Fighting Fascism: Hunter College Students and the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939)

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Proposal Summary: Eighty years after the Spanish Civil War (SCW) began, we continue to learn about the crucial role that CUNY students played in this international historical event, often viewed as the precursor of World War II. In 1936, Francisco Franco's rebel faction, aided by Hitler and Mussolini, carried out a coup d'état to overthrow the democratically elected Spanish Republic. While Western governments opted for a Non-Intervention policy, citizens throughout the world rallied to aid the people of Spain.

Approximately three thousand American civilians joined the Abraham Lincoln Brigade (ALB) and crossed the Atlantic to fight for the Spanish Republic. Several CUNY students and faculty volunteered for service in the ALB. Eighty volunteers joined from City College, twenty students from Brooklyn College, and hundreds traveled from other universities in New York and the rest of the country. Those who did not go to Spain remained in the US protesting the war and collecting money and clothes for the Spanish people. This project aims to identify and document as much evidence as possible, including interviews, news coverage, photographs, and WNYC broadcasts.

What was the involvement of Hunter College students at the time? While there are extensive publications that document activism from Baruch, Brooklyn, and City College, there are no studies that illustrate the role of these women in the protests. However, in an initial visit to the Hunter College archives last May, I found several documents that demonstrate how hundreds of Hunter College students participated in the movement to fight fascism in Spain.

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