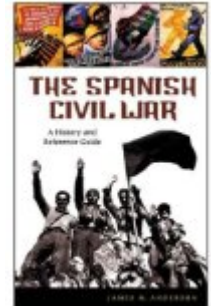


James M. Anderson. *The Spanish Civil War: A History and Reference Guide*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2003. xxviii + 221 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-313-32274-7.



Reviewed by Wayne Bowen

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Sixty-five years have passed since the end of the Spanish Civil War, and the archives of the period, in Spain and elsewhere, are wide open for researchers. Given the perspective of time, and the availability of these records, historians have within their reach the opportunity to write both thoroughly and objectively about this critical time in European history. Unfortunately, *The Spanish Civil War: A History and Reference Guide* does not arrive at this goal.

While well written, quite readable and a good beginning for general readers, this work does not add to our understanding of the Spanish Civil War in a significant way. Rather, it perpetuates many of the myths of the war, which more adept scholars have shown to be ossified remnants of the original mischaracterizations of the 1930s. The author also ignores newly declassified materials, recent research, and Spanish archives.

There are some valuable aspects of this book. *The Spanish Civil War* is a good general survey that, unlike some other studies, provides sufficient historical background to understand the conflict. Too many accounts begin with the advent

of the 2nd Spanish Republic in 1931, without explaining what happened in the previous century to make this new government, and the civil war that followed, comprehensible.

In nine chapters, James Anderson presents summaries, some chronological and some thematic, of the key events prior to and during the Spanish Civil War. Some of the reference material included, such as the chronology and biographies, is very helpful. The appendix of primary documents also enriches the book.

Additionally, Anderson does an excellent job of detailing the exploitation and betrayal of the Spanish Republic by the Soviet Union. From dramatically overcharging for obsolete weapons, to crushing popular movements of workers and peasants, the USSR tried to manipulate the Spanish Civil War to create a subservient satellite, but only succeeded in destroying what little hope democracy had for survival.

For all of these positive elements, the tone and subjectivity dampen its utility. For example, he refers to the Popular Front, an electoral alliance of socialists, communists, and anarchists,

as "moderate," even as some of its leaders, including the socialist Francisco Largo Caballero, were speaking openly of nationalization, a workers' state, and the expropriation of the church. Anderson also declares that the Popular Front's goals were modest, and included "equality, human rights and freedom of speech, religion and assembly," but once in power the Left began a campaign of intimidation against churches, business owners, and monarchists (p. xxv). This was, after all, essentially the same movement that condoned church burnings, political murders of conservative politicians, and violent attacks on the right-wing parties defeated in the February 1936 elections.

Anderson also downplays the popularity of the conservative and Catholic parties during the Spanish Republic, claiming that their gains in the 1933 election, for example, were because electoral trends "shifted to the right," rather than as a reaction against the incompetence and corruption of the left-liberal republican governments of 1931-33. Millions of Spaniards voted for conservative and Catholic parties in the elections of 1931, 1933, and 1936, and most of these millions supported the Nationalist uprising in July 1936. Their sentiments, however, are notably absent in accounts of public opinion throughout, as if no Spaniard, other than a few extremists and officers, opposed the Popular Front or supported Franco.

There are minor distractions in some of the writing, as well. For example, Anderson consistently refers to the Soviet Union and those from it as "Russians," even referring to Josef Stalin as a "Russian dictator," when it would be more accurate to say he was a Soviet dictator of Georgian ethnicity.

Even in its graphics, the book does not make use of readily available sources. For example, while there are abundant poster archives at many universities in North America, with materials from both sides, of the twenty-one plates the au-

thor features only three from the Nationalists. The same lack of balance shows in Anderson's dismissal of Nationalist writers and artists as "militaristic, reactionary and stultifying" (p. 145). While this description may be accurate, he makes no such condemnation of the formulaic Socialist Realism--glorifying Stalin, the working class, and the Communist Party--preferred by Spanish Communists and Soviet agents in many areas of the Republic.

The chapters follow the campaigns and major periods of the Spanish Republic: Republican generals, armies, and strategic plans, with very little attention to the Nationalists, who in the end emerged victorious. Indeed, this book would have been better titled "The Popular Front in the Spanish Civil War." General Francisco Franco and other elements--monarchists, Catholics, conservatives, fascist Falangists--are represented in the book as evil ciphers. Unlike in his accounts of the Republicans, the Nationalists do not exhibit courage, complexity, or ideological sophistication, but somehow win the Civil War.

An example of this focus is the disproportionate emphasis on the International Brigades. In addition to mentions throughout the work, these units receive ten complete pages of examination (pp. 109-119). The Franco regime, which governed more than half of Spain during the war, and all of it thereafter, receives two pages of discussion (pp. 124-125) about its composition. Even on these pages, Anderson dismisses the regime with excessively simplistic statements, such as: "The Falange dominated key positions in the Francoist regime." In fact, in no government of Franco's did Falangists hold a majority of cabinet posts, and active members of the party almost never held major positions over the army or ministries of interior, treasury, or education. Even those Falangists who held office were most often nominal members who joined after the Civil War began, and had been members of Catholic or monarchist parties previously. From the beginning of his dicta-

torship in 1936 to his death in 1975, Franco's chief advisers and ministers were almost all military officers, conservative monarchists, or technocrats.

Unfortunately, this work does not arrive at either thoroughness or objectivity, instead re-telling the work of previous historians without contributing a new understanding of these traumatic events. While it should have a place in major research libraries, it would not be the best choice for smaller libraries, where it might be the only recent book on the Spanish Civil War. Similarly, instructors should look elsewhere for a general text to use in courses on modern Spain or the civil war.

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