

ENGELSE TAAL EN CULTUUR

Teacher: Prof. Dr. Jaap Verheul

Title of document: Public Opinion and the News: Newspaper
Representation of Pro-Franco Americans during
the Spanish Civil War

Name of course: MA Thesis

Date of submission: 24 June 2022

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MASTER THESIS
TRANSATLANTIC STUDIES
RADBOD UNIVERSITY

Public Opinion and the News: Newspaper
Representation of Pro-Franco Americans during the
Spanish Civil War

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24 June 2022

Abstract

The Spanish Civil War, which ravaged Spain between 1936 and 1939, had a profound impact outside of Spain. An ideological war between the leftist Second Spanish Republic and the rightist, conservative Nationalist forces, the war sparked discussion across the Atlantic and deeply divided Americans. Whereas the majority of Americans sympathized with the Loyalist forces who defended the Spanish Republic, a vocal minority sided with the Nationalists led by General Francisco Franco. They sympathized with a regime that was strongly associated with fascism. This thesis will add to the academic discussion on fascist sympathies in the United States, by studying media representation of this group. By examining news articles from two major newspapers, the *New York Times* and the *New York Herald Tribune*, this thesis will investigate pro-Nationalist lobbying efforts in the newspapers and newspaper mediation of this group's perspective on the Spanish Civil War. This thesis therefore sets out to answer the question to what extent American supporters of Franco were able to portray themselves positively in the news media. Focusing on two themes, American neutrality and Nationalist ideology, this thesis argues that American pro-Nationalists lobbying efforts appeared most favorable in the news when they refrained from the political aspects of Nationalist Spain itself and focused on widely shared sentiments like anticommunism and nonintervention.

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List of Abbreviations

ACPD	American Congress for Peace and Democracy
ALB	Abraham Lincoln Brigade
AUNS	American Union for Nationalist Spain
FET y de las JONS	The Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista
KTEC	Keep the Embargo Committee
NCLEP	National Conference to Lift the Embargo Against Spain
<i>NYHT</i>	<i>New York Herald Tribune</i>
<i>NYT</i>	<i>New York Times</i>
SCW	Spanish Civil War

Introduction

Between 1936 and 1939, a civil war was fought in Spain between the Second Spanish Republic and the insurgent Nationalists forces. The Spanish Civil War (SCW) is often described as a prelude to the Second World War for being the first battle between ideologies, fought between the leftist Popular Front government and the rightist Nationalists.¹ It had a profound impact outside of Spain, as it divided much of the Western world. On the other side of the Atlantic, too, the Spanish Civil War was a contentious topic of debate. Americans watched with interest and concern as the Nationalist army, with the help of fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, advanced across the Iberian Peninsula. The majority of Americans, opinion polls have indicated, supported the democratically elected Spanish Republic.² And indeed, many traveled to Spain to fight in International Brigades to fight with the Loyalists as like-minded citizens from other nations.

There was, however, a vocal minority that supported Franco for a variety of ideological, religious, or economic reasons. Organized in interest groups such as the American Union for Nationalist Spain (AUNS), pro-Nationalist Americans lobbied the US government for a Nationalist-friendly foreign policy. They were not just ordinary American citizens. They graduated from prestigious universities such as Harvard and Yale, had impressive careers in journalism, business, or diplomacy, and

1. Willard C. Frank, "The Spanish Civil War and the Coming of the Second World War," *The*

International History Review 9, no. 3 (1987): 368–69; Andy Durgan, *The Spanish Civil War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 1; Robert Whealey, *Hitler And Spain: The Nazi Role in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1989), 3.

2. "American Institute of Public Opinion – Surveys, 1938-1939," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 3, no. 4 (October 1939): 600.

could use their elite networks to lobby for policies favorable to the Spanish Nationalists. In the wider European and American context of the 1930s, their support of a movement with strong ties to fascism and the Axis powers was controversial. This thesis will investigate how American newspapers reported on these Nationalist sympathizers and on the arguments used in support of the Nationalists in Spain.

Literature Review

Both academic and popular attention has highlighted the pro-Loyalist sentiments among Americans in the late 1930s. Scholars have published numerous accounts of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade (ALB). In 1994, Peter N. Carroll published *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade: Americans in the Spanish Civil War*, which offers insights into these volunteers' motivations for joining the brigades and their experiences in battle.³ *Madrid 1937: Letters of the Abraham Lincoln Brigades in the Spanish Civil War* has provided an even closer understanding of the Brigadiers.⁴ Other scholarly accounts focus on particular aspects of the volunteers, such as James Yates, who has investigated the racial aspects of the ALB in *Mississippi to Madrid: Memoir of a Black American in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade*.⁵ The abundance of

3. Peter N. Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade: Americans in the Spanish Civil War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

4. Cary Nelson and Jefferson Hendricks, *Madrid 1937: Letters of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade From the Spanish Civil War* (London: Routledge, 1996).

5. James Yates, *Mississippi to Madrid: Memoir of a Black American in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade* (Greensboro: Open Hand Pub Llc, 1988).

available popular resources on the ALB, such as online archives, exhibits, and educational tools suggest that the public memory highlights these heroic stories.⁶

In more recent years, scholars have published accounts of the opposite perspective, offering insights into the more dark side of American public opinion. In 2011, Michael E. Chapman published *Arguing Americanism: Franco Lobbyists, Roosevelt's Foreign Policy, and the Spanish Civil War*.⁷ The book investigates a small group of urban elites that vocally lobbied the government in favor of the Nationalists. Katy Hull has likewise investigated fascist sympathizers in the United States in this period in *The Machine Has a Soul: American Sympathy with Italian Fascism*.⁸

In public debates, media play an important mediating role. In the 1930s, newspapers were key in informing citizens of global affairs, but also in facilitating debates and informing citizens of various opposing opinions. But newspapers are ever the product of filtration, as journalists and editors inevitably pick and choose which bits of information to publish, and how much attention such a piece is afforded. Furthermore, journalists and editors can manipulate the information they provide in the way that they choose to convey it. In this process of manipulation – that one may argue is also unavoidable to journalists – word choice is of key importance, as well as numerous other decisions that are made in the process of writing and publishing an article.

6. "Online Resources," The Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives, accessed May 17, 2021, <https://albalb.org/education/resources/>.

7. Michael E. Chapman, *Arguing Americanism: Franco Lobbyists, Roosevelt's Foreign Policy, and the Spanish Civil War* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2011).

8. Katy Hull, *The Machine Has a Soul: American Sympathy with Italian Fascism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).

In scholarship on fascist sympathizers in the United States in the interwar years, the aspect of media representation has remained understudied. This constitutes a significant research gap because of the connections between media, public opinion, and politics. Firstly, media and public opinion are connected by way of journalists who, to some degree, mirror the opinions of the public. Journalists, editors, reporters, and columnists are members of society themselves. Their opinions are inescapably shaped and formed by their environment, and are therefore likely to mirror public sentiments, or at least the public sentiments of a particular group. Of course, they also need to take into account the expectations of their readership, an aspect that will be discussed more elaborately in the next section. Some scholars go as far as suggesting that public opinion equals media opinion, and it is best defined as those ideas produced by media and opinion leaders.⁹ Secondly, this relation goes both ways, as the media has the capacity to influence public opinion. For years, scholars have recognized the agenda-setting role of newspapers. In 2004, for example, Wanta, Golan, and Lee found that news coverage of nations, particularly positive news coverage, affected public perceptions of these nations' importance to U.S. interests.¹⁰ Lastly, media has the potential to influence political decision-making. This has been a particular topic of interest in recent years with the rise of online mass media, which have lowered barriers between politicians and the public. But traditional media can also wield significant power on decision-makers, as a study in 2015 found significant

9. Carroll J. Glynn, et al., *Public Opinion*, 3rd ed. (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2016), 16.

10. Wayne Wanta, Guy Golan, and Cheolhan Lee, "Agenda Setting and International News: Media Influence on Public Perceptions of Foreign Nations," *J&MC Quarterly* 81, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 364.

evidence for *strategic responsiveness* of members of Congress in response to news media attention.¹¹

This thesis will therefore investigate media representations of pro-Franco Americans in the years of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). Using newspaper articles as the primary basis for analysis, this thesis will analyze the pro-Nationalist lobbying effort through their expressions in the news media, examining the arguments the pro-Nationalists used. Moreover, this study will investigate how the newspapers mediated this perspective. This study thereby sets out to answer the question to what extent pro-Franco Americans succeeded in portraying themselves and their arguments positively in the news media.

Methodology

The basis of this research project will be newspaper articles from the SCW period. An interesting and relevant analysis of news representations of pro-Franco groups requires a selection of newspapers with different ideological backgrounds. A leftist and rightist newspaper would provide an ideal comparison, because it is likely that the portrayal of pro-Franco sentiments differed along these lines. However, such an approach does not entirely do justice to the American context, and would be more applicable to the Dutch news environment of the 1930s.

The American media landscape in that era was much different than the Dutch system of *verzuijing*, in which there were distinct newspapers for different societal groups, such as socialist, liberal, protestant, and catholic media. In the United States, there was an abundance of smaller newspapers for particular political groups,

11. Kevin Arceneaux et al., "The Influence of News Media on Political Elites: Investigating Strategic Responsiveness in Congress," *American Journal of Political Science* 60, no. 1 (2016): 5–29.

strongly leftwing or rightwing. “Radical” political groups such as communists, socialists, and anarchists, also published their own newspapers. In addition, there were myriads of papers published by religious groups, including Methodists, Baptists, and Catholics. And then there were hundreds of more general newspapers published and read exclusively in one city or geographic area, for example the *Milwaukee Journal* or the *Kansas City Star*. Lastly, there were major newspapers that had more significant circulations than these publications for specific groups. Their readership transcended political lines and the geographic boundaries of traditional local newspapers. Examples are the *New York Times (NYT)*, the *New York Herald Tribune (NYHT)*, and the *Chicago Tribune*. This last category is the most relevant for this study, because it had the largest audience, the widest reach, and their editors, reporters, and columnists were often public figures. Thereby these papers could potentially have a significant influence on public opinion and potentially on policymaking.

This category of newspapers is more difficult to charter into categories of right and left. More relevant categories are liberal and conservative, but even these categories have their limitations for the purposes of this research. Firstly, the categories of conservative and liberal were often blurry for the major newspapers. The *New York World*, for example, was seen as a “champion for liberal causes,” whereas the *Chicago Tribune* was seen as an ultra-conservative paper.¹² But very often newspapers’ position on this scale was quite blurry. Frank Luther Mott defined

12. Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States Through 250 Years, 1690 to 1940* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1945), 644; Michael Emery and Edwin Emery, *The Press and America: An Interpretive History of the Mass Media*, 8th ed. (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1996), 309-310.

the *New York Times* as a conservative paper in his expansive work *American Journalism: History of Newspapers in the United States through 250 Years*. Other evidence suggests, however, that the *NYT* supported liberal cases on some occasions, for example hiring the first woman in the editorial board and supporting an all-black Shakespeare production.¹³ The *New York Herald Tribune*, also generally categorized as a conservative paper, hired Walter Lippmann as its star columnists even though he was seen at the time as a liberal author.¹⁴

These inconsistencies can be explained in the context of the media economy of the 1930s. Mott explains how a series of developments after the Great War made the newspaper world highly competitive as production costs rose and advertisers came to prefer larger newspapers in order to cut costs. It led to the rise of newspaper barons like Joseph Pulitzer, William Randolph Hearst, and Edward Willis Scripps. In this competitive newspaper economy, it makes sense that newspapers made concessions on their ideological credentials in order to sell more newspapers.¹⁵ Secondly, with the press-radio conflict of the 1930s, newspapers had become part of what was called “old media.” They were seen as generally conservative. The major newspapers, those with the most extensive circulations such as the *New York Times*, the *New York Herald Tribune*, and the *Chicago Tribune*, are all categorized by Mott as conservative.

13. “Journalism 1929-1940,” *Encyclopedia.com*, accessed 10 November 2021,

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/education/news-and-education-magazines/journalism-1929-1940#Perspectives>; “Breaking News of the 1930s,” *PBS*, accessed 10 November 2021, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/worlds-timeline-worlds/>.

14. Barry D. Riccio, *Walter Lippmann: Odyssey of a Liberal* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1994), xii–xiii.

15. Mott, *American Journalism*, 635.

Therefore, this is not the distinguishing factor that is interesting for the analysis in this thesis.

The party affiliation of newspapers, in contrast, is a broader category and one that remains more consistent over the period studied in this thesis. This resulted in the selection of the *New York Times* and the *New York Herald Tribune* as the objects of study in this research. The *NYT* overall supported Democratic presidential candidates and was overall supportive of Democratic policies. And although it held objective and unpartisan reporting in the highest regard, according to Elmer Davis in *The History of the New York Times*, it was overall a Democratic paper.¹⁶ In contrast, the *NYHT* generally affiliated with the Republican Party. Richard Kluger, author of *The Paper: The Life and Death of the New York Herald Tribune*, argues that until 1940, the paper was seen as “a spokesman for and guardian of mainstream Republicanism.”¹⁷ What further makes these two papers interesting bases for analyses is their international outlooks. On the issue of the League of Nations, for example, they were staunch opposites.¹⁸ This may prove important when analyzing these newspapers in the context of the Spanish Civil War as the debate between isolationists and internationalists was an important part of this discussion.

To assess to what extent the pro-Nationalists were successful in portraying themselves positively in these two newspapers, a number of methods will be used. First, semantics are an important element, as word choice can have significant influence on framing perspectives. For example, the words *insurgent* or *rebel*, as

16. Elmer Davis, *History of the New York Times, 1851-1921* (New York: New York Times, 1921), 371–75.

17. Richard Kluger, *The Paper: The Life and Death of the New York Herald Tribune* (New York: Knopf, 1986), 269.

18. Davis, *History of the New York Times, 1851-1921*, 371–72; Kluger, *The Paper*, 195, 205.

opposed to the term *Nationalists*, can have a negative connotation as it contrasts this group with obedient, loyal people. A second aspect that will be studied is article length. Longer articles allow the pro-Nationalists to express their views more extensively and bring more arguments forward. Third, the balance of arguments is an important element to assess how the pro-Nationalists come across in the news. In a number of articles two sides of a discussion are presented. If in such articles one side is afforded significantly more space to provide arguments, it has more or better opportunities to bring arguments forward than the opposing side. The balance of arguments in an article may also bring forward one side as more reasonable as the other, depending on how arguments are framed or on whether opposing sides are given the opportunity to rebut.

Roadmap

The analysis of media representations of pro-Francoists in the United States will be structured into three chapters. The first chapter will provide the context of the American supporters of general Franco and the Spanish Nationalists in the civil war, and will clarify why some Americans supported the controversial insurgents. The second and third chapters will analyze media coverage of pro-Franco expressions in the public debate. The second chapter will focus on the theme of American neutrality in the conflict, centering around the arms embargo against Spain that was instated with the Neutrality Acts of 1935 and 1937. The third and last chapter will examine the public discussion in defining who the Nationalists and General Francisco Franco were, defining their ideological standpoints and political outlooks.

Chapter 1:

Pro-Franco Americans during the Spanish Civil War

In the public memory of American attitudes towards fascism and the Spanish Civil War, American anti-fascist sentiments and actions are usually highlighted. In hindsight, American foreign policy is often celebrated as having helped to extinguish fascism from Europe together with the Allied powers. Public memory mostly celebrates the veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigades who fought against fascism on the side of the Loyalists. Their opponents, the Americans who sided with the Nationalists and General Franco, have become somewhat of a black page in American history, and are often misunderstood as members of a corrupt Catholic hierarchy or “fascist crackpots.”¹⁹ These conceptions are shaped by a bias of hindsight, as fascism gained a different meaning after World War II.

This chapter will therefore seek to develop a better understanding of the context in which American sympathies with General Franco developed, and illustrate that these were – just like pro-Loyalist sentiments – shaped by domestic factors in the context of the 1930s. Pro-Nationalists were made up of two primary groups: American Catholics and upper-class anticommunists. Although the latter group will be the focus of this study, this chapter will briefly explain why American Catholics supported the Spanish Nationalists. Next, this chapter will discuss the members of the elite, East Coast Franco lobbyists, who provided a vocal base of support for

¹⁹ Chapman, *Arguing Americanism*, xii.

Franco. In contrast to the religion-based support of American Catholics, they were driven more by anticommunism and sympathy for certain aspects of the Nationalist regime. In the process, the definition of the term fascism requires further investigation. This chapter will therefore investigate the popular use of the term and the context in which it was used, which will add to a better understanding of the context in which pro-Nationalist public opinion developed.

Context

The 1920s and 1930s were a period of political crisis in the United States, a period in which the aftermath of the Great War, the modernization of social and economic life, and a deep economic crisis provided a breeding ground for new political ideas. Katy Hull's analysis of sympathies with Italian fascism sketches the sociopolitical context in which pro-fascist sympathies took root. She describes how in the early twentieth century, a number of social, economic, and cultural changes affected a sense of estrangement and disillusionment with the world. American sympathizers with fascism argued that this system would be better able to deal with the problems of the day. First, the Great War had left Americans bitter about the great ideals that had motivated American intervention in the war. She writes that the war had promised Americans a break from modernization, on which it had not delivered.²⁰

Secondly, the Great Depression caused poverty and hardship for many Americans. Hull explains how sympathizers with Italian fascism saw American modernity as the root cause of this crisis, "a product of machine-made capitalism, exacerbated by a government that had fetishized technology at the expense of human beings." American sympathizers with fascism, Hull argues, "all worried about the

²⁰ Hull, *The Machine Has a Soul*, 24–25.

impact of economic, social, and cultural change on the United States, and argued that Italy was coping better with the challenges that such changes entailed.”²¹

The changes of this period thus led a group of Americans to lose confidence in democracy. They looked at alternative political systems for the solutions to the problems of the day. Such an interpretation can be supported with evidence that scholars have found for ties between periods of economic hardship and the rise of extremist movements, in particular right-wing movements.²² In the United States, too, the 1920s and 1930s saw the rise of a number of extremist movements, including the Ku Klux Klan, the Black Legion, and the German American Bund.²³

In addition, the rise of leftist movements sparked an extreme-right response. Leftist movements in the United States had existed since the mid-19th century, and had caused distrust before, for example with the first Red Scare that followed the end of the First World War. A decade later, in the midst of the Great Depression, high unemployment inspired many other Americans to join leftist movements, with particularly the Communist Party enjoying an upsurge of members in the Depression era.²⁴

21. Hull, 18,85.

22. Alan de Bromhead, Barry Eichengreen, and Kevin H. O'Rourke, "Political Extremism in the 1920s and 1930s: Do German Lessons Generalize?," *The Journal of Economic History* 73, no. 2 (June 2013): 371–406.

23. Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 350–52.

24. Harvey Klehr, "The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade," *Science and Society* 50, no. 4 (1986): 479–82; Norman Markowitz, "The Communist Party in the '30s: The Depression and the Great Upsurge," *People's World* (blog), May 14, 2019, <https://www.peoplesworld.org/article/the-communist-party-in-the-30s-the-depression-and-the-great-upsurge/>.

Again, this inspired paranoia of international communism and fears of communism spreading to the United States, which materialized over the Spanish Civil War. In this war, the Spanish insurgents, made up of conservative and rightist factions, took up arms against the leftist Popular Front government. Chapman argues that Americans used Spain as a “blank canvas” upon which they drew America’s future. Americans observed what was happening in Spain, a conflict between left and right, and believed that what could happen there could happen in the United States too. This inspired a heated Red-Fascist debate in the United States. Pro-Nationalist Americans believed that the Great Depression had made Americans susceptible to communism, a system that would threaten American principles of freedom and democracy.²⁵ Sympathies for fascist regimes, among them the Spanish Nationalists, can therefore partly be explained by a fear over the spread of communism.²⁶

The Pro-Nationalist Lobby

One of the most vocal groups of American supporters of the Spanish Nationalists were American Catholics, a topic that has been studied extensively by scholars. The sociopolitical context of the Spanish Civil War provided a particularly testing dilemma for this group. Following the electoral victory of the leftist Popular Front in February 1936, religious violence tormented Spain. Catholic churches and buildings were looted and burned down, and thousands of Catholic clergy members were attacked and killed. The newly elected government did not repress this streak of violence. American historian Stanley G. Payne, specialized in the history of the Spanish Civil War and European fascism, argues that this was due to more than an

25. Chapman, *Arguing Americanism*, xiii, 2, 9.

26. Hull, *The Machine Has a Soul*, 24.

inability to act by a feeble government. The Republic had demonstrated its anticlericalism from the start, putting restrictions on Catholic religious freedom, for example fining priests and citizens for public displays of Catholicism. When mobs targeted church buildings and possessions in 1936 and after, the government, Payne indicates, closed their eyes to the violence, and would blame the victims instead of the perpetrators. According to Payne, the leftist parties did not on any occasion profess the church's right to be protected by state and law.²⁷

As the violence evolved into civil war by the summer, Catholic Americans said to be caught between the church's teachings of submission to authority, and the threat they perceived by the new Spanish Republic to Catholicism in Spain.²⁸ The socialist and communist elements of the Popular Front government were seen as the instigators of this violence, and so for Catholic Americans the SCW became a war between atheism and religion. Franco promised to protect the Catholic church from atheistic communism, and to protect traditional values. For this reason, he appealed strongly to Catholic Americans.²⁹

Catholic Americans were not the only source of pro-Nationalist support, however. Chapman has added to our understanding of this group with his elaborate

27. Stanley G. Payne, *The Collapse of the Spanish Republic, 1933-1936: Origins of the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 16–19.

28. "The Reply of 175 Catholic Clergy and Laymen to Protestant Letter on Spain," *New York Times*, October 14, 1937, TimesMachine; "Open Letter in Reply to Spanish Hierarchy's Recent Views of War," *New York Times*, October 4, 1937, TimesMachine.

29. Philip Chen, "Religious Liberty in American Foreign Policy, 1933-41: Aspects of Public Argument Between FDR and American Roman Catholics," in *Franklin D. Roosevelt, The Vatican, and the Roman Catholic Church in America, 1933-1945*, ed. David B. Woolner (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 129.

work on pro-Franco lobbyists. Although both Catholics and pro-Franco lobbyists were motivated to support Franco by staunch anticommunism, for the pro-Franco lobby this was less motivated by religion. Besides anticommunism, they also sympathized with certain political aspects of the Spanish Nationalists. Chapman describes how this circle of “upper-crust Yankees” had enjoyed elite educations, developed their elite networks in exclusive clubs, and exerted significant influence in Washington. They were liberal Yankee Republicans, likeminded to Henry L. Stimson and Dean Acheson, before breaking from this liberal progressive path over their staunch anticommunism.

When civil war erupted in Spain, a section of these elites perceived as the most important issue an imminent danger of international communism to Western values and Christian civilization. During the Spanish Civil War, a Great Debate erupted in the United States between interventionists and isolationists, who disagreed whether the American government should remain neutral in the war or help decide its outcome. Chapman explains that in this debate, this group of liberal progressives was “backed ... into the conservatives’ corner.” Their support for Franco was based on the presumption that Franco was restoring law and order and protecting Spain from the communist menace.³⁰ Chapman focuses closely on a number of key persons within these circles, including *Atlantic Monthly* editor Ellery Sedgwick, public administrator William Cameron Forbes, and Merwin K. Hart, head of the New York Economic Council. Chapman further makes the argument that there was a “tacit support” for Franco under American elites, and that the group of pro-Franco supporters in these circles was much larger than former historiographies acknowledge.³¹

30. Chapman, *Arguing Americanism*, 2.

31. Chapman, 21.

The Franco lobbyists sought to influence public opinion and lobby the US government in a multitude of ways. As a part of this, media exposure was an important tactic. A prevalent member of this circle was Ellery Sedgwick, editor of the liberal-progressive *Atlantic Monthly*. A Harvard graduate born in New York City, Sedgwick pursued an impressive career in journalism leading up to his editorship of the prestigious magazine.³² As editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, Sedgwick could not only write articles in his own magazine and shape discourse in his selection of authors, but he also used his extensive media contacts to uplift the image of Nationalist Spain in other major publications.³³ Sedgwick visited Nationalist Spain in early 1938 upon invitation from Juan Francisco de Cárdenas. Cárdenas was the former ambassador to Spain and now unofficially ambassador to Nationalist Spain operating from a hotel in New York.³⁴ After the tour, Sedgwick's enthusiastic findings appeared in newspapers, including the *NYT* and the *NYHT*. "I was amazed at conditions in 'White Spain' ... Of all the countries I have seen in Europe it was the most prosperous. Everything was well ordered and everyone seemed contented."³⁵

Sedgwick was accompanied on this tour by another Harvard graduate, Cameron Forbes. Forbes was a Boston-based Republican, a banker and businessman. Later in his life, he was appointed to various diplomatic posts by Republican Presidents

32. "Willa Cather to Ellery Sedgwick," June 7, 1944, The Complete Letters of Willa Cather, The Willa Cather Archive, <https://cather.unl.edu/writings/letters/let2037>; Chapman, *Arguing Americanism*, 21.

33. Chapman, *Arguing Americanism*, 24, 27–29.

34. Chapman, 18–24.

35. Sedgwick refers to *White Spain* in reference to Nationalist territory, as opposed to *Red Spain* that was held by the Loyalists. "Sedgwick Back After Tour as Franco Guest," *New York Herald Tribune*, March 6, 1938, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and Herbert Hoover.³⁶ Forbes likewise gave press interviews, but favored a more intimate approach, giving lectures in elite circles. In one of these speeches at Baltimore University, Forbes stressed Franco's aim to restore law and order and protect private property.³⁷

The stress on law and order and protection of private property also ties into another factor that inspired pro-fascist sympathies, namely the idea of the *corporate state*. Hull, in her analyses of American sympathizers with Mussolini, describes how American sympathizers with Italian fascism saw this political system as effective in dealing with the challenges of "the machine age." The Great Depression was the result of mechanization of the economy, and the American system could not keep up with this fast-paced modernization. Although it was the result of a false but effective Italian propaganda campaign, American sympathizers believed Mussolini's state was a well-oiled machine, a technocratic government that was efficient in affecting change. Without the lagging effects of public opinion and bureaucracy, the corporate government would be quick to pass legislation on such pressing issues as inflation, land reclamation, and infrastructure.³⁸

A "benevolent autocracy" for Spain was also advocated by John Eoghan Kelly. Somewhat of an aberration from the other pro-Nationalists like Sedgwick and Forbes, Kelly did not attend an elite university and was the son of Irish immigrants who were anarchists. He acquired a PhD in electromechanical engineering, but left his career as a mining engineer during the Great Depression to be a writer. An enthusiastic political activist, Chapman explains how Kelly was able to build a network of

36. "W. Cameron Forbes Dies at 89," *The New York Times*, December 26, 1959, TimesMachine.

37. Chapman, *Arguing Americanism*, 23.

38. Hull, *The Machine Has a Soul*, 3, 18–19, 74–77, 89–91.

influential elites through his activism, writing, and speech-making. He was a less prevalent figure in the *NYT* and *NYHT* than some of the other pro-Franco lobbyists, however. In 1932, Kelly wrote “Wanted: A Conservative Counterattack,” in which he advocated in favor of autocracy, which would end “the endless discussions, factions, and ‘isms of a democratic form of government.”³⁹

Furthermore, the protection of private property that Franco promised appealed to American elite circles. Forbes, for example, was director and stakeholder of AT&T, which ran a subsidiary in Spain under the name IT&T.⁴⁰ It is therefore likely that he also had an economic incentive to support the Nationalist insurgence against the Republic, as Forbes and his peers feared that the leftist Republic would ultimately threaten the capitalist establishment and the sanctity of private property in Spain.

And lastly, fascist sympathizers in the United States were conservatives, and appreciated fascist doctrine for its embodiment of traditional values. Hull explains how fascism could not only deliver on the material deficits that first the Great War and the Depression had caused, but also on the emotional deficits of 1930s modernity. The modernization of society had left traditional values in decline. Consumerism and industrialization had gone at the expense of service and honor for one’s nation, individual morality, the centrality of the family and the home, and the sense of purpose in one’s life and work. Sympathizers with Italian fascism believed that Mussolini could protect these values, for example with the back-to-the-farm policies, that had allowed Italian men to touch the fruits of their labor and install a sense of purpose in life.⁴¹ Chapman makes a similar argument for the pro-

39. Chapman, *Arguing Americanism*, 9.

40. Chapman, 20.

41. Hull, *The Machine Has a Soul*, 9, 21, 54, 99–100.

Nationalists, who contrasted the “amoral anarchy of foreign Marxism” with “the civilizing order of traditional American core values.”⁴²

Although there are similarities in the analyses of Chapman and Hull, there were also differences between American sympathizers with Mussolini and Franco. First, a key difference in their arguments is the “sanctity of private property” that comes forward as a key aspect of their support for Franco in Chapman’s work, while it is not in Hull’s work. Secondly, pro-Francoists were much more obsessed with anticommunism as the enemy of traditional rights, in contrast to the sympathizers with Italian fascism to whom modernization was the great enemy.⁴³

Definition of Fascism

That is not to say that American supporters of Franco overtly endorsed fascism, as they rejected the use of this term both in relation to their own names and that of Franco and the Nationalists. During the early SCW, the ideological position of Franco and the Nationalists was not yet clearly defined. An early sign of fascist elements in the Spanish Nationalist government was its controversial alliance with Germany and Italy. These fascist nations were known to supply the Nationalists with war materials as early as 1936. This alliance was formalized in March 1939 with Spain’s entry into the Anti-Comintern Pact.⁴⁴ An article in the *NYHT* further substantiated suspicions of a fascist Spain under Nationalist rule. It quotes Franco making statements about strong nationalism, racial purity, and “the establishment of the severest principles of

42. Chapman, *Arguing Americanism*, 2.

43. Chapman, xiii, 2–3, 23.

44. David Messenger, “Relations with Spain and European Neutrals,” in *A Companion to Franklin D. Roosevelt*, ed. William B. Pederson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2011), 659–60; “Nazis Delay Reply to France on Spain,” *New York Times*, August 13, 1936, TimesMachine.

authority.”⁴⁵ The *New York Times* likewise printed plans of the Spanish rebels to found a “military dictatorship.”⁴⁶ But there were also observers who countered such suspicions with doubts that Spain under Franco’s rule would become fascist, recounting the anomalies of Francoism with Italian fascism that contemporary scholars would describe decades later.⁴⁷

In the public discourse, however, there is a visible conflation of the term fascism with totalitarianism in referring to the Spanish Nationalist forces General Franco. Both are frequently referred to as “fascist.”⁴⁸ This is in part due to a semantic blurriness by some journalists of the terms *totalitarian*, *dictatorship*, and *fascism*. The *New York Herald Tribune*, for example, quoted Franco in October 1936, shortly after his becoming head of state and *generalissimo* of all armed forces. He states that “Spain will be organized within the totalitarian (Fascist) concept, respecting its traditions, yet with an eye to national welfare, unity and historic continuity.” The word “Fascist” in brackets, however, seems to be added by the newspaper itself, as the quote appears elsewhere without this addition.⁴⁹

45. “Franco Depicts Fascist Rule He Plans in Spain,” *New York Herald Tribune*, October 3, 1936, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

46. “Army Rule in Spain Is Plan of Rebels, Plebiscite on King,” *New York Times*, August 29, 1936, TimesMachine.

47. “Fascist Control Believed Sure To Fail in Spain,” *New York Herald Tribune*, March 30, 1938, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

48. For example, see: “Democracy, Not Church Called Real Issue in Spain,” *New York Herald Tribune*, December 3, 1936, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; “Italians Doubt An Easy Fascist Victory for Fascist Spain,” *New York Herald Tribune*, November 22, 1936, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

49. Paul P. Kennedy, “Cagey Caudillo: Francisco Franco,” in *Men Who Make Your World* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, Inc., 1949).

Among scholars, the conflation of fascism with the Spanish regime under Franco is indeed much more contested. Instead, academics use the term Francoism to refer to the Spanish ideological system, highlighting the peculiarity of the Spanish situation in which the General's persona played a large role. Using this term, scholars have debated the question of whether the Franco regime should be seen as a fascist state or not. Spanish historian Ismael Saz Campos, specialized in Franco Spain, recognizes two streams of thought, one which views Francoism as "authoritarian" and one that sees it as inherently fascist. Saz advocates a third interpretation that he calls the "fascistized dictatorship," which posits that Franco Spain was not strictly fascist while it exhibited a number of "formal, rhetorical and institutional characteristics" of it.⁵⁰ Saz's interpretation has been resonated by scholars since then, most recently by historian Giorgia Priorelli. She agrees that a fascist movement certainly did exist in Spain in the form of the Falangist movement, the Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista (FET y de las JONS). However, she argues that "fascism failed to become a regime in Spain."⁵¹

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how pro-Nationalist sentiments in the United States were a symptom of the economic and political challenges of the 1920s and 1930s. Hull has indicated how, already in the 1920s, a reevaluation of the capitalist democratic system took place in America as it was perceived to be inadequate to deal with the

50. Ismael Saz Campos, "Fascism, Fascistization and Developmentalism in Franco's Dictatorship,"

Social History 29, no. 3 (August 2004): 343–45.

51. Giorgia Priorelli, *Italian Fascism and Spanish Falangism in Comparison: Constructing the Nation* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 8–9.

economic and emotional challenges that modernity brought along. Italian fascism appealed to some Americans as it was perceived as a corporate state that was more effective in affecting economic welfare and socioeconomic justice. In the case of Spain, the fascist nature of the Nationalists remained somewhat obscure in the civil war years, although it was strongly associated with it by the news media.

Nevertheless, the sympathies of Americans with Mussolini and those with Franco exhibit some striking similarities, although the pro-Francoists sharp focus on anticommunism makes for a significant difference between them. The following chapters will demonstrate how their efforts to advocate their views were received in the newspapers.

Chapter 2:

The Arms Embargo and American Neutrality

At the outbreak of civil war in Spain, the Roosevelt Administration reinforced the American tradition of nonintervention with neutrality legislation that prohibited the sale of arms to nations in civil war. The experiences and the outcome of the First World War had left a sense of disillusionment with internationalist ideals. And in the 1930s, the Great Depression had further turned Americans inwards and unwilling to get involved in foreign affairs. When civil war erupted in Spain, the situation on the continent was already tense. European nations, spearheaded by Britain and France, as well as the United States therefore believed that nonintervention of foreign powers could prevent the Spanish conflict from escalating into an all-out European war. The Roosevelt administration strengthened its neutrality legislation, part of which was an arms embargo forbidding arms shipments to both belligerents in the Spanish Civil War. As the embargo had the unforeseen side-effect of benefiting the Spanish Nationalists led by General Franco, a fierce discussion erupted in American society over American neutrality in the war.

This discussion over the arms embargo partly played out in the newspapers. The *New York Times* and the *New York Herald Tribune* provided extensive room to engage with such questions as to whether the United States should retain a strictly neutral position, whether it should involve itself in the conflict and help decide its outcome, but also about the meaning of neutrality itself. In this discussion,

Americans who favored the Nationalist side in the SCW sided with the isolationist camp, favoring the retention of the embargo.

This chapter will investigate how this group voiced its opinions in this Great Debate, and to what extent they were successful in doing so. Thereby, this chapter will investigate how American newspapers framed this discussion and allowed the pro-Francoists to portray themselves positively to their fellow Americans. The first section of this chapter will introduce the setting of this debate and discuss how, during the early Spanish civil war, a Great Debate evolved on American neutrality. The following section will then examine the arguments of the pro-embargo group in the news media to lobby for the retention of the embargo. Subsequently, the representation of this group and their perspective on the issue by the *New York Times* and the *New York Herald Tribune* will be scrutinized, followed by an analysis of the differences between these newspapers. This chapter argues that the news coverage on the Great Debate differed between these newspapers, but that both papers made an explicit effort to feature both perspectives in this debate.

Isolationism and the Arms Embargo

In the 1930s, isolationist sentiment ran deep among Americans. The United States had long known a tradition of nonintervention, starting with the Monroe Doctrine in 1823, that warned European nations not to interfere in the Western Hemisphere. It also dictated that the United States would not interfere with European affairs.⁵² Moreover, the legacy of the Great War had left Americans disillusioned with the effectiveness of foreign intervention, and the Great Depression had further turned

52. Dominic Tierney, *FDR and the Spanish Civil War: Neutrality and Commitment in the Struggle*

That Divided America (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 46.

America inwards and unwilling to extend resources outside American borders.⁵³

Upon the outbreak of civil war in Spain, Roosevelt therefore chose to reinforce its noninterventionist principles. Dominic Tierney, in his analysis of President Roosevelt's foreign policy during the SCW, writes that it was unquestionable at this time that the United States would send troops or naval vessels to Spain. The issue of nonintervention was rather about allowing the Spanish Nationalists to purchase American arms on the open market. Tierney further argues that in 1936, the majority of American foreign policy officials supported nonintervention, regardless of their support for the Spanish Republic. Roosevelt himself too, was a Loyalist sympathizer, but nevertheless believed strongly in nonintervention to keep the Spanish war to the Spaniards and keep the general peace in Europe.⁵⁴

The United States was also not alone in this isolationist sentiment as noninterventionism was shared across the Atlantic. A French initiative backed by Great Britain in July 1936 led to the formation of a Nonintervention Committee and an agreement signed by twenty-seven countries, including Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union. Dominic Tierney describes how this was the cautious European response to the precarious international security situation of the mid-1930s, with Mussolini invading Ethiopia in 1935 and Hitler violating the Versailles Treaty that same year. France and Britain treaded cautiously, for they feared that any misstep could be the spark igniting an international war. Even when Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union broke their promise and intervened in the SCW, Britain and France

53. Brooke L. Blower, "From Isolationism to Neutrality: A New Framework for Understanding American Political Culture, 1919–1941," *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 2 (April 1, 2014): 346, <https://doi.org/10.1093/dh/dht091>.

54. Tierney, *FDR and the Spanish Civil War*, 39–45.

maintained their positions as they continued to believe that nonintervention would prevent an all-out continental war.⁵⁵

The United States did not sign on to the European initiative – reluctant as it was to engage in foreign political arrangements – but committed itself to nonintervention on its own by reinforcing its neutrality legislation. Before the Spanish Civil War, in 1935, Congress had passed the Neutrality Act, which prohibited the sale of arms to nations at war. As the Spanish conflict escalated, and the European nations joined together in committing to nonintervention, a discussion took place in Washington about whether arms shipments to belligerents in civil wars should be prohibited too. Initially, Washington's steps remained limited to calls for a "moral embargo," with President Roosevelt emphasizing that sending war materials to Spain was legal but unpatriotic.⁵⁶ David Messenger explains that when American companies showed an interest in selling airplanes to the Republic, Congress began to take action to revise the neutrality laws. By January of 1937, this led to an expansion of the law specifically targeted towards shipments to Spain, and in May the Neutrality Act was amended so as to extend to all civil conflicts. Initially, Tierney argues, the arms embargo was uncontroversial. In addition, the State Department sought to prevent Americans from joining the International Brigades to fight in Spain and marked passports "not valid for Spain."⁵⁷

By late 1938, the embargo had fused a heated debate among Americans for and against the arms ban on Spain. The instigating factor of this Great Debate was the

55. Tierney, 19–23.

56. "Neutrality Law Revision Is Speeded by President to Halt Arms for Spain," *The New York Times*, December 13, 1936, TimesMachine.

57. Messenger, "Relations with Spain and European Neutrals," 655.

realization that the embargo was indirectly helping Franco to victory. Tierney describes how American liberals, leftists, Protestants, and a number of intellectuals abandoned the principle of nonintervention when they saw that American policy was facilitating “the slow strangulation of the Spanish Republic and the victory of fascism.”⁵⁸ The urgency of this concern can be explained in the wider context of European developments. The growing concerns with Nazi aggression, the formation of an axis alliance of fascist states, and the flirtations of Spain with the Axis created a sense of imminent danger of fascism to the democratic world order. In 1938 and 1939, Americans opposing the arms embargo rallied and petitioned the U.S. government to lift the embargo. In response, their proponents did the same in order to convince the government not to.

Pro-Nationalists in the Great Debate

In this discussion, Americans who favored the Nationalist side in the Spanish Civil War sided with staunch isolationists. The elite pro-Francoist circle including Sedgwick, Forbes, and Kelly advocated for the retention of the embargo with arguments of anticommunism and nonintervention, fully aware that the American arms embargo was helping Franco to win the war.⁵⁹

A primary theme in the pro-Nationalist American lobbying efforts for the embargo was anticommunism. Between May 1938 and January 1939, when this debate played out in the newspapers, pro-Nationalists charged that efforts to repeal the embargo were the work of communist plotters under Soviet influence. They argued that these plotters were behind a propaganda campaign aimed at

58. Tierney, *FDR and the Spanish Civil War*, 5.

59. Chapman, *Arguing Americanism*, 2, 38, 40.

manipulating public opinion in favor of repealing the embargo. In November 1938, the *New York Herald Tribune* reported of a letter signed by “sixty-five noted persons,” former ambassadors to Spain Irwin Laughlin and Ogden Hammond. Laughlin was a Yale graduate who joined the Foreign Service in 1903. He was a career diplomat and served as ambassador to Spain for four years until 1933.⁶⁰ He was preceded by Hammond, another Yale graduate. Before being appointed ambassador, Hammond was first a businessman and later became active in the Republican Party, serving as House Representative in New Jersey.⁶¹ The open letter cites claims of foreign tutelage and propaganda efforts on part of the anti-embargo lobby, charging that many advocates “have been repeatedly active on behalf of the Communistic government of Barcelona.” These pro-Loyalists under foreign influence were then charged with spreading propaganda that the letter argued was responsible for American volunteers in the International Brigades. “We submit that the agitation of mistaken and misguided American ‘liberals’ has been responsible for the unlawful recruiting in the United States of several thousand Americans, many of whom have been sent to their death fighting for Communism in Spain.”⁶²

A month later, the papers report the foundation of the Keep the Embargo Committee (KTEC), a united enterprise of Catholics, isolationists, and pro-Francoists. The initiative is likely to have come from Catholic sources, as its foundation is announced by the Catholic Welfare Conference, but listed members also include

60. “Manuscript Collections - Irwin B. Laughlin Papers,” The Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum, accessed June 17, 2022, <https://hoover.archives.gov/research/manuscript-collections/laughlin>.

61. “Ogden Hammond, Former Envoy, 87,” *The New York Times*, October 30, 1956, TimesMachine.

62. “65 Sign Letter Defending Ban on Spain Arms,” *New York Herald Tribune*, November 24, 1938, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

Ellery Sedgwick, John Eoghan Kelly, and Merwin K. Hart.⁶³ A Harvard Law graduate and member of the same elite circle of Sedgwick, Hart, and Kelly, Hart was a prominent member of right-wing movements. His support for Franco would become more controversial than that of others. Hart allied himself with other controversial figures besides Franco, such as radio priest Charles Coughlin. His obituary in the *NYT* reads that his statements frequently “fringed on anti-Semitism.”

In January 1939, the KTEC organized a mass meeting in Washington D.C., with various speakers, among them Irwin Laughlin. The former ambassador likewise charged the anti-embargo group with manipulation and propaganda, arguing that the “artful misrepresentation” of the facts confused public opinion. Another speaker was the Reverend Fulton J. Sheen, a professor at the Catholic University of America who would later become a bishop.⁶⁴ He also accused the anti-embargo group of being communists, openly questioning why this group openly condemned Nazism and fascism, “but never a condemnation of the third and most insidious ideology, namely Communism.”⁶⁵

Another primary theme in arguments in favor of the embargo centered around principles of nonintervention, stressing that the United States should not get involved in a foreign conflict for both principled reasons and for reasons of self-interest. The *NYHT* in May 1938, cited Francis X. Talbot, the editor of a Catholic magazine called

63. “Catholics Fight to Keep Ban on Arms to Spain,” *New York Herald Tribune*, December 31, 1938,

ProQuest Historical Newspapers; “Group Favoring Spain Embargo Growing Larger,” *New York Herald Tribune*, January 5, 1939, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

64. “Biography of Fulton J. Sheen,” The Catholic University of America, accessed June 18, 2022, <https://fulton-sheen.catholic.edu/bio/index.html>.

65. “Arms Embargo Drive Pressed At Rival Rallies,” *New York Herald Tribune*, January 10, 1939, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

America, stating that the Nye Resolution would “embroil” the United States in a foreign conflict.⁶⁶ Radio priest Charles Coughlin, who would become a controversial figure by the late 1930s for his antisemitic views, similarly states that to “keep out of war we must hold ourselves clear from all foreign entanglements” to which end the United States “must observe strict neutrality.”⁶⁷ In similar vein, the KTEC stated in the *NYHT* that the majority of Americans would agree that the U.S. can “best avoid European entanglements by keeping its neutrality position strictly intact.”

In December, the KTEC organized a petition to be sent to the President’s office arguing for the extension of the Neutrality Act – which was about to expire – in which the Committee added further arguments to their claim. Alongside underscoring the importance of maintaining strict neutrality, the petition added that lifting the embargo would jeopardize the peace and safety of the United States itself. Furthermore, it held that to lift the embargo would be to condone “a government that stands responsible for the vilest kind of oppression and persecution.” The statement likened the persecution of Jewish persons in Germany to the violence directed at Catholics in Spain, and that Americans should therefore reject the Spanish Loyalists just as they renounce the Nazis. By maintaining the embargo, the statement indicates, the American government could show that it will not lend “aid and comfort to the persecutors of Catholics in Spain.”⁶⁸ Pro-Nationalist Americans thus used a variety of arguments in the newspapers to advocate for the retention of the embargo. It is striking, however, that endorsement of Nationalist politics was not one of these.

66. “Ex-Envoy Assails Spanish Loyalists,” *The New York Times*, May 12, 1938, TimesMachine.

67. “Coughlin Plea Spurs Wires To Congress,” *The New York Times*, January 16, 1939, TimesMachine.

68. “Charge Loyalists Persecute Church,” *The New York Times*, December 31, 1938, TimesMachine.

Instead, they focused on charges of communist plots, strict adherence to nonintervention, and arguments of anticommunism national security.

Mediation of the Great Debate in the News

Pro-Franco Americans succeeded at various occasions in putting themselves in a positive light in American news media. Articles where the pro-Nationalist stance on the arms embargo fared relatively well are those where the newspaper does not offer counter perspectives or arguments. Such articles do not observe principles of objectivity such as *audi alteram partem*, when they do not offer the recipient of an accusation the opportunity to respond. Such one-sided articles have the potential to be convincing to the reader of one perspective in the debate, rather than to encourage contemplation.

An example from the *NYT* is an article in November 1938 that reports on a letter to President Roosevelt signed by 65 persons urging to uphold the embargo. It features a great number of citations from the letter with arguments to retain the embargo and accusations directed at opponents.⁶⁹ Another article, a month later, about the aforementioned petition featured as “a special to the *New York Times*,” is titled “Charge Loyalists Persecute Church.” This article discusses a petition launched by the KTEC. It is a relatively long article, again showing solely the pro-embargo side, including the complete statement accompanying the petition.⁷⁰ Besides giving extensive space to the KTEC’s arguments, the editor of this article gave credibility and prominence to the organization when it stated that among its members are “many nationally prominent persons.”

69. “65 Protest Lifting Loyalist Embargo,” *The New York Times*, November 25, 1938, TimesMachine.

70. “Charge Loyalists Persecute Church.”

The *New York Herald Tribune* wrote about the same developments on these dates, similarly mentioning only the pro-embargo arguments. These articles feature charges of propaganda campaigns by agents of the Spanish Republic without countering these with a response from the accused party.⁷¹ In these articles, both the *NYT* and the *NYHT* featured only pro-embargo arguments. The high proportion of direct quotes allowed this group to bring across their perspective in a relatively direct and unmediated form. In addition, the newspapers chose not to allow the persons or groups at which the pro-Francoists directed accusations to respond.

With this relatively unrestricted news exposure, the pro-Francoists were successful in bringing their perspective on the arms embargo and the SCW forward in the newspapers. Although this could be interpreted as favorability or bias by the newspaper editors in favor of the pro-Nationalists, such an argument would require an analysis of all articles within this topic. Articles that were one-sided in favor of the pro-Loyalists may also be found, but are not included in the collection of sources used here as this thesis focuses on the pro-Nationalist perspective in the news.

Articles in which both perspectives on the arms embargo are featured, can be more meaningful in assessing the favor of the newspaper for either perspective. In such articles, there are a number of subtle indications that the pro-embargo perspective may have been favored by the newspaper. In such cases, the balance of the arguments as they are represented in the article suggests the tipping of the scale in favor of one side. A brief *NYT* article in early 1939 titled “Neutrality Controversy Livens” mentioned both sides of the debate, but the pro-embargo group is given a larger spotlight with more exposure of their arguments and direct quotes than their opposers. It reports that Congress “is being bombarded daily with statements and

71. “65 Sign Letter Defending Ban on Spain Arms”; “Catholics Fight to Keep Ban on Arms to Spain.”

resolutions opposing and approving the embargo.” The article quotes the KTEC secretary charging that the “bulk” of anti-embargo pressure comes from communists, and that the committee is not pro-Franco but stands for “a firm neutrality.” In contrast, the American Congress for Peace and Democracy (ACPD) is discussed only briefly in one sentence for standing to lift the embargo, and there is not one direct quotes from one of its members.⁷²

In other instances, the ending of an article may reveal whose perspective is favored by the newspaper’s editor or author. Particularly in cases when the final phrase is a grand, impressive quote, such as in a *NYHT* article from January 10, 1939 reporting on two rival embargo rallies. The article quotes both KTEC members’ charges about communist sympathies and propaganda, as well as those of the National Conference to Lift the Embargo Against Spain (NCLEP) calling the embargo “flagrantly unneutral.” This article’s initial objective outlook is obfuscated when it ends with a dramatic quote of Reverend Sheen, who responds to an invitation to several prominent American Catholics to visit Spain made by the Spanish Ambassador Fernando de Los Rios. Sheen is quoted listing his conditions for approval, one being that the bishops of Madrid, Valencia, and Barcelona are extended the same invitation, insinuating that these clergy were murdered by the Spanish Loyalists: “The massacred can write no letters; the crucified never invite; the slain can extend no hand of welcome.”⁷³ Thereby, the *NYHT* allowed Sheen to have the last say in this discussion, rather than the NCLEP.

On the other hand, these instances were counterbalanced by instances where American newspapers appeared favorable to a pro-Loyalist position, or where the

72. “Neutrality Controversy Livens,” *The New York Times*, January 9, 1939, TimesMachine.

73. “Arms Embargo Drive Pressed At Rival Rallies.”

pro-Francoists appeared negatively in the papers. Just like the articles that balanced both perspectives and favored the pro-embargo groups, the papers feature articles where the balance tipped in the other direction. An interesting example is an article in the *NYT*, a counterpart to the *NYHT* article that also reports on the rival embargo rallies. The *NYT* article leaves a different impression, however. Although it gives more space to arguments and quotes from the KTEC than the opposing organization, and also features the quote about the “massacred” clergy, the charges they made are countered with quotes from their pro-Loyalist opponents. Moreover, the *NYT* gives the last say to the NCLEP with its ending, which quotes a cablegram to British Prime Minister Chamberlain and President Roosevelt:

Following the unfavorable response from our people to the Munich settlements, an official recognition of the Hitler-Mussolini-Franco regime in Spain would be interpreted here as outright cooperation with fascist aggression and would meet with universal condemnation. The American people are emphatically in no mood to consider further concessions to the sworn enemies of American ideals.⁷⁴

The authors refer to the Munich settlement, a signatory move in the appeasement strategy of Britain and France in the years leading up to World War II, with which parts of Czechoslovakia were ceded to Germany to prevent all-out war. The agreement was violated by Germany when it annexed all of Czechoslovakia in early 1939. The NCLEP argues that to lift the embargo against Spain would be similar to

74. “Rival Camps Open Embargo Battle,” *The New York Times*, January 10, 1939, TimesMachine.

the Munich settlement, and would constitute the appeasement of Franco. Such a strategy, the NCLEP argues, would be strongly disliked by Americans.

In addition, there were articles that only portrayed the anti-embargo perspective. As mentioned, such articles are not strictly within the scope of this research, but quite a significant number of such articles were found using pro-Nationalist search terms. Out of 20 collected sources about the arms embargo and American neutrality, 4 articles are one-sided in favor of the anti-embargo group. Three of these appear in the *NYT*. One article in May 1938 reports on a protest asking Secretary of State Cordell Hull to permit arms shipments to Spain, another in the same month reports on the same demand made by the Bronx Communist Party.⁷⁵ A more in-depth article is published in July, reporting a mass-meeting of multiple organizations including the anti-embargo group the North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy.⁷⁶

The *NYHT*, although not featuring overt anti-embargo news pieces, featured the column “On the Record” by prominent journalist Dorothy Thompson. Thompson was an early criticizer of the Nazi movement in Germany, and warned for the threat of Nazism and fascism throughout her career.⁷⁷ Her anti-fascist creed also exhibited itself in columns relating to the Spanish Civil War, advocating for the repeal of the arms embargo. She characterized nonintervention as a “complete myth,” as Franco was openly being assisted by Italy and Germany. She charged that the embargo was

75. “Protests Arms Embargo,” *The New York Times*, May 9, 1938, TimesMachine; “Urges Aid to Loyalists,” *The New York Times*, May 16, 1938, TimesMachine.

76. “Rally Marks Date of Spanish Revolt,” *The New York Times*, July 20, 1938, TimesMachine.

77. “Dorothy Thompson,” Legacy Project Chicago, accessed June 23, 2022,

<https://legacyprojectchicago.org/person/dorothy-thompson>.

indirectly aiding Franco, and that his American supporters worked to keep the embargo by misleadingly claiming “that by doing so we are maintaining neutrality.”⁷⁸

Differences between the Newspapers

The discussion of these article also invites the question whether the two studied newspapers show any significant differences in their discussion of the embargo debate. All in all, their distinct reporting on the same or similar events and developments, seems to indicate a slighter favor by the *NYHT* to the pro-Nationalists than the *NYT*. There is a striking difference in the number of articles published by either paper on the subject, with the *NYHT* publishing seven, versus thirteen by the *NYT*. Firstly, the proportion of *NYHT* articles reporting favorably about the pro-embargo activists without contrasting their perspectives with those of the opposing side is relatively high, with four out of seven.⁷⁹ But a clear conclusion that this means an overt pro-embargo vision at the *New York Herald Tribune* is complicated by the fact that it featured the pro-Loyalist Thompson columns.

Secondly, the titles and subheadings of the two newspapers exhibit differences in their framing of the debate. Headings in the *New York Times*, for example “Red Propaganda Charged” and “Attitude of ‘Intellectuals’ ... Contrasted” suggest an effort to frame the statements of the pro-embargo group as subjective from the onset. With words like *attitude* and *charged*, the *NYT* highlights the fact that these are opinions

78. Dorothy Thompson, “On the Record: The Embargo against Loyalist Spain,” *New York Herald Tribune*, May 6, 1938, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

79. “65 Sign Letter Defending Ban on Spain Arms”; “Catholics Fight to Keep Ban on Arms to Spain”; “Group Favoring Spain Embargo Growing Larger”; “Arms Embargo Drive Pressed At Rival Rallies.”

and accusations rather than facts.⁸⁰ Titles and headings in the *NYHT* do not feature these indicators of subjectivity, and are more to-the-point, with such titles as “Arms Embargo Drive Pressed at Rival rallies” and “Group Favoring Spain Embargo Growing Larger.”⁸¹

Another striking difference is the semantics concerning the embargo. The *NYT* talks about a “Loyalist Embargo,” which already includes the notion that this shipment ban is only directly affecting shipments to the Loyalists, not the Nationalists. The *NYHT*, on the other hand, on most occasions talks about a “Spain Embargo” or “Ban on Arms to Spain.” Both wordings can be interpreted as the more objective option. One seems not to delve into the question of who the embargo is benefiting. The “Loyalist Embargo” though, can be said to be a more direct and realist depiction of the concept, as its disproportionate effect was uncontested among all parties. But the desire on the hand of the *NYT* to point this out, may be indicative of a subtle uneasiness at this newspaper with the arms embargo and its indirect effects.

The larger number of articles on the subject, the use of titles and headings, and word choice, make it seem that the *NYT* can be characterized as making a greater effort to report objectively and realistically, making a consistent effort to communicate both perspectives. The two corresponding articles about the two rival rallies for and against the embargo exhibit this difference, as the *NYT* included a section about fascist aggression in Europe, whereas the *NYHT* did not. This shows a higher willingness on part of the *NYT* to confront the complexities of the debate. There were no two sides to this debate, as being in favor of the embargo did not necessarily make one a proponent of the Spanish Nationalists. And the fact that one

80. “65 Protest Lifting Loyalist Embargo.”

81. “Arms Embargo Drive Pressed At Rival Rallies”; “Group Favoring Spain Embargo Growing Larger.”

was in favor of staunch neutrality, did not take away the fact that Franco was aligning with Italy and Germany, who were exhibiting growing aggression on the continent. The choice of the *NYT* to highlight also this factor, and for the *NYHT* not to, is therefore a significant differentiating factor.

The *New York Herald Tribune* therefore appears more favorable to the pro-Nationalist perspective, which is further supported by its higher ratio of articles that are pro-embargo leaning and its word choice. The Thompson columns, however, make for a significant inconsistency with such a reading. An alternative explanation which would account for this discrepancy may be that this was an effort by the *NYHT* to balance its conservative, rightist-leaning reporting style with opinion pieces, and thereby provide a balanced account of the embargo debate.

Such a reading allows for the conclusion that both newspapers sought to reflect the dilemmas that were taking place in American society. Whereas the *NYT* may have sought to do this through more extensive reporting, the *NYHT* may have assumed a different method to do so. With different methods, it can be argued, both newspapers sought to mirror what was happening in society: a Great Debate that was much more complex than a dilemma between either neutrality or intervention, but that pitted various American ideals against each other.

Conclusion

The discussion on American neutrality and the arms embargo in the *New York Times* and the *New York Herald Tribune* features both perspectives on the issue, and although with different methods, both papers can be seen as making an explicit effort to inform the public about both the pro-embargo and anti-embargo side. Whereas the *NYT* did so by publishing more articles with more variety in tone, the *NYHT* contrasted its more conservative tone with the liberal Thompson columns.

Nevertheless, it is remarkable that a group of Americans who sided with the Nationalists in the Spanish war were able to appear favorably in the news. By 1935, an Axis alliance of fascist states had united Germany, Italy and Japan. The persecution of Jews in Germany was common knowledge in the United States, Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia was generally condemned, and Italy had retreated from the League of Nations.⁸² These were the nations that were openly aiding Franco's coup d'état. These were the circumstances in which the isolationists and pro-Francoists lobbied for the retention of an embargo that was well-known to indirectly aid Franco's war effort. But the center of their lobbying efforts was not their support for Franco, who is in fact rarely mentioned in the articles studied here. Rather, their arguments centered around concepts that appealed to the American public, centering around anticommunism and a dislike of foreign entanglements.

This chapter therefore argues that through appealing to such concepts, the pro-Franco Americans were able to portray themselves positively in the newspapers. With accusations of communist propaganda and plots, they played into the paranoia of the first Red Scare of the late 1910s and triggered fears of international communist plots. They also activated the memory of America's, in hindsight futile, involvement in the Great War, and reminded Americans that it was best to stay out of foreign entanglements. In a number of articles, the pro-Francoists could effectively voice their opinions on the embargo with relatively few restrictions by the newspapers, in which they received extensive room for their arguments and direct quotes, and were

82. G. Bruce Strang, *Collision of Empires: Italy's Invasion of Ethiopia and Its International Impact* (Routledge, 2016), 2–3; "Reich Law Defined as Officials' Whim," *The New York Times*, December 30, 1935; Anne O'Hare McCormick, "Nuremberg Pushes Anti-Jewish Moves," *The New York Times*, March 1, 1935; Ralph W. Barnes, "Nazis Restore Ghetto in Plan To 'Put Jew in His Place,'" *New York Herald Tribune*, September 17, 1935, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

able to get the last say in discussions. The following chapter will investigate if they were equally successful when General Franco entered the scene, and they had to engage with the question who the Nationalists and their leader were.

Chapter 3:

Ideology and politics

Alongside debating American neutrality and the arms embargo against Spain, Americans discussed the ideology and politics of the Spanish Nationalist forces that were led by General Franco. In this discussion, Americans sought to define Nationalist Spain, what its ideology and political plans were, and what Spain would look like if the Nationalists won the war. As early as August 1936, American newspapers referred to the rebel leadership as “fascist” and reported on its plans to install a military dictatorship.⁸³ The Americans that sided with the Nationalists in the Spanish Civil War focused on countering this perspective, arguing instead that Franco’s Spain would be better and freer than the Spanish Republic. Just as on the topic of American neutrality, the pro-Francoists gained ample room to publicize their version of events in the newspapers.

This chapter will first discuss pro-Nationalist arguments in news articles about ideology and politics, which can be divided into two themes. First, the pro-Nationalists argued that Franco was not a fascist, through diminishing his ties to Germany and Italy. They also argued that Franco enjoyed wide public support by bringing liberty and justice. Second, they argued that Nationalist Spain was orderly and prosperous, and in fact better than Loyalist Spain. The next section will delve

83. “Army Rule in Spain Is Plan of Rebels,” *The New York Times*, August 29, 1936, TimesMachine. The New York Herald Tribune likewise referred to the Spanish rebels as fascist, see for example “Democracy, Not Church Called Real Issue in Spain,” *New York Herald Tribune*, December 3, 1936, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

into the question whether pro-Nationalist Americans were able to bring this narrative forward effectively and convincingly in the newspapers. This chapter argues that pro-Nationalist Americans had a more difficult time voicing their opinions on the subject of ideology and politics than on the subject of neutrality, but nevertheless received substantial room and freedom to express their views on the subject in the newspapers.

The Pro-Franco Perspective on Nationalist Spain

The pro-Nationalist Americans focused their arguments in part on the support that the Nationalist side enjoyed by the Spanish people, arguing that Franco was a man of the people who thereby had a mandate to rule. In February 1938, Ellery Sedgwick, editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* magazine, wrote two articles in the *New York Times* about his findings following his trip to Nationalist Spain. Writing that Franco was “the man of men for Nationalist Spain,” Sedgwick argued that Franco enjoyed the support of both liberals and conservatives. According to Sedgwick, Franco was able to unite groups of people that disagreed on principles but agreed on the man, convincing “every group in turn that he is of their mind.”⁸⁴ Upon his return from Nationalist Spain, Sedgwick’s companion Forbes issued a similar statement featured in the *New York Herald Tribune*. Forbes also reported on the wide popular support for Franco: “He is generally revered, and all the people in the part of Spain he controls have unbounded confidence in him.”⁸⁵

84. Ellery Sedgwick, “Franco Is Shrewd in Political Acts,” *The New York Times*, February 15, 1938, TimesMachine.

85. “Biddle, Back from Polish Post, Discounts Pennsylvania Boom,” *New York Herald Tribune*, February 5, 1938, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

Merwin K. Hart, head and co-founder of the New York Economic Council, wrote a series of articles in the *NYHT* later that year. On Franco's support by the Spanish people, Hart added that Spanish intellectuals also widely supported the *caudillo*. Hart conducted an interview with Don Eugenio D'Ors, secretary of the association of Spanish Academies called The Institute of Spain. D'Ors reported that of the Academy's 200 members, the majority supported Franco and a number of them in fact fled Loyalist territory to the Nationalist part of Spain.⁸⁶

Moreover, Franco's American supporters argued that Franco was a man of the people because he would support the working class. Ogden Hammond, former ambassador to Spain, was a prominent figure in the newspapers on the subject of Nationalist politics, particularly in the *New York Times*. Hammond wrote that "Franco is all for the laboring man" who will "improve the conditions of labor and education." Moreover, Sedgwick, in the aforementioned article, wrote about the twenty-seven pillars of the FET y de las JONS. Making the condition of laborers the responsibility of the state was one of these pillars, Sedgwick argued, ensuring fair wages to workers.⁸⁷

These arguments about the support Franco enjoyed by diverse groups of Spanish citizens were used as arguments that Franco had a mandate to rule, but also had a connotation that his leadership was in a sense democratic. Alexander Hamilton Rice Jr., yet another Harvard alumni, spoke at a rally for the recognition of the Franco government. Rice was a geographer and explorer, winning a number of

86. Merwin K. Hart, "American in Franco Spain Told Besieged Guernica Was Razed by Loyalists Fleeing Bombers," *New York Herald Tribune*, November 6, 1938, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

87. Sedgwick, "Franco Is Shrewd in Political Acts."

prestigious awards in his field.⁸⁸ In his speech at the rally, Rice argued that Franco would form a government that would be “administered for, by, and with Spaniards.”⁸⁹ Hammond likewise predicted that Franco would let the will of the people decide.⁹⁰

At first sight, these arguments seem unreconcilable with earlier reports of the rebel military leaders’ plans to install a military dictatorship in the image of Italy and Germany.⁹¹ A possible explanation may be that pro-Nationalists’ projection of Spain in Nationalist hands changed when Franco rose to leadership, which took place a month after this report. But it also seemed that pro-Nationalist Americans disagreed on this particular subject. Sedgwick and Hart seem more accepting of the totalitarian aspects of the Franco government, as they argued that Spain was not ready for a true democracy. These maintained that a totalitarian system was a necessary evil for a country with a highly illiterate population. Sedgwick asserted that “education comes before democracy.”⁹² In writing about the Falange manifesto he claimed that their plans were indeed “the totalitarian state with a vengeance” but nevertheless might solve the complex social and economic problems that Spain faced.

In similar vein, Hart wrote in an open letter in the *NYHT* that “however wise and sound the principles of a Republic are in the United States ... Spain was not ready for them.” He went further in contending that “various efforts have been made to impose a ‘democratic’ form of government on the Spanish people” which has not

88. Mark J. Plotkin, “Alexander Hamilton Rice: Brief Life of an Amazon Explorer: 1875-1956,”

Harvard Magazine, March 2013, <https://www.harvardmagazine.com/2013/03/vita-alexander-hamilton-rice>.

89. “10,000 Rally Here for Franco Cause,” *The New York Times*, February 20, 1939, TimesMachine.

90. “Predicts Franco Victory,” *The New York Times*, March 26, 1938, TimesMachine.

91. “Army Rule in Spain Is Plan of Rebels,” August 29, 1936.

92. Sedgwick, “Franco Is Shrewd in Political Acts.”

worked. This made it necessary to design the future of Spain along different lines now. These arguments by Sedgwick and Hart in support of a totalitarian system appear striking in an American context, but they illustrate how Americans in the 1930s were open to review alternatives to a democratic political system. Arguing that democracy has failed to bring order and prosperity in Spain, they openly assess fascism as a viable alternative.

Other arguments in defense of the Nationalists focused on countering the perspective that Franco was a fascist. The FET y de las JONS was the product of a merge in 1937 of Carlist, monarchist, and Catholic factions with the Falange Party, which had been founded in 1933. Historian Paul Preston argues that the “style, ideology and myths” of this party in this period were unquestionably fascist. The Falange, however, was only one of multiple factions of the Spanish Nationalists. Historians have debated whether the overall Franco regime can be seen as fascist, with Saz Campos and Priorelli, for example, favoring the term “fascitized dictatorship.”⁹³ Preston contends, however, that Franco’s war effort was, by its association with Mussolini and Hitler and the Falange, seen by contemporaries as fascist.⁹⁴ The wider academic discussion about the comparison between Spanish Falangism, Italian fascism, and German Nazism is not relevant here, however. It is important here that the FET y de las JONS was in contemporary perception seen as fascist, and that pro-Franco Americans sought to counter this perception in the newspapers.

93. Saz Campos, “Fascism, Fascitization and Developmentalism in Franco’s Dictatorship,” 343–45;

Priorelli, *Italian Fascism and Spanish Falangism*, 8–9.

94. Paul Preston, *The Politics of Revenge: Fascism and the Military in 20th-Century Spain* (London:

Routledge, 1990), 10, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203400371>.

Sedgwick acknowledged the fascist elements of the Falange but maintained that Franco was not a fascist, and that he would balance these elements out. He wrote that the Falange is “loosely called the Fascist Party,” but predicted that after a Nationalist victory, conservatives’ pressure and “General Franco’s own judicial intelligence” would water down its more extreme demands.⁹⁵ Another example comes from Ogden Hammond, about whose predictions for Nationalist Spain the *NYT* published an article in February 1939. Alongside predicting the return of the monarchy in Spain, Hammond contended that “[Franco] is not a fascist; he’s a Spaniard first and last, a great organizer and a great administrator.”⁹⁶

Other articles focused on downplaying the Nationalists’ relation to Germany and Italy and countering claims that Spain was a vassal of these fascist states. For example, Sedgwick wrote an article in the *NYHT*, arguing that although German and Italian military equipment have been “enormously useful,” the Italian troops “have rather overstayed their welcome” and their number “has been greatly exaggerated.” He also reports seeing only German engineers in civilian clothing, but “no actual soldiers on the line.”⁹⁷ In an open letter in April 1939, Merwin K. Hart refuted an argument made in an open letter that Spain is under foreign domination from Germany and Italy, arguing that this was “patently absurd.” He stated that Spain was much less indebted to these countries than believed because it had already compensated this aid by exports.⁹⁸

95. Sedgwick, “Franco Is Shrewd in Political Acts.”

96. “Hammond Expects Spanish Monarchy,” *The New York Times*, February 7, 1939, TimesMachine.

97. “Sedgwick Back after Tour as Franco Guest,” *New York Herald Tribune*, March 6, 1938, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

98. Merwin K. Hart, “Denies Spain’s Vassalage,” *New York Herald Tribune*, April 2, 1939, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

Another recurrent theme in pro-Nationalist arguments were the living conditions in Spain at wartime. The pro-Nationalists claimed that Franco had succeeded in establishing law and order, allowing Spaniards to live in relative peace and prosperity. Such references are made on numerous occasions, with Ogden Hammond speaking of Franco's triumph over communism. He equates order to Franco and chaos to communism when speaking of a "triumph of law and order over communism."⁹⁹ Hart made reference to the political torments of the prewar years, arguing that the Spanish are happy with Franco, because "after five years of disorder and crime the Spanish people have welcomed the restoration of order."¹⁰⁰ Franco has thus allowed the Spanish to pick up their lives as usual. Sedgwick stated, for example, that in Nationalist Spain "you would hardly know a war was going on until you got near the front lines."¹⁰¹ Consequently, Sedgwick wrote, living conditions in Nationalist Spain were good, prices were low and food was plenty. In one of three extensive articles in the *New York Herald Tribune*, Hart reports extensively about the relative prosperity under Franco's rule. He describes how in Nationalist territory, "food is not even rationed" and it was "plentiful in practically all varieties and it is

99. "New Envoy Thanks Friends of Franco," *The New York Times*, April 16, 1939, TimesMachine.

100. "Foreign Policy Group Debates Issues in Spain," *New York Herald Tribune*, November 23, 1938, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

101. "Sedgwick Back after Tour as Franco Guest."

cheap.”¹⁰² In an article about military prisons, Hart adds that prisoners likewise enjoyed the ample supply of food and were well-fed.¹⁰³

Hart also wrote that despite food being plenty in most parts of Nationalist Spain, he did see under-nourishment, particularly in the south. He retorted, however, that Franco’s social welfare organization, the *Auxilio Sociale*, was taking care of these people. Hart described how after the Nationalist military captured a village or city, the *Auxilio* would move in to feed the undernourished population. Hart thereby implied that the Loyalist government was not able to feed its population, but the Nationalists were. Hart also wrote that particular attention was given to expectant mothers and children, and that its motto was “through mother and child to a better Spain.” In the period following, Hart writes, clinics and food dispensaries were arranged, as well as “all the other social and philanthropic activities with which we are familiar in America.”¹⁰⁴

Forbes likewise praised the *Auxilio*, which he wrote was supported by thousands of female volunteers “who bring comfort, cleanliness and food to the needy inhabitants” within hours after capture.¹⁰⁵ Sedgwick also spoke of a deeper meaning to the organization, writing that it “gives meaning to national brotherhood” and a

102. Merwin K. Hart, “American in Franco Spain Says Towns Welcome Nationalists, for Capture Means Hot Meals,” *New York Herald Tribune*, October 30, 1938, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

103. Merwin K. Hart, “American in Franco Spain Sees a Military Prison and Reports 1,800 Get 3 Squares’ Every Day,” *New York Herald Tribune*, November 13, 1938, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

104. Hart, “American in Franco Spain Says Towns Welcome Nationalists, for Capture Means Hot Meals.”

105. “Biddle, Back from Polish Post, Discounts Pennsylvania Boom.”

“new sense of patriotism.”¹⁰⁶ Hart added to its wider significance, arguing that it is “the great means whereby peace and contentment are restored.”¹⁰⁷ In writing about Franco’s social welfare organization, and countering this against the alleged worse conditions in Loyalist Spain, the pro-Francoists added to the image of Franco being a man of the people. This narrative also portrayed his government as humane and caring, and thereby countered claims of it being a ruthless and cruel regime.

Such counterarguments by the pro-Franco Americans were a response to the numerous allegations of war crimes committed by the Nationalist forces. On April 28, 1937, the front page of the *NYT* read “Historic Basque Town Wiped Out; Rebel Fliers Machine-Gun Civilians.”¹⁰⁸ The bombing of Guernica was the first controversy over Nationalist war atrocities. Newspapers reported extensively on the ruthless bombing of the old city with the help of German planes, while the pro-Francoists in the United States refuted the accusations. A similar controversy arose over civilian bombings in March of 1938, when a series over air-raids by the Nationalists hit Barcelona.

In hindsight, we know that the Nationalists did indeed carry out these civilian bombings and that the pro-Nationalists denials were false. Newspaper reporting on the bombings suggests that this was also known at the time, however. Newspapers were able to substantiate the allegations with correspondents’ first-hand reports and eyewitness accounts.¹⁰⁹ The *NYT*, for example, featured an article by a correspondent

106. Sedgwick, “Franco Is Shrewd in Political Acts.”

107. Hart, “American in Franco Spain Says Towns Welcome Nationalists, for Capture Means Hot Meals.”

108. G. L. Steer, “Historic Basque Town Wiped Out,” *The New York Times*, April 28, 1937.

109. G. L. Steer, “Basques Indignant on Guernica Raid,” *The New York Times*, April 30, 1937,

TimesMachine; Lawrence A. Fernsworth, “Barcelona Raided 7 Times, 39 Killed,” *The New York Times*, March 6, 1938, TimesMachine; “Rebel Planes Bomb Barcelona,” *The New York Times*,

who reported that Barcelona was raided seven times in the past months and that the raids hit working-class quarters and caused numerous civilian casualties, among them children.¹¹⁰ Adding further validity to the claim that the Nationalists were responsible, the *NYHT* published an article with the response of Secretary of State Cordell Hull. He expressed his “sense of horror” at reports of civilian bombings and that he was convinced that the reports were true and that the insurgent forces were guilty.¹¹¹

Nevertheless, the pro-Nationalists continued their mission to uplift the image of General Franco and the Nationalists, and denied the allegations fervently. John Eoghan Kelly, the former mining engineer and activist writer, wrote an open letter to the *NYHT* in April 1937. He wrote that the Nationalist general staff had said that all planes were on the ground on the day of the Guernica bombings as foggy weather made flying impossible. He asked who then “initiated the killing of non-combatants?” There is only one answer, Kelly charged the Loyalists, justifying the charge in writing that “the Red government ... undertook the wholesale massacre of civilians before the outbreak of the revolution.”¹¹² Merwin K. Hart likewise pointed to the Loyalists for the Guernica bombing, charging that experts commissioned by the Nationalists

May 30, 1937, TimesMachine; James M. Minifie, “Captured Nazi Admits Bombs Razed Guernica,” *New York Herald Tribune*, May 14, 1937; James M. Minifie, “Basques Charge Germans with Guernica Raid,” *New York Herald Tribune*, May 6, 1937, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

110. Fernsworth, “Barcelona Raided 7 Times, 39 Killed.”

111. “Hull Horrified by Rebel Raids on Barcelona,” *New York Herald Tribune*, March 22, 1938, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

112. John Eoghan Kelly, “Bombing of Guernica,” *New York Herald Tribune*, May 1, 1937, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

concluded that Guernica was largely destroyed by Loyalist forces upon retreat from the city, claiming this perspective was supported by eye-witnesses.¹¹³

Pro-Nationalist Arguments in the News

The pro-Franco Americans at the center of this study succeeded at various times in putting their story forward effectively in the news media. The fact that they were able to mediate their perspective in a positive, or even a neutral way, was remarkable in the context of the mid- to late 1930s. First, a number of discussed articles suggest that many people understood at the time that the Nationalists were not planning to build a democratic, liberal state in the image of the United States. Second, it was also understood that the Nationalist government, at the least, contained fascist elements with the FET y de las JONS. Third, Franco's reputation in the United States suffered from the bombings of Guernica and Barcelona, for which the Nationalists, aided by Germany and Italy, were responsible. These factors by themselves would have made pro-Nationalist Americans somewhat contentious in the American news.

Moreover, support for Franco's politics and ideology would be expected to be highly controversial giving the wider context in which Franco operated. By the start of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, the persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany with the Nuremberg laws was a known fact in the foreign press. Tensions were also already rising over Hitler's pronounced expansionist ambitions, and over the construction of a fascist alliance with Italy and Japan in 1936.¹¹⁴ Fears of an all-out war in Europe

113. Hart, "American in Franco Spain Told Besieged Guernica Was Razed by Loyalists Fleeing Bombers."

114. Joan Maria Thomàs, *Roosevelt and Franco during the Second World War: From the Spanish Civil War to Pearl Harbor* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2008), 27–28, 38.

culminated in the Munich agreement in September of 1938 to prevent an all-out war. Far from distancing himself from these developments, Franco allied himself with both Germany and Italy, who aided him in the Spanish Civil War.¹¹⁵

In this context, the Americans in support of the *caudillo* were still able to extensively advocate their favor of the Nationalists in the newspapers. Most notable in this respect were the op-ed articles by Ellery Sedgwick and Merwin K. Hart, in the *New York Times* and the *New York Herald Tribune* respectively. Presented as the author of these articles, they differ from both editorial articles and open letters. In the former their views are quoted and paraphrased and therefore mediated through the newspapers' writers or editors. An open letter is different because any one can write an open letter to the papers to comment on news events or former articles in the paper, whereas to write an op-ed is a more privileged opportunity. Therefore, one can argue that in an open letter the newspaper is not accountable for the expressed views, whereas it is to some extent in an op-ed because it is preceded by a definitive selection-process to allow this person to broadcast its views. Sedgwick and Hart are also introduced to the reader alongside their prestigious positions in society as editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* and chairman of the New York State Economic Council, respectively. These Harvard-educated men who formed a part of the East Coast elite are presented by the newspaper with a certain prestige. This adds weight to their claims and may suggest to the reader that their views form an elite opinion.

Even more striking is an article written by Hart, in which he offers a podium for the Nationalist government to address the American public. In this article he interviews General Jordana, Franco's Minister of Foreign Affairs. Hart asks the general questions about bombings of civilians and whether it is true that Nationalists

115. Thomàs, 5, 38.

employ a strategy of starving the population in Loyalist territory. In each instance, the general flatly denied the claims, or presented an alternative vision in which it was the Loyalist government that is cruel on its population. But Hart did not criticize Jordana's answers or ask follow-up questions. Instead, he asked more questions that allowed the general to indulge in lengthy answers in praise of the Nationalist government, which give the impression of Hart being an advocate or even a mouthpiece for the Nationalist government.¹¹⁶

Another pro-Franco figure who was able to voice his opinion on Franco extensively was Ogden Hammond. As a former ambassador, Hammond also enjoyed an elite position whose views were connotated with a sense of credibility and prestige. Hammond is a recurring figure in the reporting of the *NYT* on the political aspects of the Spanish Civil War. In contrast to Sedgwick and Hart, Hammond is featured solely in editorial articles, where Hammond's views feature in articles on the discussion between pro-Loyalists and pro-Nationalists.¹¹⁷ For example, in "Loyalists Attacked and Defended Here," the diplomat is quoted saying that under the elected, Republican government in Spain, people are not "enjoying liberty, but license." Moreover, two other articles center fully around Hammond's views. It seems his opinion was found interesting, newsworthy, or credible enough to warrant a whole article.¹¹⁸ For example, he rebutted claims that Franco would become a puppet for Germany and Italy and predicted a "better day" for Spain after Franco's victory. In

116. Merwin K. Hart, "Mediation Held 'Impossible' by Spanish Rebels: Franco Minister Tells Hart," *New York Herald Tribune*, October 12, 1938, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

117. "Loyalists Attacked and Defended Here," *The New York Times*, March 21, 1937, TimesMachine; "10,000 Rally Here for Franco Cause."

118. "Predicts Franco Victory"; "Hammond Expects Spanish Monarchy."

each of these instances, Hammond's articles were not contested with counterarguments from others.

However, the *NYT* makes an explicit effort in mediating his arguments in a neutral way and framing Hammond's arguments as opinions.¹¹⁹ An example is the article reporting on a mass meeting to rally for recognition of Franco. It features quotes from pro-Francoists including Hammond, but also reports on the presence of supporters of the controversial radio priest Coughlin. This group cheered at the mention of Hitler and Mussolini, the article reads, but it explicitly states that the applause "did not seem to be general." The paper thereby made an explicit effort to not let this group discredit the other speakers.¹²⁰

Criticism of the Pro-Nationalist Perspective

The Hammond articles also point to a wider pattern in news coverage of pro-Franco arguments, which is that the pro-Nationalists were much less effective in presenting themselves favorably when their views were contested by opposers in the same article. In only one article, Hammond's arguments are countered by other views, and it is only in this article that he appears less favorable. Hammond is quoted alongside Carlos Hevia, the former president of Cuba. Following a quote of Hammond's views, the article ends with Hevia stating that "if the Loyalists win, democracy and general humanitarianism will prevail."

In other instances too, when the pro-Nationalists are contested by pro-Loyalists or opposers of Franco, they have a much harder time appearing favorable. Of the articles labeled on the subject of ideology and politics, two feature both perspectives.

119. "Hammond Expects Spanish Monarchy."

120. "10,000 Rally Here for Franco Cause."

In contrast to the topic of the arms embargo, the pro-Nationalist perspective did not appear more favorable than the pro-Loyalist perspective in any article where they appeared alongside each other. The first is the previously mentioned article in the NYT mentioning Hammond and former president Hevia. The second is an article in the *NYHT* reporting on a debate that took place at a dinner of the Foreign Policy Association in November 1938. In this article, the pro-Nationalists are placed in a defensive position, rather than in a position where they can freely express their views. They are charged with being “special pleaders” for Franco who have had their “bread and butter letters printed in the papers.” Hart is then quoted in denying the allegations.

The article also does not end strongly for the pro-Francoists, as it ends with Reverend Joseph Thorning refuting an allegation of the Nationalists massacring 4,000 Loyalists. Thorning was a Catholic scholar at St. Mary’s College in Maryland, and also a prevalent name on pro-Nationalist petitions and open letters. This massacre is said to have been reported by Portuguese journalists “who on the whole were sympathetic to Franco.” In response, Thorning maintained that this was not sufficient evidence to support the allegation.¹²¹

In addition to this criticism of being “special pleaders,” the pro-Nationalists received ample criticism on their opinions in the media. Again, it should be noted that the anti-Franco news coverage is not the scope of this research. Therefore it is impossible to make a meaningful assessment here of the distribution of pro-Nationalist and pro-Loyalist articles in the two newspapers studied here. However, the search for news entries about the pro-Nationalists rendered a significant number of articles voicing criticism of this group. Out of 52 sources labeled on the theme of

121. “Foreign Policy Group Debates Issues in Spain.”

ideology and politics, almost a dozen are critical articles. Among these are a number of editorial articles reporting on criticism of the Nationalists or their American sympathizers. For example, both the *NYT* and the *NYHT* reported in March 1938 on an open letter signed by 115 American educators, which renounced claims made by Sedgwick in the paper in which he had said that “the liberal spirit was clearly in the ascendant in Spain.”¹²²

Moreover, seven out of the 52 articles that have been studied are open letters in direct response to Sedgwick, Hart, Forbes and Kelly. Franklin Folsom, an American author and the executive secretary of the *American League of Writers* of youth wrote to the *NYT* on February 22, 1938. Folsom was a member of the Communist Party and a pro-Soviet activist.¹²³ In his open letter, Folsom criticizes Sedgwick’s “approval and endorsement of fascism and the fascist state which sounds as if it came from the pen of a press agent.”¹²⁴ Another example, in the *NYHT*, is a letter in October 1938 from Juan Montforte. Montforte was not a public figure, but a Spanish businessman who sought to reply to Merwin K. Hart’s “extraordinary interview” with General Jordana. He renounces the general’s “absurd charge” that the Loyalists were to blame for civilian bombings by placing military objects in densely populated areas. He cited a public report by the Commission for the Investigation of Air Bombardments in Spain of the British Foreign Office, that found no evidence of these claims and concluded it

122. “Rebels Criticized by U. S. Educators,” *The New York Times*, March 8, 1938, TimesMachine; “115 Professors Protest Works Laid to Franco,” *New York Herald Tribune*, March 7, 1938, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

123. “Franklin Folsom,” MacDowell, accessed June 13, 2022, <https://www.macdowell.org/artists/franklin-folsom>.

124. Franklin Folsom, “Insurgent Spain,” *The New York Times*, February 27, 1938, TimesMachine.

was either a deliberate attack on civilian populations or a badly aimed one.¹²⁵ It is therefore safe to say that the pro-Franco publications in the newspapers did not pass without resistance.

Newspapers Mediation on Nationalist Ideology

Although the newspapers provided ample room for the pro- Nationalists to express their views in a relatively unrestricted form, the newspapers made a visible effort to also facilitate discussion and called attention to the complexity of the issue. First, as the previous sections have suggested, the newspapers provided the opportunity to criticize the views of the pro-Nationalists. Second, the quote about the pro-Francoists “having their bread and butter letters printed in the papers” in the *NYHT* implies a criticism of the newspapers in being too facilitating towards the pro-Franco Americans. Rather than shun this criticism by not publishing this open letter, the *NYHT* can be seen here as being open to a discussion on its own role in mediating this discussion.

Most importantly, both newspapers appear conscious of the complexity of the issue. The *New York Times*, as mentioned, called attention to the fact that not all persons at a rally for Franco were supporters of Hitler and Mussolini, but that only part of the group cheered at the mention of these dictators. Similarly, the *NYHT*, grouped two open letters about the civil war under the subtitle “Charges and Countercharges Confuse Americans Who Try to Understand the Situation.” In so doing, it acknowledges the variety of truths that were circulating, which made it hard for people to understand what was going on.

125. Catherine Brace, “Bombings in Spain,” *New York Herald Tribune*, May 9, 1937, ProQuest

These factors together weaken an interpretation that the newspapers were biased in favor of the pro-Nationalists, but rather suggest an effort to facilitate discussion and broadcast both perspectives on the issue. To be sure, the newspapers could not have omitted the pro-Nationalist perspective from their printing altogether without having been criticized of being biased. Still, the op-ed articles by Hart and Sedgwick remain remarkable, as their overt, unrestricted praise of Franco and Nationalist Spain bore the semblance of propaganda. In addition, the papers called attention to their background as Harvard graduates and members of the East Coast elite. This added credibility and prestige to their arguments. On the other hand, it is outside the scope of this research to assess the pro-Loyalist op-ed articles that might also have been published but which are outside the scope of this thesis.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how pro-Nationalist Americans, in particular Sedgwick, Hart, Hammond, and Forbes, received ample opportunities to express their views on the Spanish Civil War and advocate the cause of General Franco. The fact that they were able to do this in two prominent, mainstream newspapers was remarkable given the times. Franco had aligned himself with the controversial Axis powers Italy and Germany who were aiding him militarily, also helping him carrying out civilian bombings in Guernica and Barcelona. However, this chapter has found insufficient evidence to argue that the newspapers were biased in favor of the pro-Nationalists on the subject of politics and ideology. Instead, this chapter argues that the newspapers made a consistent effort to give room for both perspectives on this issue.

More importantly, these articles can be explained in the context of the political ambiguity of the 1930s, a period in which Americans deliberated over alternatives to

democracy. Democracy was in crisis, for it had proved to some Americans to be unable to prevent or solve the economic hardships of the Great Depression. In addition, industrialization and modernization had a profound effect on family traditions, work, and religion. To some people, these changes signified decline, and to them fascist, totalitarian figures like that of Nationalist Spain were appealing. The American supporters of Franco focused on some aspects, like social welfare and law and order, and omitted or denied others, like Nationalists' war crimes or ties to fascist European nations. In so doing, they accepted the fact that Spain would not be a democratic state in the image of the United States, but accepted a totalitarian, or even one with strong ties to fascism, as an alternative to democracy in Spain.

Conclusion

With the Nationalist victory near after the capture of Barcelona in January 1939, General Franco wrote a message to Merwin K. Hart, transmitting “his deep gratitude for the interest and sympathy” of Hart and “the friends of Nationalist Spain in the United States” in the Nationalist cause.¹²⁶ Another “signal token of [his] appreciation,” came in May 1940, when the *caudillo* honored seven of his American allies with the Great Cross of Isabelle. Among the recipients of this civilian order were Ogden Hammond, Alexander Hamilton Rice, and William Cameron Forbes.¹²⁷ The efforts of the pro-Nationalist Americans to promote the cause of Nationalist Spain did not go unnoticed by the General.

The lobbying efforts of pro-Nationalists in part played out in the newspapers, an important medium in the 1930s. Whereas previous research by Michael Chapman and Katy Hull has extensively focused on the motivations and arguments of fascist sympathizers, this thesis has added to our understanding of this group by examining the newspaper representations of pro-Nationalist Americans in the Spanish Civil War. It has investigated how pro-Nationalist Americans lobbied for policies favorable to Franco through the newspapers, and sought to answer to what extent they were successful in portraying themselves positively in doing so.

The first chapter has provided the context of American sympathies with the Nationalists. The 1920s and 1930s were a period of political crisis, in which some Americans, disillusioned with democracy, looked for alternative systems as solutions to the economic and social ills of the time. The second and third chapters have looked

126. “Franco Thanks Americans,” *The New York Times*, February 21, 1939, TimesMachine.

127. “Spain Honors Americans,” *The New York Times*, August 4, 1940, TimesMachine.

at pro-Nationalist expressions in the newspapers, focusing on two distinct themes. The second chapter has argued that, on the topic of American neutrality and the arms embargo, pro-Nationalist Americans were relatively successful in portraying themselves positively in the newspapers by playing into American fears of international communism and entanglements in European affairs. On the topic of Franco's ideology and politics, the third chapter has shown, the representation of pro-Nationalists in the newspapers was more problematic. On the one hand, these men received a remarkable amount of space to praise and defend a highly controversial government. On the other hand, their advocacy was met with significant criticism. Especially when featured alongside opposing views, the pro-Francoists were unsuccessful in portraying themselves positively in the newspapers. Ellery Sedgwick and Merwin K. Hart, in particular, came across as explicit supporters of a fascist government and were charged with being "special pleaders" for Franco. Blind to the atrocities committed with the help of Germany and Italy, they continued to defend Franco and argued that he would bring law and order, justice, and prosperity to Spain.

As to the effectiveness of the pro-Nationalist lobby in the *NYT* and *NYHT*, this thesis argues that American supporters of Nationalist Spain were most effective in advocating their cause when they focused on themes that broadly appealed to the American public. Pro-Nationalist sentiments in the United States can be explained in the context of assessing alternative political systems, but this attitude was not shared among the majority of Americans. Franco's government was already at that time strongly associated with fascism, as the FET y de las JONS was widely understood to be a fascist movement and Franco had allied himself with Germany and Italy. When the pro-Nationalists engaged with the ideological and political aspects of the Nationalist government, they appeared to endorse a fascist government. For the

general American public, this was a bridge too far. The American public was more receptive to the arguments of pro-Nationalists, however, when they engaged with arguments that were less controversial and more widely shared. Both anticommunism and nonintervention were widely shared sentiments in the 1930s, regardless of Americans' position on the Spanish Civil War.

Based on two newspapers with different ideological backgrounds, this thesis has not found sufficient evidence to argue that these ideological backgrounds led to distinct differences in reporting on the Spanish Civil War. There is also no basis for the claim that either newspaper was biased in favor of the pro-Nationalist perspective. Whereas the chapter on American neutrality observed differences in the reporting of these two newspapers, with the *NYHT* appearing more favorable to the pro-Nationalists, this effect was mitigated by the Dorothy Thompson columns. The third chapter observed no significant differences between the newspapers. Instead, this thesis has argued that the two newspapers made explicit efforts to report objectively and facilitate discussion.

This thesis has focused on only two newspapers, however, and may therefore have omitted the perspectives of certain political groups or overlooked regional differences. Although both the *New York Times* and the *New York Herald Tribune* had significant readerships and overall affiliated with different political parties, they were also similar in a number of ways. Both newspapers were based in New York City and catered to an urban, East Coast readership. Although the *NYT* was a generally a Democratic paper and the *NYHT* Republican, overall they were both conservative. Further research could therefore incorporate regional papers to account for regional differences or investigate newspapers with more extreme political backgrounds. Furthermore, in the *NYT* and *NYHT*, it were primarily elite pro-Nationalist like Hart, Sedgwick, and Hammond who received the opportunity to express their views.

Further research could investigate the perspectives of lower and middle class Americans on the Spanish Civil War.

In addition, the explicit focus of this thesis on pro-Nationalist expressions in the news has limited this thesis to a discussion on how pro-Nationalist Americans appeared in news articles in which they featured. The collection of sources used for this analysis were based on search terms pertaining to pro-Nationalist themes and key persons from Michael Chapman's work on pro-Franco lobbyists. A wider analysis, including pro-Loyalist persons, could provide insights into how newspapers balanced Loyalist and Nationalist perspectives on the SCW. Further research could also measure the proportion of the pro-Nationalist articles discussed here in relation to all news entries on the Spanish Civil War.

Although limited to the pro-Nationalist perspective, the study conducted here has provided relevant insights to understand the challenges of today. First, this thesis has demonstrated how socioeconomic conditions can inspire people to question democracy and consider alternative political systems, such as totalitarianism and fascism. Second, the fact that a civil war in Europe could inspire such fierce debates on the other side the Atlantic demonstrates the significance of transatlantic relations. Even in the 1930s, when WWI and the economic crisis turned Americans all the more inwards, Americans still saw Europe as an example or a warning of what could happen in the United States. These two insights may help us understand the appeal of far-right, populist movements that have emerged across the Atlantic in recent years. These movements can be explained partly by national factors, such as economic inequality, frustration over migration, and social injustices. To account for the parallels between these movements, however, we also need to take into account the relevance of transatlantic networks in the way people across the Atlantic engage with societal and political issues.

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