Tampa and the Spanish Civil War: A Photographic Essay

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Recommended Citation
Available at: https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/tampabayhistory/vol19/iss2/5

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Despite the onset of the Great Depression, the decade of the 1930s started auspiciously for Tampa’s Spanish immigrants. In 1930 they rejoiced at the fall of the seven-year dictatorship of General Primo de Rivera. In 1931 they celebrated the return to democracy and the proclamation of the Second Spanish Republic ending the rule of the Bourbon monarchy. By the end of the decade, their expectations had been shattered. In 1936, a military uprising threatened to overthrow the Republic. In 1939, after three years of war and half a million deaths, the Spanish Republic fell, and Spain again became a dictatorship under General Francisco Franco.

Spanish immigrants in the United States sided overwhelmingly with the Loyalists and responded to General Franco’s revolt by setting up anti-fascist committees to support the Republican war effort. In Tampa, the Democratic Popular Committee to Aid Spain worked tirelessly in support of the Spanish Republic, organizing weekly collections in cigar factories and business establishments; sending shipments of clothing, food and medicines; demonstrating...
against the indiscriminate bombing of civilians; and urging the United States to lift the arms embargo against Republican Spain. When the Republic fell in 1939, they turned their efforts to aid the thousands of refugees who fled the country. The accompanying photographs are testimony to the commitment of the Tampa Latin community to support democracy in Spain.
Gustavo Jimenez in the Spanish consular office in the First National Bank Building. Following Pablo de Ubarri’s resignation, Jimenez was named interim consul of the Spanish Republic. He served from 1936 until his death in 1938.

Photograph courtesy of Gus R. Jimenez.

Alvin D. Pasternack, one of several Tampans who joined the Abraham Lincoln Brigade to defend the Spanish Republic against General Franco’s rebel forces. He was killed on October 17, 1937, while fighting on the Aragon front.

Photograph courtesy of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives.
Blanca Valls contributes to the Tampa Committee for the Defense of the Spanish Popular Front in Ybor City’s Labor Temple, while its president Jose Martinez (left) and Victoriano Manteiga look on. Two weeks after its foundation the Committee sent $2,000 to Republican Spain. During the three years of the war, it contributed close to $200,000 to the Spanish Red Cross.

Photograph from the *Tampa Tribune*, August 21, 1936.

Republican supporters celebrating good news that was received from Republican Spain on short wave radio in Ybor City streets. People gathered daily at the Labor Temple to listen to radio broadcasts from Madrid and Havana reporting on the progress of the Spanish Civil War.

Photograph from the *Tampa Tribune*, August 22, 1936.
Fernando de los Ríos, the Spanish Ambassador, first visited Tampa in November 1936, and during the course of the war, he returned several times. In 1938, he presented the Tampa Democratic Popular Committee to Aid Spain the gold medal of the Spanish Red Cross for its outstanding humanitarian work.

Photograph from the *Tampa Tribune*, November 20, 1936.

Front page of a program commemorating the sixth anniversary of the Spanish Republic. The program design resembles the Spanish Republican flag. Throughout the war, Tampa Spanish immigrants continued to celebrate the anniversary of the Spanish Republic every April 14.
Pablo Picasso’s *Guernica* represents the destruction of the Basque town of Guernica by the German Condor Legion on April 26, 1937, one of the first saturation bombings of a defenseless town in Europe.

Reproduction from the Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid.

The bombing of Guernica provoked international outrage. In Tampa, 5,000 demonstrators marched from Ybor City’s Labor Temple to City Hall to protest the “ruthless killing of women and children by Franco’s forces.”

Photograph courtesy of *La Gaceta*. 
Posters of the Spanish Civil War portrayed the popular defense of Madrid against Franco’s forces during the first months of the war. These posters featured images of women donning dungarees and fighting side by side with militiamen in the trenches.

Photograph courtesy of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives.
Powerful images of the Spanish Civil War resonated in Tampa, where children dressed as milicianos sang the song “¡No Pasarán!” at fundraisers of the Tampa Committee like this picnic at La Columna Park in West Tampa circa 1937.

Photograph courtesy of Grace Pelaez.

Children were key participants in the activities of the Tampa Democratic Popular Committee to Aid Spain as it can be seen in this Labor Day demonstration through Ybor City in 1938.

Photograph from the *Tampa Tribune*, September 6, 1938.
Children raised money for the Republic by collecting the tin foil from chewing gum wrappers and cigarette packs. The tin foil was made into fishing sinkers, like those pictured here, that were sold locally to buy canned milk for Spanish children.

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.

Members of the Democratic Popular Committee to Aid Spain at the Labor Temple preparing to send one of many shipments of clothing to the Spanish Red Cross. During the war, the Tampa Committee shipped more than 20 tons of clothing to Spain.

Photograph from the Tampa Tribune, November 28, 1937.
Flier announcing a play, “Los Héroes de Madrid,” written by a Tampa cigarmaker and performed at the Centro Asturiano. Proceeds from the performance were used to purchase sewing machines to send to Republican Spain.

Courtesy of Alice Menendez.
Volunteers from the Democratic Popular Committee to Aid Spain packing some of the more than 6 million cigarettes made with tobacco donated by the Raul Garcia Co. to be shipped to the Spanish Red Cross for use by the Loyalist soldiers.

Photograph from the *Tampa Tribune*, December 21, 1938.

As the Spanish Republic collapsed in March 1939, demonstrators gathered in front of Tampa’s courthouse to ask for the lifting of the arms embargo.

Photograph from the *Tampa Tribune*, March 5, 1939.
In this cartoon depicting the fall of Madrid in March 1939, George White acknowledged the role of foreign intervention in Franco’s final victory.

Photograph from the *Tampa Tribune*, March 29, 1939.
Around half a million Spanish Republicans fled to France after Franco’s victory in 1939. The organizations that had supported the Spanish Republic turned to alleviate the plight of the thousands of Spanish refugees crammed into French refugee camps at the start of World War II.

Photograph from *The Spanish Civil War: A History in Pictures*.

The membership card of Ceferino López for Tampa’s Junta de Cultura Española, the organization that replaced the Popular Committee when the Spanish Civil War ended in 1939. The Junta de Cultura Española collected more than $50,000 to aid Spanish refugees and continued operations until 1970.

Courtesy of Grace Pelaez.