

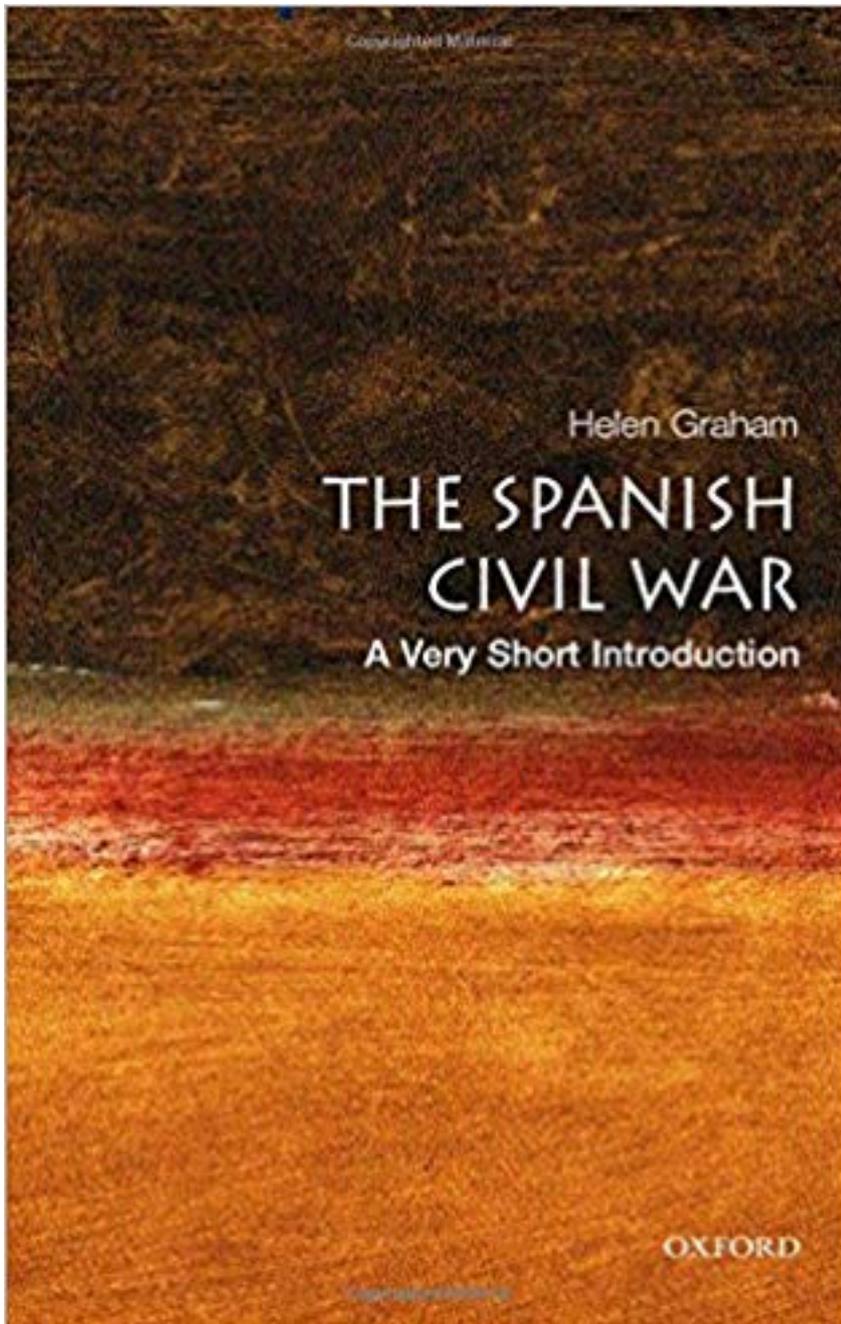
#89: The Spanish Civil War

#books

#books/rating/☆☆☆

#books/type/non-fiction

#books/date/2019/03



Overview

On a recent trip to Barcelona, a tour guide mentioned Franco and the Spanish Civil War. I realized that my Virginia education had neglected to fill in those gaps in my historical knowledge, and that I honestly had no idea what had happened to forge modern day Spain. Fortunately, I found this little book at a Picasso museum before I left.

While the book itself was a little inaccessible and overly academic, the content was eye-opening.

- The events that led to the fall of the Spanish Republic have many lessons that are relevant in other struggles today; there were many self-inflicted wounds by the republican-socialist leaders.
- Many foreigners fought in the Spanish Civil War (including George Orwell—his experiences are chronicled in [Homage to Catalonia](#))
- Germany and Italy were the main financiers of Franco, supplying troops (some 75,000 from Italy alone), supplies, and planes/ships.
- Rebel troops even fought alongside the Nazi's and had active diplomatic relations with Germany until VE Day
- The bombing of Guernica (the subject of the famous Picasso painting), was truly horrific—Franco bombed his own people, not to hit a military target, but to sap civilian morale.

Book Notes

CHAPTER 1 - THE ORIGINS OF SPAIN'S CIVIL WAR

- When Spain "lost its empire" in 1898, its military no longer had a meaningful external defensive role.
- "It is not the business of historians to engage in counterfactual speculation, but one could argue that what established the preconditions for a successful coup attempt was not Spain's deep tensions, but republican-socialist failure to implement key policy reforms in 1931-3: most crucially, perhaps, the failure to demilitarize public order." (pg. 18)

CHAPTER 2 - REBELLION, REVOLUTION, AND REPRESSION

- "For republican and socialist leaders who had stake the Republic's legitimacy on its defense of constitutional forms and rule of law, the knowledge that they had been powerless to prevent extra-judicial killing was devastating." (pg. 28)
- Rebel violence, "meant 'cleansing' people who symbolized cultural change and thus posed a threat to the old ways of being and thinking." (pg. 29)
- "This points to the fundamental asymmetry between the violence occurring in Republican and rebel zones. The military authorities had the resources to stem the violence—for there was no collapse of the police or public order in rebel areas. But they chose not to." (pg. 31)

- “The violence was a way of shaking up society while staving off the redistribution of social and economic power heralded by the Republic.” (pg. 31)
- The public backing given to the rebels by the Spanish Church gave their cause the “air of a crusade”. (pg. 34)
- “If the Republic was to survive the rebel onslaught of modern, mechanized warfare, courtesy of German and Italian aid, it would need to put an army in the field and to mobilize its whole population for war—something unprecedented in Spanish experience.” (pg. 36)

CHAPTER 3 - MOBILIZE AND SURVIVE: THE REPUBLIC AT WAR

- “Hitler and Mussolini intervened in Spain because they saw it as the most effective way of changing the balance of power in Europe.” (pg. 39)
- “Soviet aid saved the Spanish Republic from almost certain military defeat in November 1936.” (pg. 41)
- The Spanish Republic recruited many international volunteers, 35,000 in total, and 3,000 from the US (pg. 42)
- “The Abraham Lincoln bridge, in which around 90 African Americans fought, was the first non-segregated American military unit ever to exist—the United States Army itself continuing to operate segregation throughout the Second World War.” (pg. 45)
- “Such was the scale of Mussolini’s aid in weaponry and manpower (75,000 troops), we can say that from March 1937 Fascist Italy was at war with the Spanish Republic.” (pg. 51)

CHAPTER 4 - THE MAKING OF REBEL SPAIN

- “After Madrid and Durango came the attack on Guernica, the symbolic seat of Basque nationalism. The town, which had no anti-aircraft defenses, was annihilated on 26 April 1937 in three hours of saturation bombing carried out by the German Condor Legion and the Italian Aviazione Legionaria. The key strategic target in the attack was not a military one, but rather civilian morale. Guernica was intended to kill the Basque appetite for resistance, and in an important sense it did achieve this.” (pg. 71)
- Most shocking aspect was these air raids were happening in a civil war—Franco was bombing his “own” people!
- Franco’s perception: “Theirs was a higher purpose: the purification of Spain...the health of the nation required the elimination of the industrial proletariat.” (pg. 73)

CHAPTER 5 - THE REPUBLIC BESEIGED

- “The difference between Negrín and Prieto was not their intellectual grasp of the

Republic's position, but rather their subjective response to it. Negrín drew strength from adversity, while Prieto seemed to cave in before the bleakness. Negrín honed down his energies to a single fiery point and focused only on the matter in hand—how to maintain an army in the field, supplied and fed.” (pg. 101)

- “In signing away Czech independence, the Western democracies also killed the Spanish Republic. For Munich demonstrated their apparently unbreakable commitment to appeasing the fascist powers, and the resulting diplomatic impasse fatally undermined both Negrín’s resistance strategy and his personal political credibility in the eyes of many of his desperate and war-weary compatriots.” (pg. 111)
- “If Britain and France had heeded [Negrín], then the whole course of European history might have been different.” (pg. 113)

CHAPTER 6 - VICTORY AND DEFEAT: THE WARS AFTER THE WAR

- Franco, who did not break off diplomatic relations with the Third Reich until VE Day on 8 May 1945, provided Hitler with strategic raw materials, food, and labour...the best-known consequence of this affinity, however, was the dispatch in 1941 of the Falangist Blue Division, as a result of which some 47,000 Spanish troops would fight with the armies of the Third Reich on the Eastern Front. A less well-known consequence was Franco’s complaisance in allowing the Nazis to strip prisoner-of-war status from the thousands of Spanish Republican prisoners in their power, thus permitting them to be sent from the stalls to concentration camps.” (pg. 126)
- “Denunciation was a major mechanism to trigger the detention and trial of Republicans in post-war Spain. But priests were not the only denouncers. Tens of thousands of ordinary Spaniards also responded to the regime’s enthusiastic encouragement—out of political conviction, social prejudice, opportunism, or fear. They denounced their neighbors, acquaintances, and even family members—denunciations for which no corroboration was either sought or required.” (pg. 135)

CHAPTER 7 - THE USES OF HISTORY