

iNo Pasarán!

(They shall not pass)

No other conflict of the 20th Century combined the drama, the historical significance and the ethical clarity. Thousands of young men from around the world came together in a foreign land and sacrificed their lives for an ideal. More than an impassioned showdown between democracy and evil, the Spanish Civil War was the prologue to World War II.

THE CENTRO ASTURIANO IS A GRAND old edifice rooted to the intersection of Nebraska and Palm in an ungentrified section of Ybor City in Tampa. Originally built in 1914, the building served as the mutual aid society for Spanish immigrants. Surrounded by auto body shops and smudged by decades, its ornate, stone-carved facade is carefully being restored by a small army

of workmen. Sun streams through the large open windows along with the rat-a-tat-tat sounds of jackhammers and the steady roar of cars from nearby I-275. On the second floor, above the newly resurrected cantina, is a meeting room, the salon de directiva. From its ceiling hangs a large, faded flag of purple, yellow and red. A symbol of the brief-lived, quixotic Republic of Spain. Herein lies a tale of two cities.

Ybor City. August 6, 1997:

Ana Varela-Lago stands over the salon's boardroom table, gently removing the contents of a stuffed leather briefcase, carefully spreading out fragile mementos of another era — yellowed bits of newspaper clippings, a scarf, a pin, ribbons, faded letters and flyers, an old autograph book, ragged telegrams. These tangible bits and pieces are silent testimony of the significant role that Tampa's Latin community played in Spain's fight against Francisco Franco and fascism in the 1930s.

"Everybody in Republican Spain knew about Tampa," she said. Varela-Lago, 32, grew up in Galicia, a region of Northwest Spain. The same place that many of Tampa's Spanish immigrant population hail from. It was her marriage to

James D'Emilio, USF associate professor of humanities, that brought her to Tampa. It was her curiosity about the lives of these immigrants that brought her to USF's History department. After enrolling in the master's program, she began combing Tampa's archives and archives in Spain; one immigrant exploring a common destiny with the past. Her master's thesis, "La Retaguardia de Tampa," described how Tampa's Spanish immigrant community marched, lobbied and raised money to support Spanish democracy during the Spanish Civil War. She earned her master's degree in December.

While Varela-Lago was researching the local effort, an international event was unfolding that would parallel her study: the 60th anniversary of the Spanish Civil War. Spain would invite the surviving veterans to return to their old battlefield and grant them Spanish citizenship: the fulfillment of a 60-year-old promise to the foreign volunteers who had fought for the Spanish Republic. This historic milestone would generate worldwide media attention.

It's not often that local and international stirrings collide. Out of this unintended coincidence, the Spanish Civil War Oral History Project was born, funded by \$17,000 in grants from the Florida Humanities Council and a cultural exchange program between the Spanish government and American universities.

In January, Varela-Lago began collecting memorabilia and oral histories that recall this heroic 1930s struggle. The people who are old enough to remember are now in their 60s and 70s, but their stories are told in the voices of Depression-era children who grew up playing in the shadows of Tampa's cigar factories.

Varela-Lago has interviewed more than 30 people. She

By **Lynn Rothman**

continues seeking more stories and artifacts. She organized community meetings, sent out flyers and made appointments at people's homes. Every few weeks, she continues to hold informal meetings at the Centro Asturiano, dogged in her pursuit of small pieces of history.

"People were very skeptical at first. As they heard about the project they started to come to meetings. They came with friends, and brought the photographs and momentos they had carefully kept for 60 years. They began to realize that this is not just 'old stuff,' this is their story."

"He [the Spanish Consul] usually did most of his business in the house on Columbus Drive. I can remember the room just like we're sitting here. One whole wall was a map of Spain. With a small ladder to go up. And that's where he kept track of the progress of the war. And I used to change the flags back and forth and I'd always ask him, 'When are we going to win, Grandpa?' and he would say, 'Don't worry, we are gonna win.' Well, he died before the war ended, which is just as well, because it would have crushed him to know that. He was so sure that there was going to be victory."

Gus R. Jimenez, talking about his grandfather Gustavo Jimenez, the consul of the Spanish Republic in Tampa during the Spanish Civil War.

Madrid. July 18, 1936:

The opening shots of the second World War were fired in one of Europe's poorest countries. Spain, long governed by a wealthy elite and its brutal military police, the infamous Guardia Civil, grabbed its chance for democracy when the 7-year-old dictatorship of General Primo de Rivera collapsed. When elections were held, the monarchist candidates were defeated at the polls. King Alfonso XIII fled Spain for exile in Italy, and a new republic was born on April 14, 1931.

But this fragile democracy would not last.

As the new government attempted to modernize Spain, class conflict erupted. Efforts toward land reform, improved working



Alice Perez, 5, front left, and her sister Grace Pelaez, 7, second row right, raise their fists in support of Loyalist Spain.

conditions, and a reduction of privileges within the church and the military were a threat to powerful interests. A military coup was launched. The army rebellion led by Franco and his Nationalist movement attempted to crush the republican government. Instead the rebels faced armed resistance on the streets of Barcelona and Madrid. A civil war had begun.

Franco persisted. Europe's fascist dictators — Germany's Hitler, Italy's Mussolini and Portugal's Salazar — supported his rebellion. The first airlift in modern war occurred when Nazi planes

transported Franco's troops from Morocco to battle in Spain. Italy sent airplanes, tanks, trucks and some 47,000 ground troops. Nazi planes conducted the first saturation bombing of a defenseless civilian target when they obliterated the town of Guernica in April 1937.

"My father had a short-wave radio at home. And every night of the week, he'd sit by the radio and listen to the news from Madrid. I think they used to start the newscast by saying 'Aqui Madrid,' and then they went into their newscast... It probably wasn't very long, 30 minutes or so. And they gave statistics

of how many people were injured and how many were killed from both sides. And how many airplanes were shot down and that sort of thing."

Angel Rañón

People from all over the world came to the aid of Spain. Artists like Pablo Picasso, Joan Miro, Ernest Hemingway, George Orwell and Paul Robeson were in the forefront of this international outpouring of support. Volunteer brigades came from every corner of the globe to defend Spain — 40,000 anti-fascists from 52 countries. From the United States, 2,800 men volunteered as part of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. They were seamen and students, the unemployed, miners, fur workers, lumberjacks, teachers, salesmen, athletes, dancers and artists. The Lincolns established the first racially integrated military unit in U.S. history and were the first to be led by a black commander.

Franco had hoped to subdue Madrid and win the war in one decisive maneuver, but the Spaniards and the international volunteers, shouting the battle cry "No Pasarán," would not let them pass.

"I remember the Spanish Civil War because there were a lot of protests and demonstrations, and I was involved, as a child, dressing up in the miliciano outfit. I was about 7 years old. And it was very emotional. I loved it. We learned the song "No pasarán, and we'd sing it. Then we would make these signs (raising the fist) and march, and it was a lot of fun. It was something really to look forward to."

Grace L. Pelaez

Franco's bloody civil war lasted three years and claimed a half-million lives. His rebel forces overthrew the republic in 1939. The Lincoln Brigade had lost nearly 750 men and sustained a casualty rate higher than that suffered by Americans in World War II. Few escaped injury. Throughout the struggle, the great powers of the West stood silent, adhering to a policy of appeasement. Had the West stood firm against fascism in Spain instead, the history of our century might read differently.

"When the Civil War broke out, Pepe (Jose Garcia Granell) left, went to New York, got in the Lincoln Brigade and went back to his old country. I became aware of the civil war in Spain. When I heard that Pepe was leaving ... 'se va pa España.' (he's going to Spain). 'What is he going to do in Spain?' 'There's a conflict in Spain. A civil war in Spain.' That's when I learned about that. Then, later on they learned that the youngest brother Oscar was also involved, but with Franco. Pepe got my eyes open when I heard that he left the United States to go to Spain and fight in the civil war."



Demonstrators marched down the streets of Ybor City to protest Franco's bombing of Guernica in 1937.

"Pepe was a POW for 18 months... Oscar managed to go to this... camp... after the war, get his brother, get him out of there, and hide him some place in Pravia. Because if his brother wouldn't have done that, they would have killed Pepe. Pepe was... very outspoken... very devoted for his cause... He was injured, he died and he's buried in Spain."

Anthony Granell, talking about his uncle Jose Garcia Granell, one of more than 20 volunteers from Tampa who joined the Abraham Lincoln Brigade

Ybor City. August 3, 1936:

When Spain elected a democratic government in 1931, Tampa's immigrants took to the streets in celebration. Portraits of the deposed king were torn from the walls, the old Bourbon flag was summarily discarded. Throughout the neighborhoods, everywhere, the brand new red, yellow and purple flag of the republic was proudly displayed.

A week after General Franco's uprising, Victoriano Manteiga, the editor of the Ybor City Spanish newspaper *La Gaceta*, declared that "if it were possible to go to Spain in a few hours, hundreds of Tampans would take up arms in defense of the Popular Front." At least 24 Tampa volunteers did serve in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. The rest fought fascism from the home front. The first mass meeting in support of the Spanish Republic took place at the Labor Temple in Ybor City on August 3. Two days later, Tampa Latins organized the Democratic Popular Committee to Aid Spain. Local leaders, labor unions, mutual aid societies, socialists, communists and protestant churches joined together to raise money to support the Loyalists.

"When they got together at the Labor Temple, the whole auditorium was full. And people standing in the back couldn't get a seat. The whole community came together. Very much so. Mainly through word of mouth, through the cigar factories. And also at the time there used to be these panel trucks with loudspeakers. They'd go up and down the neighborhoods, with the loudspeakers, maybe announcing that there would be a meeting or a social function of some kind. And the people would just line up. Anytime, every time there was anything like this going on, any function of this type, it would always fill the theaters."

Amelia Menendez

Much had changed since Vicente Martinez Ybor, a Spanish businessman, bought 40 acres of land northeast of the small village of Tampa to build his cigar factory in 1885. Populated initially by Cuban and Spanish cigar workers, and a growing number of Italians, the cigar industry triggered a demographic explosion. By the 1930s, the Latin community in Ybor City numbered 30,000, including 5,000 native Spaniards, making it the third largest Spanish immigrant community in the United States.

Latin cigar workers brought with them two institutions that facilitated their subsequent support of the war effort: the mutual aid society and la lectura (the reading).

"The mutual aid societies were the heart of the immigrant community's life," said Varela-Lago. The majority of Tampa's immigrants belonged to one of these societies; Spaniards to the Centro Español and the Centro Asturiano, Italians to L'Unione Italiana, white Cubans to the Circulo Cuban and Afro-Cubans to La Unión Martí-Maceo. These buildings served as a home away from home—a place to socialize, obtain social services and disseminate information. Through these mutual aid societies, the organizational structure necessary to support the republic was already in place.

La lectura (the reading) was the office radio of its day. Four

hours a day, a reader, paid by the cigar workers, would read from the pages of national and international labor publications and from the writings of Emile Zola and Victor Hugo as the workers rolled cigars. While la lectura was blamed for the five major strikes that rocked the cigar industry in the first half of the century, it was also a catalyst for solidarity among the workers, bonding them in a common trade unionist philosophy. During the war, the local community marched in demonstrations, lobbied government officials and boycotted products from the fascist countries and areas of Spain that were held by Franco.



Jose Garcia Granell, one of more than 20 volunteers from Tampa who joined the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, praised Tampa's work in this article published in a Spanish newspaper.

"The cigar workers where my mother (worked) in Garcia & Vega got together and formed a committee, and they said: 'Let's have a march to protest, and ask Roosevelt to lift the embargo and to help the poor children that are suffering so much in Spain.' And it organized in the Labor Temple in Ybor City, and we marched from there down to city hall. And I remember participating in that march... And (the people) were holding hands, going with posters and so forth. It was a very impressive demonstration. And when it went to the city hall, and I don't recall who spoke, but they did speak there, and they asked the mayor and others to send a telegram to Roosevelt to please lift the embargo so those people could at least have arms to defend themselves."

Joe Maldonado



The Women's Committee in front of the Labor Temple with General Philemore, general inspector of the Spanish Red Cross, in 1938.

"I remember seeing them (the demonstrators). And they had little pins with the Republican flag on them, and then there was a big drive when the Fascists were trying to take Madrid, and they would have this song, that all of them would sing in the Centro Obrero, in the streets, and everything: 'Pero a Madrid, pero a Madrid, no pasarán.'

Joaquin de la Llana

One of the most significant contributions of the Democratic Popular Committee to Aid Spain was raising money and gathering supplies for Loyalist Spain. It was particularly remarkable in light of the community's dire financial straits. By 1931, the Ybor cigar workers had been crippled by automation, the increasing popularity of cigarettes and the Great Depression. But the workers' nickels and dimes added up to impressive resistance. In a three-year period, Tampa immigrants raised \$9,000 to buy four ambulances, rolled 6 million cigarettes and packed thousands of Christmas boxes that were shipped overseas to support the freedom fighters. The local women's auxiliaries collected and mended 20 tons of clothes and raised enough money to buy several thousand cans of milk that were sent to Spain's women and children. The children collected lead foil wrappers from cigarette packs which were melted down for metal sinkers and sold to support the war effort. Altogether, \$200,000 was raised and sent to Spain, the equivalent of \$1.57 million in today's dollars.

"The kids all used to get together. We used to collect newspapers and we used to collect the foil. And I understand that they made sinkers for fishing and would sell them. And I had a friend that I think must have stripped his mother's lemon tree, because he was always selling lemons to collect money."

Amalia Owens

"We sold churros. Every Saturday you'd get anywhere from 10 to 15 women making them. We used to go out with two baskets. I think they put five in each little bag. And I had Seventh Avenue. And we used to yell 'Churros!' We started early. And we stayed there until 9:30, until all the stores closed. We sold churros from 22nd Street to Nebraska.

And very few people said no. We would get anywhere from a nickel to

a dollar. And it was not just Seventh Avenue and Ybor City. People used to go to West Tampa and wherever they could sell it, they would sell it. I don't know what other part of Tampa they went to, but I know in Ybor City and West Tampa, we churroed them out!"

Melba Pullara

"My mother was very active, mainly sewing and mending clothes that had been donated to send to Spain. All this through the Labor Temple. All this went to the Loyalists. My house had turned into a warehouse. Everything was separated: children's clothes, women's clothes, men's clothes and so on. And a lot of people would come over. Encarnacion Rosete had the most. In fact, it was when her house overflowed that my house became a warehouse. And people would go over there to pick up items of clothing to mend. And also, if any of the clothes were soiled or anything, they were all made presentable. And they were fixed at both these houses. The people would take them and fix them, maybe wash them, iron them, bring them back all folded and nice to be able to pack and send away."

Amelia Menendez

But not everyone in the community supported the republic. A small minority supported Franco — notable among them were a handful of members of the local Nationalist Club, some cigar manufacturers and the Catholic Church.

"The Catholic church in Ybor City, one Sunday in August, announced that the next Sunday there would be a special collection for the Red Cross in Spain. Well, that was like a bomb had hit this community. Everybody got so upset. The Red Cross meant Franco Spain, not the Red Cross as we

think of it, as an international organization. So that Sunday, most of these people did not let their children go to church. Two weeks later we were supposed to go to school. The greater part of the students never returned. They went to public school. My recollection is that there were about 900 students in the school, and it got down to about 90. There were 10 students in my class, in ninth grade, and it came down to three. It was tremendous. If it wasn't the ratio that I remember, it was somewhere close in there."

Delia Sanchez



The worker's nickels and dimes added up to impressive resistance. Tampa immigrants raised \$9,000 to buy four ambulances that were sent to Spain.

The Spanish Republic fell to Franco in 1939, four months before Hitler

invaded Poland. The purple, red and gold flags of the Spanish mutual aid societies were taken down, consigned to the attic and the museum. The Spanish immigrants were in a quandary. They could not take back the old flag. Gradually, throughout Ybor City and West Tampa, the stars and stripes began to make an appearance.

"In a sense, that is when they cut links with Spain," said Varela-Lago, "and they became Americans."

Madrid. November 10, 1996:

Some came in wheelchairs. Others used canes or walked slowly into the Madrid Sports Palace. The old men were showered with the best that Spain could offer—flamenco music, poems of Garcia Lorca, and the old battle songs. They cried, saluted and raised clenched fists before a cheering crowd of 10,000.

Fraser Ottanelli, USF professor of history, was there and witnessed this moving memorial to unselfish idealism.

"There were thousands of people lining the streets, singing, chanting and crying. I was overwhelmed. It was one of the most moving experiences of my life."

Ottanelli is one of four members of the executive committee for the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives (ALBA), a collection of posters and other artifacts salvaged from history that is permanently housed at Brandeis University. He has been instrumental in bringing "Shouts from the Wall," an exhibit of Spanish Civil War poster art, to the USF Contemporary Art Museum (see story Page 24) that will run through December. Ottanelli is neither a Spanish immigrant nor an aging volunteer. But as a historian, his area of expertise is radicalism and anti-fascism of the '20s and '30s. The Spanish Civil War, he says is "my call to heart."

Ottanelli witnessed the Spanish do two things, he said. One was to thank the survivors. But more importantly, it was watching the younger generation, in their twenties, wanting to hug and touch the old men, asserting their own commitment, 60 years later, to the values of social justice. "It was a beautiful passing of the torch. The old men knew that the values that they had stood for would live on into the 21st century."

"(I remember my parents talking about) the picnics, the fundraisers that were coming up and that we needed uniforms and that we needed to learn songs. And how terrible Franco was. And that was the extent of it for a five-year-old. I mean, the excitement was getting uniforms and learning the songs. And I remember my father was always very emotional about it, and every time I sang those songs I got chilled, very emotional about it. Because that's when I could feel, more than listen or understand. It was this feeling that youngsters get about things that are emotional around them."

Alice Perez

Ybor City, September 10, 1997:

"She costs a lot, this old lady." William Garcia is giving a tour of the Centro Asturiano's theatre showing off the new, red velvet seat upholstery. The seats are original. The theatre, with its ornate carved walls, and gilded edges was the scene of many live performances as well as the meeting place for the Democratic Popular Committee. Garcia and 14 other oral history participants gathered at the Centro on this sunny morning for a photo session.

"If only we had done this 10 years ago," said Gus Jimenez, sighing over recent deaths in this community and lost bits of history. Between photographs, the men and women engage in the easy chatter of people who have known each other a lifetime.

Varela-Lago's oral history project and the "Shouts from the Wall" exhibit are just two pieces of a larger, multi-faceted Spanish Civil War Project—an ad hoc partnership between USF and the community commemorating this historic convergence. Art exhibits, lectures and other special events are planned throughout November and December. USF's Contemporary Art Museum, the Library Special Collections, and the History department all play



Varela-Lago's oral history subjects gather in the Centro Asturiano's salon de directiva. Seated from left to right, Aida Azpeitia, Melba Pullara, Angeles Marti. Standing from left to right, Alice Menendez, William Garcia, Ana Varela-Lago, Frank Gonzalez, Jose Oural, Anthony Granell, Amalia Owens, Gus Jimenez, Alice Perez, Grace Pelaez, Angel Rañón.

key roles.

But the heart of the project belongs to Tampa's Latin community. Varela-Lago's collection of oral histories and memorabilia will be on display at an exhibit at the Centro Asturiano which will run from November 8 through December 22. Among the prized artifacts is a 1930s recording of the song *No Pasarán* and a 1938 home movie showing a Labor Day demonstration and fundraiser.

When the Centro Asturiano exhibit closes, some of these pieces of history will be permanently housed at the USF Library's Special Collections. A library web site has also been created that displays the photographs, video and recordings. It can be reached at <http://www.lib.usf.edu/spccoll/guide/s/spncwohp/guide.html>.

In May, Special Collections hosted a reception for the Spanish Civil War Project and displayed the objects and documents. More than 50 people from the community attended. During the event, a recording of the song *No Pasarán* was played. "Many tears were shed," says Varela-Lago.

The Spanish Civil War remains a haunting inspiration to man's better nature. Following the war, the survivors of the International Brigades faced ignominy and disgrace. Many survivors of the European Brigades died in World War II concentration camps. Many members of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade were blacklisted as communists during the McCarthy purges of the 1950s. The war itself has been consigned to a vague historical footnote, laced with memories of Hemingway and Picasso's "Guernica," often confused with the Spanish-American War and "Remember the Maine."

It is perhaps fitting that this international ideological struggle—of good vanquished by evil—took place in Spain. Land of the legendary Don Quixote.

It is sad and ironic that Tampa's Latin immigrants fought for democracy while America turned its back.

"My ideas reflected my parents' feelings, and my parents' feelings were that the republic was a legally instituted government and they should have been given the opportunity to rule the government according to democratic principles. Like this country, you know. They fought for the same principles: liberty and the pursuit of justice."

Angel Rañón

USF