83</sup> John T. Whittaker, *We Cannot Escape History*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1943), 114.



If Franco could not understand himself without Africa, the same can be said for the brutalities which marked the Nationalist campaign in Spain. The officers who were at the heart of the rebellion saw the war on the Spanish mainland much the same as their earlier battles in Spanish Morocco, “It was a means of purifying a degenerate Spain from the outside...a movement to restore Spain to its true identity.”<sup>84</sup> This conception of the war entailed a totalitarian view of the war that pitted the forces of the ‘pure Spain’ against their sworn enemies bent on denigrating Spain. When he arrived in Spain, “Franco would regard the working class militiamen who were about to oppose his advance on Madrid in the same way as he had regarded the Moorish tribesmen whom it had been his job to pacify...as if it were a colonial war.”<sup>85</sup> An army imbued with this kind of extreme outlook could commit acts because of the totality of the enemy’s evil that would have been previously unconscionable. A precedent for these terror tactics had already been established in colonial wars where “Such brutality had become second nature.”<sup>86</sup> With the incorporation of colonial style justification in which the opposition was inherently impure, it follows that the totalitarian tactics would be incorporated as well.

The major problem with implementing such logic was the changed racial and national identity of the enemy. During the colonial conflicts, Spanish forces were fighting against Moroccans and Africans whom they considered “a racially contemptible enemy.”<sup>87</sup> Now, however, they were fighting with the Africans against European Spaniards. This contradiction demanded explanation to make the tactics and ideology employed by the Nationalists more palatable. Franco and his allies met this challenge like a number of their campaigns, with a two pronged assault. They sought to define the conflict increasingly as a religious crusade against

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<sup>84</sup> Balfour, 315.

<sup>85</sup> Preston, *Franco*, 146.

<sup>86</sup> Balfour, 297.

<sup>87</sup> Preston, *Franco*, 146.

atheist leftists and by turning to that other boogeyman in Spanish history: the Jew. Both utilized existing themes in Spanish history that resonated with Spanish identity while applying them in a new manner to fit the geopolitical environment of the 1930s. These two complementary ideological justifications were linked in what became a campaign to subordinate the racial issues raised by using Moorish troops.

Spain's identity as a nation was carved out in opposition to the Moorish and Jewish "other" during the *Reconquista*, and these two groups were considered the antithesis of Spanishness on the eve of the Civil War. Due to the integral role Moorish troops played in the rebellion, Nationalists focused on the Republicans as "the Jew, a traditional internal Other."<sup>88</sup> This identification of Republicans as Jewish also had the benefit of motivating the Moroccan troops who regarded the Jews as an enemy as well with the prospect of fighting Jews because "a long time had gone by since they had been allowed to kill Jews."<sup>89</sup> Nationalist rhetoric over the Jewish nature of the Republic was influenced by the upswing of anti-Semitism in Europe since the end of the First World War. With the Russian Revolution fears arose that "the Jews, who in their Bolshevik guise now posed the ultimate threat to a racist, capitalist, western, society," were behind left-leaning movements all over Europe.<sup>90</sup> Thus, the European wide trend of equating Jews with Bolshevism played into the Nationalists' hands in their attempts to emphasize the Jewish nature of the Republican forces. Franco made this clear during a parade speech that warned against "the Jewish spirit which permitted the alliance of big capital and Marxism."<sup>91</sup> Though much of this was blatantly anti-Semitic, there was some truth in the association of Republicans with Jews because of the number of Jewish volunteers who fought against Franco in

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<sup>88</sup> Balfour, 282.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Morrow, 304.

<sup>91</sup> Preston, *Franco*, 330.

the belief that “Fascism in Spain [was] an integral part of the world struggle against anti-Semitism.”<sup>92</sup> When appeals to fight against the Republic based on its Jewish identity did not suffice, Nationalists elevated their rhetoric to that of a religious crusade.

With this conception of the conflict, the racial difference of North African troops was subordinated to the fact that like Catholic Spaniards, they shared a belief in God lacking in the atheist Republic. The war then took on connotations of a holy war in which the forces of religion were fighting against atheism. The Moorish troops were accepted because the Nationalists were “fighting ‘what is worse than Islam, for Islam believes in God.’”<sup>93</sup> Racial and religious differences fell aside in this battle over the existence of faith. By portraying the Spanish Civil War as “a confrontation between two irreconcilable civilizations,” the Nationalists and their supporters were able to sideline racial debates over their use of Moorish troops.<sup>94</sup> In this incarnation of Nationalist ideology, the North African troops were part of Spain based on their religiosity rather than a foreign “other” based on their race. The representation of Moorish troops in this light exemplifies how complex and static the definitions of race were in the Spanish Civil War.

Race, racism, and the Nationalists’ ideas on race played a number of different roles in the Spanish Civil War, befitting the ideologically pragmatic Franco who was willing to adapt in order to advance his own power throughout his career. That race had a distinct place in the Nationalist worldview can not be denied. The Spanish Civil War ceased to be a solely Spanish conflict from its inception. It reflected the overarching racial ideas in European thought at the time concerning eugenics, as well as the racism that arose during the years of imperialism that

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<sup>92</sup> R. Singerman “American-Jewish Reactions to the Spanish Civil War,” *Journal of Church and State*, vol. 19, no. 2 (1977): 268, excerpted in Esenwein, 160.

<sup>93</sup> Balfour, 283.

<sup>94</sup> Esenwein, 164.

preceded the war. The conflagration also revealed uniquely Spanish conceptions of race that came from a homogenous people whose identity had been forged largely in opposition to racial others, both Moorish and Jewish. For the Nationalists, Spanish history and racist ideas forced them to justify their use of North African troops, but also provided a new psychological weapon against Republicans. Nationalist commanders either defended Moroccan troops as disciplined and European or emphasized their African brutality depending on which was more beneficial to their cause at the time. The Moorish presence forced a rethinking and reinvention of Spanish identity that was indicative of the colonial experience. The Nationalists' treatment of race concerning their Moorish allies was marked by a largely opportunistic outlook to be taken advantage of when possible and defended when necessary.

## Chapter Two

### Republican Racists?

Few figures are more evocative of wartime Republican Spain than Dolores Ibárruri. *La Pasionaria* or Passion Flower as she became known during the defense of Madrid was born in the Basque country near the turn of the twentieth century where her struggle for a more equal society in Spain began early in life. In her autobiography she recounts how as a twenty-one year old mother “The struggle for a Socialist Society –even though it was clearly not imminent – began to give content and substance to [her] life; it was the force that sustained [her] under the oppressive conditions of our pariah-like existence.”<sup>95</sup> Ibárruri continued her journey of political discovery despite suffering constant harassment because of her work with the *Partido Comunista Español* (Spanish Communist Party). In February 1936 she was rewarded for her perseverance as “the Asturians inflicted a roaring defeat on the reactionary forces, the instigators of the oppression of 1934,” by electing her as a Communist deputy to Parliament.<sup>96</sup> As a strong supporter of the Popular Front government, Ibárruri was outraged when these same reactionaries rose in rebellion against the Second Republic on July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1936.

On the evening following the Nationalist insurrection *La Pasionaria* sought to rally Spaniards loyal to the Republican government. From the Ministry of the Interior radio station she exhorted people to resist the military uprising with the impassioned cry that “It is better to die on your feet than to live on your knees! *No Pasarán!*”<sup>97</sup> Those iconic words, “They shall not

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<sup>95</sup> Dolores Ibárruri, *They Shall Not Pass, the Autobiography of La Pasionaria*. Translated from *El único camino* (International Publishers Co., 1966), 61-2.

<sup>96</sup> Ibárruri, 164.

<sup>97</sup> Ibárruri, 195.

pass,” became the rallying cry of the Republic from that day forward. The slogan was ubiquitous across Republican Spain; it was written in graffiti, adorned posters, and even became a form of greeting for Republican forces. *No Pasarán* became famous across the globe as a symbol of the Republican defenders’ resoluteness against the Nationalist rebels. Less well known is her denunciation of Nationalist Moroccans as “Savage Moors, drunk with sensuality, that poured in horrible rapes of our girls, our women.”<sup>98</sup> This racist depiction of Moroccan troops in what Daniela Flesler terms “sexual bestiality” hardly fits with the progressive leftist politics with which Ibárruri is more often associated.<sup>99</sup> The reasons for this striking change in tone are numerous and complex. Her racially charged outrage suggests a visceral response that can partially be explained by the fact that *La Pasionaria*, like the Second Spanish Republic, gave relatively little thought to the issue of race prior to war’s outbreak.

Republican Spain emerged from the period of chaos that followed Primo de Rivera’s fall in 1931. Due to a number of military debacles in Morocco and general disorder on the Spanish Peninsula “Alfonso XIII, on the whole a well-intentioned monarch, had backed the unconstitutional dictatorship of Primo de Rivera,” after his *coup d’état* in 1923.<sup>100</sup> Primo de Rivera’s initial belief that a “short, sharp period of military government and *ad hoc* decrees would cut out the vices from the constitution of 1876 which he considered ‘suspended but not abrogated’,” gradually gave way to a protracted dictatorship that did little to solve Spain’s political crisis.<sup>101</sup> Perhaps speaking to his paternalistic love for Spain, Primo de Rivera peacefully resigned in January 1930.<sup>102</sup> His abdication placed King Alfonso XIII back in control

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<sup>98</sup> Daniela Flesler, *The Return of the Moor: Spanish Responses to Contemporary Moroccan Immigration* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2008), 78.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Raymond Carr, ed. *The Republic and the Civil War in Spain* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1971), 5.

<sup>101</sup> Carr, *Spain 1808-1975*, 575.

<sup>102</sup> Carr, *Spain 1808-1975*, 590.

of Spain, but in light of his support for Primo de Rivera's dictatorship, the Spanish public became increasingly fed up with his reign. Raymond Carr states that the only chance for the monarchy's survival "would have been a change to civilian and parliamentary rule in January 1930," instead Alfonso appointed Damaso Berenguer, a milder dictator, "which continued for a year government by decree and censorship without the moral force to make authoritarian rule effective."<sup>103</sup> Admiral Juan Aznar replaced Berenguer but faced the same challenges as his predecessor and finally acquiesced to municipal elections on April 12, 1931 as the start of a return to parliamentary rule.<sup>104</sup>

These elections resulted in a landslide victory for the Republican-Socialist coalition which "surprised the opposition as much as it did the government," and made it clear that the days of the monarchy in Spain were over.<sup>105</sup> Dolores Ibárruri gleefully recalled how "On April 14, 1931, the king and the royal family were obliged to abandon the country, and the republic was proclaimed."<sup>106</sup> General Francisco Franco's response was more measured, especially when the new regime closed the General Academy at Zaragoza where he was serving as commandant. In his farewell speech to the Academy, Franco ruminated on the correct course of action "when the heart fights to rise up in spiritual rebellion, or when the command is arbitrary or erroneous," in a not so subtle indictment of the Republic.<sup>107</sup> Noted Hispanist Gabriel Jackson summarizes the Spanish reaction as "a mixture of euphoria, incredulity, and anxiety."<sup>108</sup> This mix of emotions that King Alfonso's flight and the Republic's proclamation released highlights the deep political divisions that existed in Spanish society.

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<sup>103</sup> Carr, *Spain 1808-1975*, 601.

<sup>104</sup> Stanley Payne, *Politics and the Military in Modern Spain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), 263-264

<sup>105</sup> Carr, *Spain 1808-1975*, 699.

<sup>106</sup> Ibárruri, 84.

<sup>107</sup> Jauquin Arraras, *Francisco Franco, The Times and the Man*. Translated by J. Manuel Espinosa (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1938), 115.

<sup>108</sup> Gabriel Jackson, *The Spanish Republic and the Spanish Civil War, 1931-1939* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 28.

To say that Spain was politically fragmented in 1931 is a severe understatement of the difficulties the new republican government faced. Few societies have experienced such a complete realization of the political spectrum from right to left as Spain in the 1930s. In spite of this, by 1932 the second Prime Minister Manuel Azana “had molded a dependable majority out of the several republican fractions and the Socialist Party.”<sup>109</sup> With the support of these two moderate groups, Azana was able to govern, but serious challenges remained to Republican rule. From the extreme left, the position of “the anarcho-syndicalists of the CNT-FAI, was summed up in their slogan: ‘Our Revolution is made not in parliament but in the streets.’”<sup>110</sup> While on the far right, the Fascist Falangist party under Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera called for the formation of a totalitarian state beginning in 1934.<sup>111</sup> In between these extremists were a number of other factions with varying degrees of loyalty to the Republican regime. Such pressing political concerns took precedence for the new government as it attempted to address the range of demands made upon them. Spain’s acute political fragmentation and the racial homogeneity previously discussed meant that Republicans had little time or need for articulating a detailed racial ideology prior to the Civil War’s onset in 1936.

Although the Second Republic lacked an explicitly racial outlook, a more subtle racist thinking is discernable in a number of policies it enacted. One policy area that demonstrates republican racial thought is education. Educational reform was a crucial part of the Republican agenda when they took power in 1931. Dr. Jose Castillejo, a renowned education expert at the University of Madrid noted “New free elementary schools were opened for about half a million

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<sup>109</sup> Jackson, 98.

<sup>110</sup> George Esenwein, *The Spanish Civil War, A Modern Tragedy* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 14.

<sup>111</sup> Esenwein, 15.



more children, inspection reinforced and centralized, and salaries of teachers raised.”<sup>112</sup> Indeed by 1933 “the Republicans created 9,325 classrooms (unitary and graded combines); an additional 5,500 were added during the second biennium,” despite conservative resistance to their program.<sup>113</sup> Along with organizational and pedagogical reforms came changes in the new schools’ curriculum. Nowhere was the shift more seismic than in the field of history. Carolyn Boyd states “The goal of Republican educational policy was to transform historical study... by discovering a past that could be shared by all Spaniards, republicans hoped to lay the foundation for a collective national project.”<sup>114</sup> This concern with the past as a foundation for the present led to debates over national identities which demonstrated a kind of proto-racialist thinking in at least some sections of the Republican Coalition.

Republicans sought to define Spanish identity in a new light that took on racial dimensions in a number of significant ways. Whereas conservative Spaniards emphasized Spanish uniqueness to inspire their brand of patriotism, republican history relied on a more inclusive vision. In their newly built schools Spanish children were taught that all peoples were “united by their similarities rather than separated by their differences,” according to Carolyn Boyd.<sup>115</sup> This seems to be a nod to Americo Castro’s positing of a Spanish race built on racial diversity and mixture rather than separation or purity. These views also emphasize racial similarity with other Europeans, exemplifying the Republic’s attempt to “foster a national unity based on both ‘Castilianized’ and ‘Europeanized’ conceptions of Spain.”<sup>116</sup> The Castilian aspect

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<sup>112</sup> Jose Castillejo, *Wars of Ideas in Spain: Philosophy, Politics, and Education* (London: William Clowes and Sons, Ltd., 1937), 144.

<sup>113</sup> Carolyn Boyd, *Historia Patria, Politics, History, and National Identity in Spain, 1875-1975* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 199.

<sup>114</sup> Boyd, 211.

<sup>115</sup> Boyd, 214

<sup>116</sup> Sandie Holguin, *Creating Spaniards: Culture and National Identity in Republican Spain* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 5.

raises the important issue of regional difference, which the Second Spanish Republic viewed in distinct, pseudo-racial terms.

While Franco and the Nationalists downplayed regional difference because of their commitment to a united Spain, Republicans were much more accepting of distinct regional communities and viewed such distinctions in racial terms. The Republic and the various groups pushing for regional autonomy were natural allies because of right-wing centralist tendencies. Conservatives' opposition to greater regional independence as made clear as early as 1934 when Gil Robles attacked both Basque and Catalan autonomy statutes.<sup>117</sup> Due in part to their mutual enemies on the right, left-wing supporters of the Republic tended to accept the "nationalist movements in Catalonia and the Basque Country...in so far as both movements thought (and still think) of themselves as exceptional in the face of a more or less homogeneous Spain."<sup>118</sup> A kind of positive reinforcement mechanism emerged through their support of one another's goals that led to an emphasis on regional difference in racialist terms. George Orwell experienced this on the Aragon front in 1937 when an Andalusian contingent joined their line and noted the view "from the Catalans, who professed to look down on the Andalusians as a race of semi-savages."<sup>119</sup> Such examples prove that racialist thinking was well represented among those who sided with the Republic when the war broke out and served as the foundation for more explicitly racial conceptions as Spain's racial diversity increased during the war.

Pre-war republican racial thought focused primarily on internal racial concerns; however, the appearance of large numbers of non-Spaniards within their midst during the Civil War forced them to address their racial conceptions of others. Republican reactions to the Nationalist

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<sup>117</sup> Preston, *Franco*, 99-100.

<sup>118</sup> Helen Graham and Jo Labanyi, eds., *Spanish Cultural Studies, an Introduction: The Struggle for Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1995), 37.

<sup>119</sup> George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1938), 101.

employment of Moroccan troops have been discussed in detail above, but these were not the only foreign troops who came to fight in Spain. A number of American volunteers came to the Republic's aid and eventually formed a sizable part of the International Brigades. American veteran Robert Colodny traces these units to "the chaos of the July days when Franco's rebellion had been answered by revolution, and when a few "Leftist" foreigners in Barcelona, German and Italian émigrés, for the most part joined the militia columns."<sup>120</sup> The more formal and organizational origins of the International Brigades lay in the murky world of Soviet action through the Comintern in Western Europe, which raised both communist and later non-communist volunteers for the fight in Spain.<sup>121</sup> President Azaña and Prime Minister Largo Caballero initially resisted the idea, "but by mid-October the government was desperate and willing to use any trained men it could find."<sup>122</sup> After a short period of training at Albacete the first volunteers of the International Brigades arrived in Madrid on November 8<sup>th</sup>, 1936. Upon their arrival one eyewitness recalled listening to orders issued "in the clipped Prussian voice of Colonel "Hans" and repeated in French and Polish."<sup>123</sup> A journalist with the anarchist-aligned labor union, the *Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo* (CNT) recalled, "The arrival of the International Brigades impressed us all... Revolutionaries who fought magnificently."<sup>124</sup> These troops would soon be joined by other republican sympathizers whose presence provides a number of insights into the racial ideas held by supporters of the Popular Front government.

News of Franco's uprising in Spain quickly spread across the Atlantic to America where it provoked passionate feelings for both sides. Historian Allen Guttman has even gone so far as

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<sup>120</sup> Alvah Bessie and Albert Prago, *Our Fight: Writings by Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, Spain 1936-1939* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1987), 27.

<sup>121</sup> Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (revised) (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 438-440.

<sup>122</sup> Jackson, 318.

<sup>123</sup> Bessie and Prago, 36-37.

<sup>124</sup> Eduardo de Guzman, quoted in Ronald Fraser, *Blood of Spain: An Oral History of the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979), 263.

to state “no public event of the 1930’s mattered so much to so many Americans as did the Spanish Civil War.”<sup>125</sup> Only on the Republican side, however did these passions inspire large numbers of Americans to take up arms in support of their convictions. This group would eventually total around 2,400 volunteers.<sup>126</sup> Among their ranks were approximately one hundred African Americans.<sup>127</sup> Many of these men had been active in labor movements and the fight for African American rights in the United States prior to joining the international brigades. Others were involved with the American Communist Party through which men “like Richard Wright and Langston Hughes and Paul Robeson hoped to discover equality.”<sup>128</sup> These political ties drew a number of African American volunteers to Spain.

Others went to fight fascism as part of a larger worldwide battle against racism. Volunteer James Yates went to Spain because as he recounted, “I pictured Hitler applauding the lynching of Blacks in America, and I visualized Mussolini raping Ethiopia, the only independent Black country in the world. What would things be like in the US with a Hitler and with Bilbo [the Governor of Mississippi] as his lieutenant? I realized that if the fascists were not defeated in Spain, a bigger war would surely come.”<sup>129</sup> This view was shared by a number of African Americans who saw the war in Spain as a chance to strike back at fascism to avenge Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia. The fight against fascism was also inextricably linked to the fight against racism for Paul Robeson as he made clear in a 1938 interview “it is not only as an artist that I love the cause of democracy in Spain, but also as a Black. I belong to an oppressed race,

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<sup>125</sup> Allen Guttman, *The Wound in the Heart, America and the Spanish Civil War* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), 201.

<sup>126</sup> Thomas, 942.

<sup>127</sup> Esenwein, 153.

<sup>128</sup> Guttman, 99.

<sup>129</sup> James Yates, *From Mississippi to Madrid* (Seattle: Open Hand Publishing, 1989), 96.

discriminated against, one that could not live if fascism triumphed in the world.”<sup>130</sup> Thus some volunteers equated fascism with racism and the battle against racial injustice drove their decision to fight against the Nationalists. Inspiration by and aspiration for such high minded ideals naturally leads one to question whether or not their experience lived up to those ideals.

The first American volunteers began to arrive in Spain in late 1936 and early 1937. Due to French neutrality, all but the earliest to arrive embarked on treacherous trips across the border “climbing the snow-covered Pyrenees in the darkness of night, crowding the holds of small fishing boats on the Mediterranean,” while avoiding the French police to enter Spain.<sup>131</sup> They were flung into the battle almost immediately at Jarama in February 1937 to assist in the desperate defense of Madrid. As a result, these untrained troops suffered enormous losses but managed to prevent the Nationalists from cutting the Madrid-Valencia highway.<sup>132</sup> Among these raw troops were the first African Americans to arrive in Spain and it was at Jarama that James Yates’s friend Alonzo Watson became the first African American to give his life in defense of the Republic.<sup>133</sup> Yates himself arrived in Spain shortly thereafter, and like most African American volunteers was struck by the egalitarian atmosphere, which stood in stark contrast to the discrimination practiced in the United States.

The tolerance and equal treatment of African Americans serving in Spain provides an excellent window into the racial attitudes of Republican Spaniards. African Americans joined the fight in solidarity with other oppressed people and to fight back against the phenomenon of worldwide racism and their experiences proved their idealism was not misplaced. One African

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<sup>130</sup> Philip S. Foner, ed. *Paul Robeson Speaks: Writings, Speeches, Interviews 1918-1976* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, Inc. 1978), 124-5, originally found in Esenwein, 159.

<sup>131</sup> Edwin Rolfe, *The Lincoln Battalion: The Story of the Americans Who Fought in Spain in the International Brigades* (New York: Random House, 1939), 5.

<sup>132</sup> Rolfe, 57.

<sup>133</sup> Danny Duncan Collum, ed. *African Americans and the Spanish Civil War, “This Ain’t Ethiopia, but it’ll Do”* (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1992), 95.

American soldier recalled how Spaniards “judged me as a Tom Page, not as anybody else, or Tom Page, black. Just Tom Page. Spain was the first time in my life I was treated as a person.”<sup>134</sup> One could easily dismiss this as wartime expediency or attribute it the liberal politics behind the Republican lines; however, such explanations ignore the unique nature of race and racism in the Spanish context. Race’s long association with religious and cultural difference in Spain meant that because African Americans lacked these dimensions of racial difference, their skin color was less important than in other societies.

The Republican policy on integrated military units is further proof of this. When questioned as to the racial makeup of units in Spain veteran Frank Alexander stated “there was a conscious effort of the Brigade to separate the blacks out and make sure there was one in each of the units...to show sincerity and equality of everything.”<sup>135</sup> This was the polar opposite from his service with the American Army in World War Two where he was “put into a Jim Crow division with all blacks and all white officers.”<sup>136</sup> His experience was hardly unique. Crawford Morgan who similarly fought in both wars testified that during his stint in the still segregated U.S. Army “all the worst jobs, were handed down to the majority of Negroes, to my people.”<sup>137</sup> Dolores Ibárruri recounted with pride the interaction between an American colonel visiting the Lincoln Brigade who questioned African American Captain Oliver Law as to why he was wearing a captain’s uniform. Law shot back ““Because I am a Captain...In the United States I could only be a corporal because I was a Negro. Here we get our stripes not because of our color but because we earn them.””<sup>138</sup> The discrepancy between her fervent support of Law’s right to rank regardless of skin color and her racist denunciation of Moroccan troops again stems from a

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<sup>134</sup> Bessie and Prago, 54-55.

<sup>135</sup> Frank Alexander interview from the Abraham Film Project interview, printed in Collum, 142-143.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Crawford Morgan interview from the Abraham Film Project interview, printed in Collum, 178.

<sup>138</sup> Oliver Law, quoted in Ibárruri, 265.

uniquely Spanish conception of race heavily dependent on culture rather than perceived physical difference alone. Moors were not the only racial group that carried with it significant historical and cultural baggage in Spanish society.

One can also look to the other group expelled from Spain, the Jews, for insights into Republican racial thinking. The estimates of numbers of Jews vary substantially with Allen Guttman estimating that “of the 40,000 men who volunteered to fight in Spain, 3,000 were Jews,” and cites *Life* magazine’s estimate that 10 percent of American volunteers were Jewish.<sup>139</sup> Jewish American Albert Prago, a veteran of the International Brigades, places the number higher at 7,000 to 10,000 Jews overall and 30 percent of all American volunteers.<sup>140</sup> Like African Americans, a number of the Jewish volunteers who joined the International Brigades came to Spain to fight against the oppression and persecution of their people around the world. Jewish volunteer Hyman Katz said as much in a letter from Madrid in 1937 when he wrote, “Together with their agent, Franco, they are trying to set up the same anti-progressive, anti-Semitic regime in Spain, as they have in Italy and Germany. If we sit by and let them grow stronger by taking Spain, they will move on to France and will not stop there.”<sup>141</sup> For at least some other Jewish volunteers the larger struggle against anti-Semitism served as their motivation to fight in the Spanish Civil War.

This was not the case for all Jewish volunteers, however. A sizable contingent of the Jewish troops were inspired more by a defense of the Republic’s commitment to progressive politics than a desire to combat anti-Semitism. Albert Prago notes the fact that a large proportion of “Jews went to Spain as internationalists, as humanists, as antifascists, as communists—and

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<sup>139</sup> Guttman, 98.

<sup>140</sup> Bessie and Prago, 96.

<sup>141</sup> From a letter by Hyman Katz, 25 November 1937. Reprinted in Nelson, C. and Hendricks, J., eds, *Madrid 1937: Letters of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade from the Spanish Civil War*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), reprinted in Esenwein, 160.

while they may not have denied their heritage, they did not go to Spain identifying as Jews.”<sup>142</sup> Even with Hyman Katz, the anti-progressive nature of fascism seems to concern him as much as its anti-Semitic aspects. Prago further notes that in the two semi-official histories of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade “with some thirty years separating the two works, there is no mention of Jewish participation.”<sup>143</sup> The reason for this is simply that most Jewish volunteers emphasized national or political identities over a distinctly Jewish one. One explanation that so many Jews fighting in Spain downplayed their identification as Jews was the persistence of racist attitudes towards Jews in Republican Spain.

One is struck by the almost singularly positive experience African Americans had with regard to racism in Spain. There are nearly no accounts of racist attitudes or actions towards them during the conflict. Veteran Walter Cobb stated the only time his race was an issue was while he was driving a captured Nationalist truck and was mistaken “for a Moor that got lost and came across lines by accident,” before clarifying his identity to the Republican soldiers who nearly hugged him afterwards.<sup>144</sup> The same cannot be said regarding Jewish volunteers because of the fact that “anti-Semitism flourished (and indeed it still has not been extinguished),” according to Soviet Colonel Com. Sverchevsky in a report from 1938.<sup>145</sup> Thus, it is clear that Jewish volunteers continued to face anti-Semitism despite their widespread lack of Jewish identification. George Esenwein notes, “The idealism of some of the Jewish volunteers was leavened by their personal encounters with anti-Semitic volunteers.”<sup>146</sup> In searching for an explanation for the persistence of anti-Semitism, Spain’s culturally and historically constructed

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<sup>142</sup> Bessie and Prago, 96.

<sup>143</sup> Bessie and Prago, 98.

<sup>144</sup> Yates, 127-128.

<sup>145</sup> Colonel Com. Sverchevsky (Walter), “Notes on the Situation in the International Units in Spain,” 14 January 1938, printed in R. Radosh, M.R. Habeck, and G. Sevostianov, eds., *Spain Betrayed: The Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War* (New Haven: ,2001) originally found in Esenwein, 158.

<sup>146</sup> Esenwein, 160.



views of race again played a significant role. Jewish volunteers downplayed their identity because Jewishness remained antithetical to Spanishness based on the two peoples' historical relationship. Jews' role as a traditional "other" in Spain (along with the Moors) meant that their racial difference could not be overlooked in the same way as African Americans. Prejudice against Jewish volunteers "was not based on skin colour but on the fact that for cultural, social, and political reasons, they were regarded as outsiders in Germany and elsewhere in Europe."<sup>147</sup> Nowhere was this truer than in Spain.

The Popular Front government also had reasons to discourage the Republic's open association with large numbers of Jews fighting for a Jewish cause. One of the most constant Nationalist attacks on the Republic was to accuse it of being part of a Jewish conspiracy. As early as October 10, 1936 General Queipo de Llano broadcast that "Our war is not a Spanish Civil War, it is a war of Western civilization against the Jews of the entire world."<sup>148</sup> Such attacks were not limited to Nationalist generals either. The Basque Cardinal Isidro Goma echoed Queipo de Llano when he declared that the Nationalists were fighting against "the Jews and Masons who had poisoned the ingenuous *pueblo* with Tartar and Mongol ideas, and who were erecting a system manipulated by the Semitic International."<sup>149</sup> His ideas reflect a worldwide anti-Semitism that closely associated Jews with Marxism and communism, but also the traditional Spanish religious tradition of animosity towards Jews. In light of the fact that such sentiments were present among a cross section of Spanish society, the open acknowledgment of Jewish volunteers fighting for a Jewish cause would have lent credibility to Nationalist propaganda. It was also unlikely to win over many Spaniards still on the fence as to which faction to support because of the long anti-Semitic tradition in Spain, which had been

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<sup>147</sup> Esenwein, 159.

<sup>148</sup> Radio Broadcast from Gen. Queipo de Llano, October 10, 1936. Printed in Bessie and Prago, 94.

<sup>149</sup> Jackson, 386.

strengthened in the twentieth century as an explanation for Spain's shortcomings.<sup>150</sup> The Republic therefore downplayed Jewish involvement not only due to Jewish volunteers' lack of Jewish identity, but because of their wariness about playing into Nationalist propaganda and the latent anti-Semitism present in Spain.

As the war progressed through 1937, events did not go well for the Republican forces. In February the International Brigades had helped to hold the line at Jarama and ensure that Madrid was not cut off from the rest of Republican Spain. Another Republican victory came with the routing of an Italian led offensive at Guadalajara in March and a successful Republican counterattack.<sup>151</sup> In other areas, however, Republican forces were unable to hold back the Nationalist advance. In the north of Spain, the Nationalists conducted a sustained campaign in the Basque country. Their operations included the infamous bombing of Guernica on April which demoralized Basque forces "much worse than if they had been in combat," according to a local socialist militiaman.<sup>152</sup> This was followed in May by internecine fighting in Barcelona in which the various party militias saw their autonomy curtailed in an attempt to reconfigure the Republic's armed forces along traditional lines. George Orwell, who was in Barcelona for the fighting, prophesied "that the Caballero Government would fall and be replaced by a more Right-wing Government with a stronger Communist influence."<sup>153</sup> The growing Communist influence was engineered by the Soviet Union, on whom the Republic became increasingly dependent to maintain its war effort. This provided another incentive for both volunteers and the Popular Front to understate Jewish identity because despite rhetoric to the contrary, the Soviet

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<sup>150</sup> Joshua Goode, *Impurity of Blood, Defining Race in Spain, 1870-1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 29.

<sup>151</sup> Paul Preston, *The Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (Chicago: The Dorsey Press, 1986), 127.

<sup>152</sup> Saturnino Calvo, quoted in Fraser, 401.

<sup>153</sup> Orwell, 180.

Union under Stalin was imbued with anti-Semitism. As Orwell soon noticed, it took only the slightest perception of difference, political or otherwise, to attract the attention of the Communists which could end in a trip to their secret prisons.<sup>154</sup>

Even prior to the military uprising in 1936, Republicans thought in a manner that can be accurately described as racist if not racist. While the overwhelming majority of pre-war Republican thought focused on the substantial political challenges Spain faced, in educational policy and the debate over history one can observe the roots of racial thought which characterized the Republic's wartime outlook. Prewar debate over the racial identity of Spaniards and the various regional groups in Spain gave way to more open racial concerns with the influx of non-Spanish volunteers who fought for the Republic. African American and to a lesser extent Jewish volunteers were drawn to Spain by a desire to confront racism head-on. For African Americans, their experiences in Spain almost universally lived up to the egalitarian ideals for which they fought. For Jewish volunteers, however, there remained some discrimination due to both traditional Spanish anti-Semitism and foreign anti-Semitic sentiments. The existence and impact of racial thinking among the Republican coalition was more often than not tied to traditional Spanish constructions of race that relied on cultural and historical factors as much as skin color. Acknowledging this fact affords a more complete understanding of the conflict itself, as well as its post-war legacy.

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<sup>154</sup> Orwell, 175.

## Chapter Three

### Race and Aftermath

While the Communist Party, with strong Soviet backing, was consolidating control in the Spanish Republic, a similar trend was taking shape in Nationalist held Spain. Like their Republican adversaries, the Nationalists were also far from politically unified during the early months of the war. On the far right was the Spanish Fascist party, the Falange, under José Antonio Primo de Rivera, son of the late dictator. Less extreme was the conservative, Catholic CEDA party, which had accepted the Republic, albeit with a lingering desire for the monarchy's return. In addition to this were the explicitly monarchist Carlists and a few Alfonsine monarchists. The Falange and Carlists quickly emerged as the two most powerful political forces due in no small part to the fact that "Only the *Requetés* [the Carlist militia] and the Falangists were able to respond to the call for direct action" by militarily joining in the uprising.<sup>155</sup> Unlike the groups that remained loyal to the Republic, however, the Nationalist factions never engaged in the outright violence against one another like that seen in the Barcelona May events. Leery of the trouble disunity could cause, in Spring 1937 Franco set out to merge the competing political parties into a single organization, the *Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista* (FET y de las JONS).

On April 19, 1937, Franco announced the formation of his new party as "a movement more than a program...in the process of elaboration, subject to constant revision and improvement, as reality may counsel...not rigid or static, but flexible."<sup>156</sup> The lack of a coherent

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<sup>155</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *Falange: A History of Spanish Fascism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), 121.

<sup>156</sup> El Generalismo Franco, *Palabras del Cuadillo*, 19 abril 1937 – 31 diciembre 1938 (Madrid: Ediciones Fe, 1939), 10-11, printed in Payne, *Falange*, 169.

ideology reflects both Franco's practicality in pursuit of victory and the difficult task of combining two organizations that had little to unite them except a disdain for the Republic. Falangist leader Dionisio Riduejo stated with pride that, "Within the nationalist camp, the Falange after all represented the most left-wing posture possible."<sup>157</sup> Carlists on the other hand were among the most conservative Spaniards who derogatorily referred to Falange members as "Our Reds," or "FAIangists," in reference to the anarchist Federación Anarquista Ibérica (FAI) organization.<sup>158</sup> Antonio Izu, a Carlist militiaman, remarked "The Falange never inspired any confidence in me. It was a totalitarian, centralist movement."<sup>159</sup> Franco was able to achieve their unification in large part because both organizations were leaderless. José Antonio Primo de Rivera had been shot in Alicante in November 1936, though Franco was prone to ruminate on his capture and castration by the Russians.<sup>160</sup> The Carlist leader, Manuel Fal Conde, meanwhile had been exiled to Portugal due to an earlier spat with Franco.<sup>161</sup> The *Caudillo* exploited this opportunity to unify the Nationalists politically behind the lines in the hope that this unity would translate into increased military efficiency at the front.

Initially, Franco's political consolidation of the Nationalists into the unwieldy named FET y de las Jons seemed to produce the desired effect of increased military effectiveness. On July 19<sup>th</sup>, after a Nationalist sympathizer had betrayed the defense plans for they city, Bilbao fell to the Nationalists.<sup>162</sup> Franco's forces had little difficulty in completing their conquest of northern Spain, but the plodding pace of the conflict allowed the Republican Army to strike back in early July at Brunete, near Madrid. General Vicente Rojo organized nearly 60,000 men and

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<sup>157</sup> Dionisio Riduejo, quoted in Ronald Fraser, *Blood of Spain, An Oral History of the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979), 315.

<sup>158</sup> Payne, *Falange*, 128.

<sup>159</sup> Antonio Izu, quoted in, Fraser, 319.

<sup>160</sup> Paul Preston, *Franco, A Biography* (London: HaperCollins, 1993), 196.

<sup>161</sup> Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 614.

<sup>162</sup> Gabriel Jackson, *The Second Spanish Republic and the Spanish Civil War 1931-1939* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 384.

made sure his staff “had seen to the most insignificant details, and had complied with the directives of the superior command with an absolute precision, especially concerning the secrecy of the attack,” before unleashing his assault on July 6<sup>th</sup>, 1937.<sup>163</sup> The attack met with widespread success and *The New York Times* cited the reorganized Republican Army as a new source of hope for those loyal to the Republic.<sup>164</sup> By the end of July, however, the Nationalists had regained their lost territory around Madrid and the battle petered out. As George Esenwein states, given the large casualties on both sides, neither Republicans nor Nationalists could claim victory, though the Popular Army’s logistical problems were exposed during the battle.<sup>165</sup> The Battle of Brunete set a pattern of successful Republican offensives followed by Nationalist counterattacks that characterized the war for the next six months.

The Republican attack at Brunete signaled the beginning of a new strategy that coincided with Juan Negrín’s tenure as Prime Minister. Negrín intended to lead an “active war policy” in order to seize the initiative within Spain.<sup>166</sup> General Rojo made a secondary motive clear when he discussed the planned offensive against Zaragoza in pursuit of “a tactical victory which was sorely needed by the Republic: especially to impress those outside of Spain who had seen only Fascist victories to date.”<sup>167</sup> Based on the failures on the central front around Madrid, the Republican leadership looked to Aragon as a more promising theatre of operations. On August 24<sup>th</sup> the Republicans began their offensive and heavy fighting broke out near the village of

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<sup>163</sup> Landis, A. *The Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, (New York: Citadel Press, 1967), 185-186, excerpted in George R. Esenwein, *The Spanish Civil War, A Modern Tragedy* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2005), 216-217.

<sup>164</sup> Wireless to the New York Times, “New Army Raises Hopes of Madrid,” *The New York Times*, July, 14, 1937. <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?index=8&did=94400304&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1271734400&clientId=30345> (accessed April 26, 2010)

<sup>165</sup> Esenwein, 218-219.

<sup>166</sup> Anthony Beevor, *The Battle for Spain, The Spanish Civil War 1936-1939*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 287.

<sup>167</sup> Landis, 259, excerpted in Esenwein, 223.

Belchite, which would eventually give the battle its name.<sup>168</sup> Events unfolded in a similar fashion to Brunete with early Republican victories followed by intense combat, high losses, and the eventual Nationalist counteroffensive. Franco chose not to divert troops from the north and completed his conquest of the North when Nationalist forces entered Gijón on October 21<sup>st</sup>.<sup>169</sup> Approximately one week later, Minister of the Interior Zugazagoitia publicly announced that the Republican government was pulling back from Valencia to Barcelona due to Nationalist gains.<sup>170</sup> The Republicans were reeling at the end of 1937, but plenty of hard fighting remained before the issue was decided.

On the heels of successive victories, Franco was planning an operation intended to finally capture Madrid. Before he could do so, however, the Republican Army struck at Teruel. With snow falling and no preliminary bombardment to maintain the element of surprise, Republican forces launched their attack on December 15<sup>th</sup> and captured the town on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1938.<sup>171</sup> Franco's anger at the loss of Teruel "surprised a staff unused to seeing him lose his equanimity," and he committed significant forces to recapture all lost ground.<sup>172</sup> Once more the Republican gains were short-lived, though the ramifications of this defeat were more serious than either of the two that preceded it. On the one hand, the initial victory displayed Republican initiative, diverted Franco's drive on Madrid, and raised their flagging morale. German observers remarked, "before the events in Teruel the end of the Spanish Civil War seemed to be in sight,

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<sup>168</sup> Esenwein, 223.

<sup>169</sup> Preston, *Franco*, 289

<sup>170</sup> Wireless to the New York Times, "*Loyalists Confirm Move to Barcelona*," *The New York Times*, October, 29, 1937.

<http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?index=0&did=94448970&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1272478668&clientId=30345&cfc=1> (accessed April 10, 2010)

<sup>171</sup> Thomas, 768-771.

<sup>172</sup> Preston, *Franco*, 294.

today the war seems once again to have moved into the far distant future.”<sup>173</sup> Alternatively, the battle “had exhausted the resources of the Republican Army,” and increased the infighting among the Republican factions.<sup>174</sup> Teruel also prepared the way for Franco’s coming offensive by weakening the Republican forces. As a result, the operation’s “speed in most areas depended more on the state of the roads and communications than upon enemy action,” and on April 15<sup>th</sup>, Franco’s forces reached the Mediterranean coast.<sup>175</sup> The Nationalists had now split the Republic in two and had done so with a rare rapidity.

Nationalist strategy under Franco was typically characterized by a slow paced, cautious approach from the war’s outset. According to Sebastian Balfour, Franco’s decision to take the longer, safer route to Madrid through Andalusia and Extremadura in the summer of 1936 “reflected the wariness of the colonial military officer.”<sup>176</sup> It also set the tone for much of the rest of the war. This risk adverse strategy also contributed to Franco’s decision to take Badajoz rather than bypass the town and advance on Madrid. A move which might have enabled the Nationalists to seize the capital in the war’s first year.<sup>177</sup> Franco’s slow and careful approach continued in other theatres of the war as well. During the drive against the Basques in the north, the German ambassador “was scathing about Franco’s military leadership, pointing out to Berlin that the campaign had taken nearly three months to cover forty kilometers.”<sup>178</sup> The Italian Foreign Minister, Count Galeazzo Ciano, echoed these sentiments at Teruel when he commented that Franco’s “objective is always ground, never the enemy. And he doesn’t realize that it is by

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<sup>173</sup> *Documents on German Foreign Policy*, Series D, vol. 3, Document 502, p. 554, printed in Esenwein, 228-229.

<sup>174</sup> Esenwein, 229.

<sup>175</sup> Jackson, 408.

<sup>176</sup> Sebastian Balfour, *Deadly Embrace: Morocco and the Road to the Spanish Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 290.

<sup>177</sup> Paul Preston, *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War*, (London: Fontana Press, 1986), 88.

<sup>178</sup> Preston, *Franco*, 280.



the destruction of the enemy that you win.”<sup>179</sup> As Paul Preston points out, what Ciano failed to perceive is “that Franco’s obsession with ‘ground’ was a conscious search for great battles of attrition which could, and did, destroy vast numbers of the enemy’s troops.”<sup>180</sup> One reason for this desire to eliminate large numbers of Republican troops was a racial conception of his Republican enemy.

Franco’s aspiration to kill Republicans, rather than push for quick victories, illustrates the fact that the Nationalists conceived of their enemy as racially different. Franco himself made this clear when he stated, “a systematic occupation of territory accompanied by the necessary purge (*limpieza*) is preferable to a rapid rout of the enemy armies which leaves the country still infested.”<sup>181</sup> One is struck by how closely his language mirrors the terminology previously utilized to discuss the Moors and Jews in Spain. The term *limpieza*, denoting purity or cleanliness, was previously associated with the purity statutes of fifteenth century Spain to distinguish pure Christians from Jewish or Moorish converts.<sup>182</sup> The employment of such language demonstrates his concern that the supporters of the Republic were racially distinct from the Nationalists and therefore had to be eliminated rather than simply defeated. In an interview with a Francoist General who fought in the colonial wars in Morocco as well as the Spanish Civil War, Sebastian Balfour noted the interchange of *moro* and *rojo* in the General’s accounts of the conflict. Balfour attributes this to the “the right-wing simplification of identities [which] encouraged a sort of metastasis between the Moorish and Spanish Others.”<sup>183</sup> The “reds” were conflated with the North Africans who had fought against Spain during the colonial conflicts.

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<sup>179</sup> Galeazzo Ciano, quoted in Preston, *Franco*, 293.

<sup>180</sup> Preston, *Franco*, 293.

<sup>181</sup> Francisco Franco, quoted in Preston, *Franco*, 222.

<sup>182</sup> Joshua Goode, *Impurity of Blood, Defining Race in Spain, 1870-1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 12.

<sup>183</sup> Balfour, 285.

Thus, Republican forces became a racial other in the Nationalist mindset. Understanding this fact helps to explain Nationalist strategy and the emphasis on total victory rather than an expedient one. As Paul Preston asserts, Franco saw the war “as an all-or-nothing, life-or-death struggle which had to end with the total annihilation of the Republic and its supporters.”<sup>184</sup> This was due in large part to a racist view of those who supported the Republic and also helps to explain the brutality that characterized the Spanish Civil War.

The Civil War in Spain was marked by the kind of mass killings and atrocities seldom seen in civil conflicts, unless they possess a racial understanding of the enemy. Hugh Thomas estimates that executions and murders behind the lines account for some 130,000 deaths, with Nationalists responsible for 75,000 and Republicans for 55,000.<sup>185</sup> Gabriel Jackson puts the number much higher at around 420,000 and asserts that in the three years after the war, “a large part of the 220,000 [additional deaths] can be attributed either to execution or to death from concentration camp conditions.”<sup>186</sup> Estimates of the total number of lives lost during the Civil War vary in a similarly large fashion, but the number of casualties directly tied to non-combat killings in nearly every account of the war is staggering. This is particularly true of Nationalist inflicted casualties, which are almost universally regarded to be higher than Republican atrocities. The explanations for these actions lie in their racial view of the Republican enemy.

Nationalists’ conception of Republicans in racial terms directly contributed to their propensity to commit atrocities on such a large scale. In his work on the Pacific theatre during World War Two, John Dower asserts that race hate fed atrocities while “The dehumanization of the Other contributed immeasurably to the psychological distancing that facilitates, not only on

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<sup>184</sup> Preston, *Franco*, 224.

<sup>185</sup> Thomas, 900.

<sup>186</sup> Jackson, 536-539.

the battlefield but also in the plans adopted by strategists.”<sup>187</sup> Although he was speaking about fighting between Japanese and American forces, the same logic holds true for Nationalists in the Spanish Civil War. As the Francoist General previously cited illustrates, *rojo*, or red became more than pejorative slang for leftists or republicans; it transformed Republican supporters into a distinct racial category. Such thinking enabled officers to order and soldiers to carry out the mass killings that characterized so much of the Spanish Civil War. Father Alejandro Martinez, a Madrid priest held by Republicans in Gijón until it fell to the Nationalists, noted that during the repression that followed, “it was as though a ‘certain species’ of human being had to be liquidated.”<sup>188</sup> In seeking an explanation for the similar level of brutality of combat on the Eastern Front in the Second World War, Omer Bartov cites “ideological internalization, whereby humanity is divided into opposing groups of ‘us’ and ‘them.’”<sup>189</sup> An analogous mode of thought directly contributed to the mass slaughter of the Spanish conflict as well. By acknowledging this racist feature of the war, one gains a better understanding of how and why the massacres took place.

Observing the role that race and racism played in the treatment of the enemy leads one to examine the role these factors played in the Nationalist treatment of their own troops; specifically the Moroccan soldiers. Republican forces were quick to claim that Franco exploited and abused his Moorish fighters. Scottish volunteer Tom Murray recounted how “Moors got terribly slaughtered, of course. You see the fascists were sending them in impossible situations, just grinding them down because they were Moors.”<sup>190</sup> As a Republican volunteer, however,

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<sup>187</sup> John Dower *War Without Mercy: race and Power in the Pacific War*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 11.

<sup>188</sup> Father Alejandro Martinez, quoted in Fraser, 424.

<sup>189</sup> Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 6.

<sup>190</sup> Ian MacDougall, *Voices from the Spanish Civil War: Personal Recollections of Scottish Volunteers in Republican Spain 1936-39*, (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1986), 323.

Murray was far from an unbiased observer. Historian Sebastian Balfour states that “the Army of Africa remained the shock-troops of the rebel forces, their cannon fodder,” and notes that one in eight of the over 75,000 Moroccans who served was killed.<sup>191</sup> Yet the Army of Africa contained Spaniards as well as Moroccans and their role as shock troops seems to be more reflective of their skill level than any racist contempt. Although Republican’s racially founded fears of the Moors did have some influence on this type of deployment. Given Franco’s penchant for battles of attrition, it is unsurprising that these units suffered such high casualty rates. There is little credible evidence of a conscious, race-based decision to sacrifice Moorish troops at a higher rate than other portions of the Nationalist Army. This speaks to the fact that the Nationalist ideology allowed for Moroccan soldiers to become part of the “true” Spaniards who came to rejuvenate Spain from the anti-Spanish “reds.” This is not to suggest that Franco’s Moroccan troops were not treated differently in some respects. From the recruiting practices to enlist them to the looting which they were allowed conduct following the taking of a town, distinctions existed. In at least one instance, they replaced a Falangist firing squad because of their superior marksmanship.<sup>192</sup> These exceptions notwithstanding, Moroccan units were treated in a similar fashion as other Nationalist formations and not sacrificed in disproportionate numbers due to Nationalist racism. Some Moroccan soldiers, however, were singled out in a different way that highlighted their racial distinctness from the Spanish population.

As the war progressed and Franco consolidated his control over the Nationalist rebellion he also took new titles. As just one of the initial junta members, he was hailed as Generalissimo, but on September 28<sup>th</sup> 1936, he was proclaimed head of state and by early October, Franco

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<sup>191</sup> Balfour, 312.

<sup>192</sup> Balfour, 292.

became *El Caudillo*.<sup>193</sup> The title of *Caudillo* was an effort to link Franco to the warrior leaders of Spain's medieval past, especially El Cid, while simultaneously establishing his Fascist identity alongside the Italian *Duce* and German *Fuhrer*.<sup>194</sup> As "leader" or "chief," Franco soon began to acquire the requisite trappings of a dictator at the center of a personality cult. One essential piece of Franco's image was his Moorish bodyguard, *La Guardia Mora*, which he was already employing in October 1936.<sup>195</sup> The Seville version of the conservative *ABC* newspaper first mentions them in an article on the reception of the new Italian Ambassador, describing them as "the magnificent Moorish guard with their eye-catching suits, in which the colors shouted in an Arabic din and on the horses, beneath legendary African suits, the black and bronze faces of these warriors of the desert."<sup>196</sup> Franco's decision to compose his bodyguard exclusively of Moors is rich with insights into his own racial ideology and intended meaning for the people with Spain.

The *Guardia Mora* served as a visual representation of Franco's racial ideology. Sebastian Balfour correctly asserts that the Moorish bodyguards were "meant to be a constant reminder to the Spanish people that they had been saved by the Army of Africa."<sup>197</sup> On one level, Moroccans' racial differences were subsumed by their religious and political identification with their erstwhile allies. Yet, the article cited above displays a clear recognition of their racial distinctiveness as well. Franco chose Moroccan soldiers because of the race-based fears so many Spaniards possessed, especially those who supported the Republic. These Moors served as a poignant symbol of the brutality Franco could unleash on those who contested his vision for the

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<sup>193</sup> Thomas, 410-411.

<sup>194</sup> Preston, *Franco*, 187.

<sup>195</sup> Thomas, 189.

<sup>196</sup> "Presentacion de Cartas Credenciales por el Nuevo Embajador de Italia," *ABC Sevilla*, August 3, 1937. <http://hemeroteca.abc.es/detalle.stm> (accessed April 1, 2010)

<sup>197</sup> Balfour, 316.

country. The Moorish guards also symbolized the racial hierarchy that the *Caudillo* extended to all Spain. Franco and his allies held themselves to be superior to the Spanish masses, which they were meant to control or exterminate. The infamous cavalry Captain Gonzalo de Aguilera made this clear when he lamented the introduction of sewage systems because “prior to this, the riff-raff had been killed by various useful diseases; now they survived, and of course, were above themselves... Sewers are a luxury for to be reserved for those who deserve them, the leaders of Spain, not the slave stock.”<sup>198</sup> The *Guardia Mora* was meant to keep this racially inferior “slave stock” in check as a reminder that Franco could unleash his Moors if ever he felt it necessary. This racial conception of Spain, especially “red” Spaniards, was to have severe consequences after the Nationalist victory in 1939 though in early summer 1938 this victory was still far from certain.

After the defeat of Republican forces at Teruel and the Nationalists’ advance to the Mediterranean coast, the initiative clearly lay with Franco’s forces. The Nationalists were in position to attack either Catalonia or Valencia and chose the latter because, as George Esenwein confirms, “Franco reasoned that taking Valencia, which appeared to him more vulnerable than either Madrid or Catalonia, would so disrupt the enemy’s forces that it would bring about a rapid end to the war.”<sup>199</sup> The Republican Army, however, had other ideas. In late July Dolores Ibárruri recounted how Republican forces shocked the world as over “200 miles on the right bank of the Ebro were occupied by our army after an audacious crossing of one of Spain’s most important rivers.”<sup>200</sup> The surprise offensive caught Franco off guard, forcing him to postpone the offensive against Valencia and shattering Nationalist hopes of a definitive end to the conflict.

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<sup>198</sup> Captain Gonzalo de Aguilera, quoted in, Preston, *Franco*, 191.

<sup>199</sup> Esenwein, 231.

<sup>200</sup> Dolores Ibárruri, *They Shall Not Pass, the Autobiography of La Pasionaria*, Translated from *El único camino*, (International Publishers Co., 1966), 312.

Franco responded to the offensive as another opportunity to kill large numbers of Republicans and disregarded advice for a rapid attack against Barcelona in order “to turn Gandesa into the cemetery of the Republican army.”<sup>201</sup> Due to this decision, both armies suffered appalling casualties of perhaps 40,000 on each side before the fighting came to an end in November.<sup>202</sup> While the Nationalists were able to absorb the losses, the Republican Army’s back was now broken. After the Battle of the Ebro the Republic was doomed to defeat; it was only a question of how long Republican forces could hold out.

Although the outcome was increasingly clear to all concerned, the war would drag on for almost four more months. Having defeated the Republicans at Ebro and regained all lost territory, Franco embarked on the war’s last great offensive to capture Catalonia. On December 23<sup>rd</sup>, a huge aerial and artillery bombardment marked the beginning of the onslaught.<sup>203</sup> Nationalist forces made steady progress against crumbling resistance over the next month. Communist Lieutenant Timoteo Ruiz recalled the ambivalence of new recruits who did not possess “spirit of defence as there had been in November 1936 in Madrid. The political struggles in Barcelona had sapped the people’s spirit.”<sup>204</sup> On January 26<sup>th</sup>, Barcelona fell to the Nationalists.<sup>205</sup> The following months saw increased political infighting behind the lines and continued Republican losses at the front. Madrid would hang on for nearly two more months until Nationalist troops entered the capital on March 27<sup>th</sup>.<sup>206</sup> Finally on April 1<sup>st</sup>, Franco declared, “Having captured and disarmed the red army, Nationalist troops today took their last objectives. The war is finished.”<sup>207</sup> The Republic had fought to a bitter end, but this decision

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<sup>201</sup> Preston, *Franco*, 311.

<sup>202</sup> Jackson, 461.

<sup>203</sup> Esenwein, 256-257.

<sup>204</sup> Timoteo Ruiz, quoted in Fraser, 480.

<sup>205</sup> Preston, *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War*, 211.

<sup>206</sup> Preston, *Franco*, 322.

<sup>207</sup> Francisco Franco, quoted in Fraser, 507.

was not without debate. When Republicans questioned whether continued resistance was worthwhile in a conflict they had no hope of winning, “One of [President] Negrín’s constant arguments was that more men would die if the Republic surrendered than if it resisted.”<sup>208</sup> These words would prove to be unfortunately prophetic of Republicans’ fates during the post-war years.

Franco and the Nationalists’ conduct towards their vanquished adversaries illustrates their attitude that those who had supported the Republic, especially the more left-leaning supporters, were racially different than themselves. As one might expect given his actions during the conflict, the *Caudillo*’s peace was not a magnanimous one. Writing in July 1939, the Italian Fascist Ciano spoke of “a great number of shootings. In Madrid alone between 200 and 250 a day... while more than ten thousand men already condemned to death awaited in the prisons their inevitable moment of execution.”<sup>209</sup> While it is nearly impossible to accurately calculate how many perished, the total is almost certainly above 100,000. Hugh Thomas rejects the high of 193,000 in favor of the more open-ended assertion that “tens of thousands of Spaniards died in the months following the war,” which signifies the scale of the executions.<sup>210</sup> The killings continued for years after the war’s end, slackening in 1942 “not only because of the lack of victims, but also because the heyday of the European fascist powers, which had seemed to provide a sort of sanction to mass murder, had been passed,” according to Stanley Payne.<sup>211</sup> Payne’s assertion that the fascist “heyday” had passed in 1942 is somewhat anachronistic, but by linking the killings in Spain to those that took place elsewhere in Europe Payne does illustrate that like Hitler, Franco was acting on an ideology that considered those being murdered racially

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<sup>208</sup> Jackson, 539.

<sup>209</sup> Count Galeazzo Ciano, *Ciano’s Diplomatic Papers*, (London: Odhams, 1948), 290 and 204, printed in Esenwein, 267.

<sup>210</sup> Thomas, 899.

<sup>211</sup> Stanley Payne, *Politics and the Military in Modern Spain*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), 420.



different. He goes on to state that the killings were intended to “carry out a thorough social and political prophylaxis.”<sup>212</sup> Given the hereditarian nature of Spanish eugenics, one can also observe a distinctly racial logic at work in these killings.

Those who were not killed outright were often condemned to long stays in concentration camp conditions and even longer prison sentences. According to official statistics cited by Payne, the April 1, 1939 prison population of 100,292 more than doubled to 270,719 by 1940.<sup>213</sup> A large number of these were low-ranking soldiers who had served with the Republican Army, yet even these prisoners were considered totally incompatible with Nationalist Spain in ways that betray racist thinking at work. One such manifestation of this was that despite the fact that sentences “permitted a form of redemption under which the offender would get a day’s remission of his sentence for every day spent at hard labor... only 8 per cent were rated eligible.”<sup>214</sup> This fact suggests that there was no “cure” for Republican supporters because their political difference was understood in a way that can only be described as racial. As further proof of this, one need only reference “the testing of political prisoners to find out if they harbored a ‘Marxist gene.’”<sup>215</sup> The search for a genetic basis of political difference goes far beyond any conventional construction of political ideology into a race-based conception of those Spaniards who had supported the Republic. For Franco, “reds” had transformed from a political epithet into a racial slur.

The closing months of the Spanish Civil War and years that followed were heavily influenced by conceptions of race among both Nationalists and Republicans. Franco’s racial

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Payne, 419-420.

<sup>214</sup> Herbert L. Matthews, *Half of Spain Died: A Reappraisal of the Spanish Civil War*, (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1973), 233.

<sup>215</sup> Goode, 212.

construction of Republicans and leftists directly contributed to his slow, methodical strategy that emphasized physically destroying Republican forces. This in turn contributed to the Republican leadership's understandable reluctance to surrender and decision to extend the war. Similar racial thinking was to blame for the mass killings that took place both during and after the war. Both factions viewed each other as irreconcilably different types of Spaniards, but especially on the Nationalist side this construction of difference developed into a racialist picture of their "red" enemies. Nationalists were cognizant of their Moroccan allies' distinct racial identity and traded upon this in the form of Franco's *Guardia Mora*, but did not overtly sacrifice them in battle because of this difference. Racial logic and racism played the unfortunate role of escalating the brutality of the Spanish Civil War, but by examining the conflict in racial terms one gains a fuller understanding of the conflict's destructive nature.

## Conclusion

### A Complex Legacy

In between executing Republicans and attempting to maintain advantageous neutrality during the Second World War, Francisco Franco found the time to write an idealized autobiography that would soon be turned into a film. The film's name was *Raza* (race). Paul Preston writes that the "title reflected Franco's current infatuation with Nazism...that the hero and his family are considered to carry the essence of what is valuable in the Spanish 'race' and so are able to save Spain."<sup>216</sup> Franco's title choice alone demonstrates that the Spanish Civil War possessed distinctly racial dimensions for one of the most important participants. Race and racist thinking were significant factors in the course, outcome, and legacy of the conflict in Spain. Acknowledging this fact and analyzing the war through the lens of race and racial thought provides a more complete understanding of the Spanish Civil War. Race, however, is not an obvious category of analysis with which to study the war. Initially, one is struck by the country's racial homogeneity and the lack of overt racism in the period preceding the war's outbreak.

The Second Republic paid scant attention to race, but through their education reforms focused on Spanish history and identity, one notices a determination to define the Spanish race. In light of the influential eugenics movement and attempts to justify colonialism through racial superiority across the European continent during the 1930s, this should not be surprising. Also, given Spain's long and complex racial history an attempt to elucidate the Republican position on these issues should be expected. Spaniards traced their national race to the *Reconquista* and

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<sup>216</sup> Paul Preston, *Franco, A Biography* (London: HaperCollins, 1993), 418.

asserted their identity in contrast to the Moors and Jews who had once inhabited the peninsula. The result was a conception of race that relied on those two groups as “others,” whom Spaniards could define themselves against. Due to this the idea of race in Spain was tied to cultural, religious, and historical factors in addition to more conventional concerns such as skin color or facial features. Spanish racial ideology clearly did not ignore the latter two factors, as made evident by racial policies utilized across the vast Spanish empire. Spaniards also continued to define their own racial character, with particular urgency following the “disaster” of 1898 and the rise of eugenics in the early twentieth century. Spain was rife with racial ideologies, concerning themselves and others, prior to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. The influx of large numbers of non-Spaniards for the first time in hundreds of years as well as the political questions that arose from the Civil War make the conflict an ideal period to examine race in the Spanish context.

Both Republicans and Nationalists utilized race-based reasoning to conduct their campaigns at home and abroad. Nationalists sought to encourage the image of ferocious, marauding Moors in order to gain a psychological edge over Republican forces. At the same time, they also attempted to justify the deployment of Moroccans by citing western precedents and downplaying Moroccan differences in the language of Eugenics. They were also able to rationalize employing Moors by subsuming their racial difference to their religiosity in contrast to the atheist “reds.” Republicans appealed for sympathy based on racist outrage at Franco’s use of non-European, and specifically Moorish soldiers, against Spaniards. Republicans, however, had few qualms about utilizing African American volunteers in their own lines. Indeed, the African Americans who served in Spain reported equal treatment almost to a man. The Republican Army also accepted a significant number of Jewish volunteers, though some of this

group still felt racism's impact. As these non-Spanish groups illustrate, race was an important factor on and off the battlefield in both camps. Nationalists and Republicans recognized a very Spanish racial ideology that could emphasize or de-emphasize similarities because of the fact that race relied on a number of factors in Spain.

As in the greater conflagration that followed, race-based hate also had the regrettable role of escalating the level of violence and death in the Spanish Civil War. Once Franco had consolidated his control over the rebellion, he pursued what is often described as an overly cautious strategy. The *Caudillo* was loath to bypass any pockets of resistance in order for a more rapid victory. Additionally, he favored large battles of attrition and demanded his troops retake any territory lost to Republican offensives. This may have been partially due to the limits of his strategic vision, but it also displays the overarching goal of killing as many Republicans as possible. His desire trickled down the Nationalist ranks and was driven by a racialized view of Republicans and leftists who were antithetical to the Spanish race. Those who supported the Republic were deemed incurable in a way that can only be described as racial. The widespread slaughter of the Republic's soldiers and supporters following the Nationalist victory demonstrate this point, as do the concentration camps and the search for a biological basis of their difference. In this instance, race refers to a method of articulating difference rather than any physical or cultural features. Yet it is clear that Nationalists understood their "red" enemy to be racially different which contributed to the atrocities and enormous casualties that characterized the conflict. By investigating the role of race, both conventionally and theoretically, one can more completely comprehend the course of the Spanish Civil War.

Additionally, race and racial thought also have implications for the legacy of the conflict as well as Franco's reign. Traditional historiography, which portrays a liberal, progressive

Republic in contrast to a conservative, reactionary Franco regime, is called into question. The *Caudillo* was surprisingly progressive on the Moorish issue, while Republicans displayed a discernibly racist contempt. Franco's racial conception of his enemies also pushed him more firmly into the Fascist camp. While the Falangist leader Dionisio Ridruejo may have felt his party "differentiated itself from Nazism by having no racist policies," a closer analysis shows a similar racialist logic at work, albeit to a lesser degree than in Nazi Germany.<sup>217</sup> This does not detract from the fact that racial modes of thought were at work. As Joshua Goode poignantly notes, "The era of George Mosse's assumption that all racial thought must necessarily lead to the gas chamber if it is to be characterized as racial is well passed."<sup>218</sup> These new insights complicate Franco's legacy. He undeniably saw himself as the defender of traditional Spain and believed in a somewhat reactionary concept of "National-Catholicism." And yet, his racial ideas reveal a more egalitarian outlook in some instances or perhaps merely an opportunistic one. Even if one employs a cynical interpretation, Franco is able to ignore race and tradition with unexpected ease.

The Spanish Civil War was not primarily a racially driven war; however, race and racial thought were key components to the conflict in a number of significant ways. By the role race played historians gain a more thorough understanding of the conflict as a whole. Historians must go beyond traditional biologically or physically derived conceptions of race to fully explore the impact of racial thought in an era dominated by such concerns. Even in a political war among a racially homogenous people, racial ideology played a part. Franco and his allies never ignored the role of race and for historians to do so would represent a setback in scholarship on the

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<sup>217</sup> Dionisio Ridruejo, quoted in, Ronald Fraser, *Blood of Spain: An Oral History of the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979), n. I 315.

<sup>218</sup> Joshua Goode, *Impurity of Blood, Defining Race in Spain, 1870-1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 142.

conflict. Historians must acknowledge race as a factor in the Spanish Civil War to completely comprehend the war both in Spain and internationally.

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Note: I have chosen not to list primary and secondary sources separately because a significant amount of the sources utilized in this study do not neatly correspond to these categories. A number of primary sources are embedded in secondary sources rendering any division along those lines false and potentially counterproductive.